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Theatre and Performance Studies in English: An Introduction

Isabel Guerrero & Verónica Rodríguez

The authors of this Introduction write from two countries and with two backgrounds that are directly relevant to the title of this special issue. They write from Madrid (Spain) and London (UK). The authors originally studied a degree called *Filología Inglesa* in Spain (we can translate *Filología Inglesa* as English Studies). *Filología Inglesa* and its tradition is exactly the *raison d'être* for the words 'in English' in this RAEI Special Issue's title. This not only means that this Issue features articles about theatre and performance in English but also that it analyses theatre and performance from English-speaking countries.

This may be considered limited indeed in the context of debates around global identity and calls for the decolonization of the curriculum, which is part of a movement that has been called 'Decolonise the University'. It was the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town in 2015 that kick-started the Decolonise the University movement across the globe. Another debate is the one about the Global North and the Global South, which has recently morphed into a focus on the term Global Majority (a concept still in the making; sometimes also written as Black and Global Majority people or Black, Global Majority and Indigenous people). In this context, Black, Global Majority and Indigenous scholars as well as artists and people that support this cause demand a commitment to long-term decolonisation processes and the demise of the neoliberal university.

Despite the limitations of this Special Issue in relation to the above, we wanted to acknowledge these crucial contexts in our process of edition and be as diverse and inclusive as possible in our selection of articles and topics. Again, the words 'diverse' and 'inclusive' are problematic too. In the article "A Manifesto to Decentre Theatre and Performance Studies", Swati Arora includes Angela Davis's critique of the concept 'diversity', which she often extends to 'inclusion' to ask questions about the concept that matters to her, justice:

> I have a hard time accepting diversity as a synonym for justice. Diversity is a corporate strategy. It is a strategy designed to ensure that the institution functions in the same way that it functioned before, except now you have some black faces and brown faces. It is a difference that does not make a difference. Diversity without structural transformation simply brings those who were previously excluded into a system as racist, misogynist, as it was before. (Davis 2020 as cited in Arora 2021, 13)

But that's not the only challenge. The title of this Special Issue in itself may be read like an oxymoron. English Studies in Spain has a strong textual tradition, which means that the study of theatre and performance in Spain has been ubiquitously understood from the perspective of literature, that is, in this case, of drama. This leaves us questioning for now the words 'theatre' and 'performance' in the title. Another intriguing aspect to dissect is, why don't we translate *Filología* into English as Philology? Well, although philology exists as a word in English, generally, Philology doesn't exist as a discipline in the UK and other English-speaking countries.

In Spain, if someone wants to study Theatre and Performances Studies, they may realise very soon that it is not a straightforward route, and the following is one of the main reasons why. The two mainstream ways to access the study of this/these discipline/s in Spain is/are: via courses that focus on language, literature and culture of the theatre tradition studied, or courses that directly train the student as a theatre maker. In other words, either via Departments of 'Philology' that include some modules that focus on the study of drama or via a Theatre School or Conservatory. In the first, the approach to learning theatre and performance (generally drama, due to their textual tradition) is theoretical, most of the time, exclusively. In the latter, the approach to learning is mainly practical with some opportunities for critical and theoretical engagement. There are (Anglophone) universities and institutions that offer Performing Arts as a course in Spain at present, but this is a recent development and not a main route (at least yet) for someone wanting to study theatre and performance in Spain.

This means that studying *Filología Inglesa* (or its contemporary equivalent, *Estudios Ingleses*, and other courses and disciplines that focus on textual tradition, like Comparative Literature) will unlikely feed a prospective student's hunger for theatre and performance (in English), and neither will courses in Fine Arts, most of which, will at least, cover to some extent Performance Art. This is so much so that one of the editors of this Special Issue studied simultaneously *Filología Inglesa* and *Arte Dramático* (literally, Dramatic Art, but meaning, the course studied in a Spanish public theatre school) and currently is both a theatre

academic and a theatre director. The journey for the other author was doing an MA in Comparative Literature and ending up teaching drama, theatre and performance in the UK and engaging with several aspects of theatre making, including writing, acting, dramaturgy, directing and production.

You may have spotted already the ongoing 'problem' of the words 'drama', 'theatre' and 'performance', at the very least when we try to think about them alongside the above landscape. Philology-related courses cover drama in most cases, which, as discussed, implies a robust textual tradition. After all, those courses are studied in *Departmentos de Filología*. However, this approach has opened up in the context of the growing Theatre and Performance Studies discipline/s slowly making their way into the academia. Therefore, although these Departments still focus on text, they have analytically and critically expanded into the field/s of Theatre and Performance Studies, non-exhaustively, as a result of the impact of performance itself and the irruption into the mainstream of work that experiments with and beyond the dramatic text. In this expanded approach, analysis goes beyond the text, but the text may remain the core analytical element.

In the case of the UK, the shift from Drama to Theatre and Theatre and Performance is perceived, for instance, in the extension of Department's names, to include the words Theatre and sometimes both Theatre and Performance, or, internationally, variations that may include words such as 'practice' and 'arts' or even 'science' or 'technologies', to name but a few. Other Departments in the UK keep the term 'drama', such as Queen Mary's, University of London's Department of Drama, which belongs to the School of English and Drama (all of which makes sense in relation to the discussion above). However, you may then look at Staff's titles to discover that some of them may be 'Lecturers in Drama, Theatre and Performance' (a tripartite division ardently criticized, for instance, by Richard Schechner). Keeping the three notions is also true of numerous BA titles across UK Universities, including Roehampton University, University of Sussex and Lancaster University. It has been indeed a long (unfinished) road since the University of Bristol offered a degree in Drama for the first time in the UK in 1947.

Theatre and Performance Studies have made, little by little, their way into academia. The field is relatively new if compared to other disciplines in the Humanities, such as Literary or History Studies. We can say that it is a 20th century phenomenon. Its main precedent is of course the study of Drama. The word drama, "forged from the dialogic tradition" (Wilcox 2020, 268), is invoked when there is a focus on text, which is often referred as a play. Drama, as we have already alluded to, is often (but not always) "taught in literature departments as the study of a particular genre of literary text" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 12). *Literary*

genre: drama. Dramatic text: play. But this began to be perceived as limiting and insufficient in the early twentieth century.

In the English-speaking world, Theatre Studies, "a discipline based on performance rather than literature" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 13), made its appearance in 1914, with the first Theatre Studies degree programme being taught at the Carnegie Institute of Technology (USA). Although the word 'drama' was still used, the focus was Theatre Studies, as we came to know it later on: "the Carnegie Mellon University's School of Drama, founded in 1914, became the first to offer a degree-granting program in drama with an emphasis on practical training that prepared for a career in the performing arts as well as radio, and later film and television" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 14).

But the theatre tradition that made history as far as the establishment of Theatre Studies is concerned was the German. In fact, the most important figure in creating and moulding Theatre Studies was Max Herrmann (1865–1942). "[I] nspired by the work of Max Reinhardt (1873–1943), whose productions turned away from the traditional proscenium stage" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 12), Herrmann argued that the new discipline of Theatre Studies should focus not on literary texts but on performance, arguing that performance was the most important element of theatre. In 1918, Herrmann articulated a difference between drama and theatre that is central to the way Theatre Studies is now conceived not only in German-speaking but also in English-speaking countries and beyond. He wrote that theatre and drama are "fundamentally opposites … drama is a literary creation of one author, while theatre is the accomplishment of the public and those serving it" (Herrmann 1918)" (Fisher Lichte 2014, 12). Crucially, "Herrmann was interested in the interrelationships between the physical bodies of actors and spectators" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 14).

This means that the German Professor Max Herrmann is considered by many the 'founder' of Theatre Studies, as he decided to pay attention to the staging, and not only concentrate on the study of the dramatic text. Significantly, this attention to the staging coincides with the emergence of the modern stage director as an individual in charge of orchestrating everything that takes place on the stage as well as the development of the avant-garde movements. At this time, "Theatre Studies turned increasingly toward practical training while the theory of theatre and drama remained within the domain of literature departments (Roach 1999)" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 14).

Slowly but importantly, academic attention diversifies and focuses not only on theatre itself, but on all sorts of performative events related to human activity, which conferred to the discipline the name of Theatre and Performance Studies. But this must be considered alongside Performance Studies itself developing as a field. While "Theatre Studies was consolidated as a discipline

during the 1980s as a result of dissatisfaction in academia at the inadequacy of an exclusively literary-based approach to the text, premised upon its ostensible permanence and immutability" (George, Green and Wheeler 2018, 108), "[i]n the 1970s, a third field developed that sought to emphasize the academic research and study of performance outside of the familiar frame of drama and theatre" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 14).

Propelled by the avantgarde scene in the US in the 1960s, Performance Studies, coined as a term by Richard Schechner, developed as a discipline in the 1960s and 1970s and was also consolidated in the 1980s. Two major events in this direction were the renaming of the Drama Department at NYU into Performance Studies in 1980 and the 1981 "World Conference on Ritual and Performance" organised by the so-called 'fathers' of Performance Studies, Victor Turner and Richard Schechner. Performance Studies generally looks at "non-theatrical cultural practices that share performance characteristics with theatre" (Allain and Harvie 2014, 8). This goes from a funeral to a football game; from Native American rituals to getting ready to go out. Needless to say, Performance Studies looks at performance. In performance, "the performative aspects take precedence over literary and textual elements" (Wilcom 2020, 268).

Theatre and Performance Studies (even more Performance Studies) are still in its infancy in Spain in comparison to the UK, and of course, in much bigger proportions, to the US. Proof of Performance's infancy in Spain is that this volume features more articles on theatre than on performance. This is something that reflects the proposals sent and begs the question about the state of the interest in Performance Studies in English (in/from Spain). At least, what seems clear is that people writing about theatre in English (and who may have been exposed to this call for papers) remain strongly within the dramatic (and theatre) tradition.

From a textual perspective and tradition, scholars are writing increasingly about 'theatre'; they analyse 'theatre' by looking at any performance elements, including but beyond text. But that's obviously not mainly what we mean by 'performance' in this Special Issue's title. Indeed, one of the aims of Performance Studies is to disentangle itself from performance as understood uniquely as a phenomenon that is "constituted in the moment of encounter and interaction between actors and spectators" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, xiii). Nevertheless, as mentioned, we recognize that there is an increasing academic analytical tradition that embraces text as well as other performance elements. In other words, we detect an integrated approach to analysing theatre and performance.

However, it is vital to note that the term Theatre Studies indicates a shift that marked not only the interest in text as only one of many of theatre's elements, but also in practices of signification that go beyond the theatrical event itself, including for instance training. The term Performance Studies suggests a

decoupling of performance from Performance and embraces all forms of cultural performance. When it comes to analysis, Theatre Studies explores performance (staging and beyond), which includes text as one of its elements, while Performance Studies looks at performance and may include the study of theatre (see Fisher-Lichte 2014, 14), but not drama.

To make things even more complicated, the strong influence of postmodernity and then of influential concepts such as Hans-Thies Lehmann's postdramatic theatre have undone a clear distinction between theatre and performance and the way we analyse theatre and performance. Lehmann's own words on the postdramatic signal unmarking, as he understands postdramatic theatre both as "a rupture with and a continuation of traditional drama" (Boyle, Cornish and Woolf 2019, 33). To add to the complexity, the same piece may be called dramatic and postdramatic by different scholars (take for instance the case of Sarah Kane's *Blasted*).

What we can say though is that, generally, "Theatre and Performance Studies is concerned, most fundamentally, with the study of performances" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, ix). Taking into account that "Theatre and Performance Studies has had a different history in different national contexts" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 12), what is perhaps most relevant to this Special Issue is that Theatre and Performance Studies has "often been connected to both innovations […] and broader political developments" (Fisher-Lichte 2014, 12).

Filología Inglesa (at present, mainly called *Grado en Estudios Ingleses*) should continue pursuing its goals and so should *Escuelas de Arte Dramático*, no doubt, but this Introduction is undoubtedly a call to the creation of Theatre and Performance Departments across Spain. And not only that, theatre and performance should also be taught at schools and high schools. While this slowly sinks into Spanish Universities' psyche and Spanish governments themselves, we have something else to do, which is introducing the articles in this Special Issue, which we hope will be a small step towards the study of theatre and performance in Spain, in English, yes certainly, but, somehow, beyond Spain and beyond English.

* * *

The present Special Issue consists of eight articles divided into four thematic sections entitled respectively: "The Performance of Alternative Victorian Femaleness"; "Performing Politics and Aging"; "Theatres of Violence"; and "Activating Community: From Satire to Location". Each of these sections are briefly introduced, followed by a short summary of the articles. This Special Issue, thus, aims to contribute to this expansive field, encompassing a series of arti-

cles that examine performative and theatrical events from different perspectives in the field of English Studies.

The 19th century was key for many of the intellectual and artistic ideas that set the foundation of 20th-century society. The artistic movement known as Romanticism was especially prolific in the visual arts, literature and music, which influenced each other and set the basis for the avant-garde in the 20th century. Although, in the theatre, this period is usually remembered for the many unsuccessful attempts to meet the criteria established by Victor Hugo in his "Preface to *Cromwell*", theatre was not only a site for romantic experimentation, but also for the introduction of ideas about social change. The articles in the section opening this special issue, "The Performance of Alternative Victorian Femaleness", show how theatre and performance were active agents in the construction of an alternative female identity beyond the Victorian idea of women as the angel in the house.

In "Performing the Female Alternative in Victorian Popular Drama: The 'Girl of the Period' and the 'Fast Girl'", María Victoria Puchal explores the popularization of theatergoing in 19th-century London and the social issues addressed by the drama of the times. She focuses on two mid-century plays, *Our Female American Cousin* (1860), by Charles Gayler, and *My New Place* (1863), by Arthur Wood, to examine how they introduce the fight for women rights thanks to their depiction of female characters. Although these characters are not perceived as positive, as Puchal argues, their appearance in the plays is an indication of the relevance of transgressive female identities.

Mayron Cantillo focuses on performativity beyond drama in her analysis of Michael Field's poem *Long Ago* in the article "'Come, Dark-eyed Sleep': Michael Field and the Performance of the Lyric as a Radical Fantasy". Michael Field was the pseudonym of two 19th-century female authors: Katharine Bradley and Edith Cooper. The article approaches Fields' poem with Jonathan Culler's theory of the lyric as a performative genre to analyse the performative dimension of the text. The poem, thus, is used as a case study to explore Field's poetic theatricality thanks to pictorial and performative power.

The second section in this volume, "Performing Politics and Aging", groups two articles that, albeit focusing on the analysis of drama, bring to the foreground the performing dimensions of, first, politics, and, second, aging. As social constructs, both politics and aging are constantly negotiated. Not only politics is often discussed in theatre and performance but, throughout history, politics has also used theatre to serve its own purposes. Aging might be, at first sight, a biological construct, but many of the ideas we associate with it are also conditioned and are part of a social performance that theatre has often re-enacted.

In "Performing Political Persuasion in the United States in the Early Years of the Republic", Tomáš Kačer examines the role of theatre to create a national

identity in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War in the US. To do so, he examines the theatre productions of Joseph Addison's *Cato* at Valley Forge in 1778, William Dunlap's *André* at the New Park in New York in 1798 and *Bunker-Hill* by J. D. Burk at the Haymarket in Boston in 1797. Through the analysis of several performative aspects of these productions, the article examines the role of theatre in the formation of the US as a new, independent nation.

Regarding aging, Núria Casado-Gual and Inesa Shevchenko-Hotsuliak shed light on how the complexity of old age and its gender implications has been traditionally disregarded in drama and its theoretical analysis in "Disrupting Temporalities, Multiplying the Self: An Age-Studies Approach to Two Contemporary Plays". As a response to this invisibility, they select two plays that show the multi-layered identity of aging and present female characters on the stage: Michel Tremblay's *Albertine in Five Times* (1984) and Matt Hartley's *Here I Belong* (2016). In spite of the thirty-year gap between the two plays, the authors of the article find many similarities in their treatment of old age and claim that these playscripts pave the way for an anti-ageist society.

To turn to this volume's third section, "Theatres of Violence", a contemporary inevitable reference, given the allusion to Black Lives Matter in its first article, is the murder of George Floyd. For how long can someone keep their knee on someone's neck? Derek Chauvin kept his knee on George Floyd's neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds on 25 May 2020. The stark inhumanity humans are capable of keeps happening over and over again, and overwhelmingly targeted at specific groups. The outpour that followed George Floyd's murder was a marked moment in the long, ongoing struggle against police (and system and systemic) brutality towards the Black community.

How long will it take for our generation to forget Floyd's "I can't breathe"? Hopefully, we will never do. Memory is such a key strategy to resort to in relation to violence because unfortunately, violence against Black people is a persistent and ongoing event. Lucy Nevitt, for instance, writes in *Theatre & Violence* of violence as "prolonged, ongoing or repeated" (2013, 5).

In "Performative Encounters: Memory Violence in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*", Paula Barba Guerrero discusses the biographical play *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996) by Adrienne Kennedy and her son Adam P. Kennedy. Barba argues that the play manages to insert unrecorded moments of abuse in our collective imaginary, moving from staged nightmares, distant courtrooms and individual sleep deprivation chambers into a figurative shared space where black lives do matter.

In the second article, entitled "Adaptation against Myth: Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* and the Violence of Austerity", Rebeca Gualberto Valverde explores Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* (2015), a contemporary British adaptation of

Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*. Owen situates the story in the context of austerity policies in the UK. Firmly placing the adaptation in the context of political theatre, Gualberto discusses myth as the 'ethical' framework that legitimises Effie's suffering. Equating myth discourse and the austerity narrative, she argues that *Iphigenia in Splott* is an adaptation that works against myth.

The fact that Barba Guerrero's and Gualberto Valverde's articles are presented together in the same section is a stark reminder that there will be no justice for marginalised groups in societies until there is no equal access to dignity, opportunities and resources. As Edward Bond himself puts it, "[W]henever there is serious and constant violence, that is a sign of the presence of some major social injustice" (1977, 13), which points out to the idea that "violence has a relationship to power and powerlessness" (Nevitt 2013, 6).

To proceed with the fourth and final section, "Activating Community: From Satire to Location", we sometimes invent new forms; some other times, we revise existing forms for the times we live in, to speak about the present. Satire comes and goes. There is perhaps no other form right now that can mean so much to the times we are living. When existence becomes ridiculous and the everyday absurd, what is the most fitting form? We live in a period of informants, surveillance and control once again. When power closes us in so forcefully and darkly, one of the only avenues left is laughter, humour and satire.

Oluwafemi Alabi's "An Exploration into the Satiric Significance of Abuse in Selected Nigerian Drama" taps into the political potential of satire by looking at the socio-political relevance of linguistic abuse in contemporary Nigerian Drama, focusing on the playwrights Femi Osofisan and Ola Rotimi. Going beyond a comedic purpose, Alabi argues that invectives in Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath* (2002) and Ola Rotimi's *Who is a Patriot?* (2006) crucially address some socio-political realities such as oppression, exploitation, resistance, self-interest versus national interest, and capitalism.

Something similar goes for community. What is the significance of community when communal events are wiped off our diaries and we can no longer be one body in a single space? What is community when the only assemblage of bodies willingly allowed by the state is today's *circensis*, aka football? Fear is the ingredient that instils distance (not uniquely physical) between bodies and the pandemic has only exponentially increased fear. We are at a cliff edge, but nobody wants to look. Will a reinvention of community that cares about bodies and our main body, the planet, lead the way towards a possible future?

Kerrie Reading's article, "Navigating New Approaches for Grassroot Community Theatre in a (Post)-Covid World", explores how theatre makers in Britain might navigate former approaches to alternative and community theatre making, including discussion of work by companies such as Common Wealth Theatre

and Theatre and Women, as a way to create live work in a (post)-Covid world. Kerrie posits that locality (and the forged connections between people and place) will be a key component to how theatre is made as we emerge from the world-wide crisis generated by Covid-19.

Whether there is a future or not, we must decentre and embrace multiplicity now. So, back to the idea of decentring and the opportunity brough by the fact that theatre and performance in English (in/from Spain) as well as Theatre and Performance Studies in Spain are young phenomena, what seems clear is that "the discipline needs to interrogate what it deems 'theory' and embrace a multiplicity of knowledge systems as vital to our pedagogy" (Arora 2021, 17).

And yes, that's right, no matter how many times Schechner repeated this: "Performance is about more than the enactment of Eurocentric drama" (Schechner 1992, 9), Theatre and Performance Studies is a Eurocentric discipline, often Anglo-centric, and exercises in decentring, no matter how precarious they are, are still small steps in the best direction we can take.

We are certain that we have not solved any disciplinary debates, answered any questions or offered a comprehensive picture of the field in this Special Issue. And yet, we hope that this Volume and its gestural politics are just an introduction towards what may be ahead and what we may become as a country that cares for the teaching and learning (and making) of theatre and performance.

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Section 1.
The Performance of Alternative Victorian Femaleness

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Performing the Female Alternative in Victorian Popular Drama: The "Girl of the Period" and the "Fast Girl"[1]

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Abstract:

During the nineteenth century, theatregoing became the favoured entertainment of both the lower and upper classes in London. As Davis (1994, 307) suggests, the plays were a "mirrored reflection" of society, and they had the ability to reflect important socio-political issues on stage, while also influencing people's opinion about them. Thus, by turning to the popular stage of the mid-century we can better understand social issues like the Woman Question, or the tensions around imperial policies, among others. As such, this article scrutinises the ways in which Victorian popular drama influenced the period's ideal of femininity by using stock characters inspired by real women's movements. Two such cases are the "Girl of the Period" and the "Fast Girl", protofeminists that would go on to influence the New Woman of the fin-de-siècle. We analyse two plays from the mid-century: the Adelphi's *Our Female American Cousin* (1860), by Charles Gayler, and the Strand's *My New Place* (1863), by Arthur Wood. As this article attests, popular plays like these would inadvertently bring into the mainstream the ongoing political fight for female rights through their use of transgressive female characters and promotion of scenarios where alternative feminine identities could be performed and imagined.

Keywords: Victorian theatre; Victorian popular drama; Girl of the Period; Fast Girl; theatre and feminism

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1. Introduction

When we think about literature during the Victorian period in England, we often forget about popular drama. For the non-Victorianist, English theatre during the nineteenth century is usually represented by two names: Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw. But the truth is, even though both authors rightfully earned their global fame as masters of satire and social commentary, there were many more names that did not make it to the annals of literary history. While Wilde and Shaw might be representative of the *fin-de-siècle* theatrical scene, we should look to the rest of the century to get a broader idea of the period's performance culture.

Prior to the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, a few selected venues in London—Drury Lane, Covent Garden, and the Haymarket—held the monopoly of "legitimate" drama. This meant that serious spoken drama—tragedy and comedy—could only be performed in these venues. The dramatic repertoire was thus significantly limited as the plays that fit into the "legitimate" category were most likely to be Shakespearean adaptations, or the more modern creations of Richard Sheridan. At the same time, other "non-patent" theatres struggled to innovate, interspersing musical interludes with dramatic scenes to attract the general public. After the lifting of restrictions in 1843, however, other theatres were finally allowed to perform various dramatic genres and a shift from a "legitimate" culture to an "illegitimate" culture occurred (Moody 2000, 10; Newey 2005, 6). Nevertheless, it was not until the 1850s and 60s that the economy allowed for the creation of new theatrical venues around London, which, combined with the rise of the music hall, favoured the proliferation of the popular genres (Davis and Emeljanow 2004, 94; Bratton 2011, 57-58). After years of restrictions, music and dancing could be performed outside the patent theatres despite the criticism of moralists, who still condemned popular performance as lowbrow or inappropriate. The Examiner of Plays, appointed by the Lord Chamberlain, controlled all playscripts before their debut, and was able to censor whatever he thought unsuitable for public performance. Despite his efforts, the most successful playwrights and actors dodged censorship with double-entendres, puns, and nonverbal communication. In this way, mid-Victorian theatre was much more than simply the written script.

For the modern scholar, the multi-layered nature of Victorian theatre might be considered an impediment. To address this problem, Marcus suggests that scholars "read Victorian plays—but don't just read them; read about them, peruse visual and verbal accounts of the people who staged and watched them, read them aloud, try to block and perform them, set them to music, imagine them with costumes and lights and contraptions and scenery" (2012, 446). In other words, to fully

comprehend the Victorians' "catholicity of experience" (Davis 2012, 20), we must scrutinise the period's socio-political background and establish its links with popular performance, as they are inextricably bound together. In the end, Victorian theatre will prove to be an invaluable source of information about the daily lives of the Victorians and will shed light on one of the most interesting periods of history.

This article scrutinises the way in which popular drama both influenced and reflected the ongoing social debates of the time, more precisely those concerned with modern gender roles. In the first section, we discuss the so-called "age of equipoise" (Burn 1964) and establish the links between a progressively modern metropolis and the myriad forms of entertainment available to both visitors and natives. As we shall see, after the Theatre Act Regulation of 1843 and the ensuing aura of respectability attempted by the Examiner of Plays, stages struggle to juxtapose salacious plots with traditional decorum. Performative culture during the mid-century turns to music and playful representation, perhaps as a way of processing the period's changing social and political reality. It is, in the end, the period in which "more performances in more theatres were seen by more people than in any other period" (Shepherd and Womack 1996, 219).

In the second section, we examine the mid-century's shifting perspective on femininity, paying especial attention to the 1850s and 60s. Here we analyse the pressing *Woman Question*, a conundrum for the more traditional side of British society who feared the "loss of femininity" of England's daughters. Hence, amidst the first steps taken towards a more inclusive society in which women's education and civil rights were being reconsidered, conservative magazines and newspapers published articles advocating for traditional femininity. Specifically, we will focus on Eliza Lynn Linton's *Saturday Review* article, "The Girl of the Period" (1868), and we will discuss the contemporary type of women it condemned. As the second section of this article attests, Linton's warning about the decline of the country's morality and the proliferation of brand-new "Girls of the Period" and "fast girls"—who most certainly, preceded the *fin-de-siècle*'s New Woman—was a mere reflection of fear and antagonism towards ongoing attempts towards modernity.

In the third section, we will see two examples of the "Girl of the Period", or "Fast Girl" on the popular stage. The plays selected, Charles Gayler's *Our Female American Cousin* (April 30, 1860) and Arthur Wood's *My New Place* (November 19, 1863), are representative of the comic farce of the mid-century.[2] Both plays

2 Both the official British Library record and Nicoll (1946) attribute *My Female American Cousin* to "C. Galen". However, *The Adelphi Theatre Calendar Project* recognises the authorship of Charles Gayler. There is no consensus on the correct spelling, as the contemporary reviews of his plays published in British newspapers spell the author's surname both as "Gaylor" and "Gayler". I have decided to use the latter spelling, following *The Adelphi Theatre Calendar Project* and numerous obituaries published after the author's death in 1892.

were first staged in the West End, the hotspot of Victorian London's theatrical life. The Adelphi and the Strand theatres, where the plays were respectively performed, were both located on the Strand, "an old road linking the City and the Town" that ran parallel to the Thames (Bratton 2011, 35). It was a bustling street, which not only delimited the southern borders of the West End, but also served as the hub of the printing district. As we shall see, Gayler's and Wood's female protagonists embody the kind of transgressive femininity of which Linton would warn her readers a couple of years later. On stage, the primitive "Girl of the Period" boasts of her "fastness", that is, a tendency towards the superficial and a rejection of traditional gender norms.

The final section summarises the main ideas and questions raised in this article, further establishing the characters from our case-studies as comic figures that simplify the efforts of their real-life, middle-class female contemporaries, who were attempting to find their place in a rapidly changing society.

2. The "Age of Equipoise" and Popular Entertainment

In 1851, the Great Exhibition was inaugurated in the gleaming Crystal Palace in London's Hyde Park. Queen Victoria herself described inauguration day as "one of the greatest and most glorious of our lives" (quoted in Gibbs-Smith 1964, 16). According to Nicoll, the grand event would become a "symbol of an age that was passing away and the premonition of an age that was to come" (1946, 7), kick-starting the prosperous mid-century and trying to make amends for the bleak 1840s, which were sombrely linked with Ireland's Great Famine and the emigration crisis. As hoped, the Great Exhibition was just a prelude to the bountiful decades that would come on the back of improvements in transport and communication that enabled the country to continue projecting its global power internationally. A couple of years later, and to ensure the metropolis' global importance, London opened its doors again to celebrate the inauguration of the International Exhibition in 1862. Inspired by its predecessor, the International—as it was often called—was located in South Kensington from May to November of that same year and attracted over 6 million visitors in total. As an international event, the exhibition would transform the capital into an open space for education and interchange, welcoming people from different upbringings and cultures and promoting ideas of hospitality. It would also provide the basis for London's South Kensington museums and, in the long term, both exhibitions would promote the growing influx of visitors to the metropolis' theatres (Thomson 2006, 229).

As Burn (1964) argued, the Great Exhibition of 1851 marked the beginning of "the mid-Victorian equipoise", the apparent peaceful atmosphere that predominated in Britain during the 1850s and 60s. Both the Great Exhibition

and the following London International Exhibition of 1862 were essential in the formation of a national identity, as they attempted to bring the citizens of Britain together and encourage their acceptance of the social hierarchy. Incidentally, Hoffenberg identifies both exhibitions as "not only signs of equipoise, but also the living and material experience of such equipoise" (2017, 42). In other words, both events were physical manifestations of Britain's steady advance as a prosperous Empire, and proof of its citizens' cultural dominance. However, as Hewitt's [2000] (2017) review of Burn's theory of mid-Victorian equipoise suggests, we might argue that these public, massive events were a mere distraction from what was really going on behind the scenes, both outside the country—the Crimean War (1853-1856), the Second Opium War (1856-1860), and the Indian Rebellion of 1857, to name a few—and within, where pressing social issues such as the *Woman Question* and the creation of Trade Unions threatened traditionally minded individuals.

From the 1860s and up until the 1880s, museums doubled in number, from 90 to 180 in London, testifying to both the renewed appetite for knowledge and the government's insistence on democratising culture. In the end, the creation of public venues where lower- and middle-class citizen could have access to models of "perfect order and perfect elegance", as Ruskin (1880, 215) put it, went hand in hand with the incipient rise of educational movements across the country. For instance, the Royal Commission on the State of Popular Education in England established the groundwork, in 1861, for the forthcoming 1870 Elementary Education Act, which mandated that nearly all children—including those from the lower and workingclasses—were to receive minimal elementary education in order to create a responsible citizenship, in consonance with the country's prosperous times. In other words, if Britain were to compete as a global leader, it needed to have educated citizens, even if they were lower or working class.

However, we could argue that education did not just happen inside public, elegant museums or galleries. Bailey (2003, 23) has identified the dual purpose of "leisure" during the mid-Victorian period; as he contends, leisure could be seen as an "amusement", an empty activity with no deep purpose. It could also, though, be understood as "recreation", a rational way of improving oneself by means of an activity. Thus, public spaces specifically addressing citizens' leisure could simultaneously bring the average citizen closer to entertainment, delight, and, ultimately, knowledge. Such was the case of the reading rooms of the museums, which were somewhat more private, away from public scrutiny and the crowded aisles of the exhibits themselves, or of the *tableaux vivants*, also known as living pictures. These symbolise the duality of entertainment in the city, especially in the West End: as Donohue (2005, 4-7) explains, in all popular entertainment, behind an aura of respectability, moral and social transgression was hiding. In the case of *tableaux vivants*, where immobile costumed actors staged a historical event, a

famous painting, or a literary passage of classical inspiration, a complex interplay of theatrical elements assured the combined result of "elevated taste" and visual appeal (Assael 2006; Monrós-Gaspar 2015). With time, however, *tableaux vivants* crossed the line of propriety and became an excuse to legitimise a kind of voyeurism towards the female figure under the pretence of instruction (Davis 1991, 125), perhaps due to the onlooker's uncultured background and their lack of appreciation of the pictures represented (Assael 2006). Soon, *tableaux vivants* were also absorbed by light genres such as pantomimes and burlesques, which featured immobile scenes or *tableaux* between acts. As this hybridisation suggests, the entertainments of the mid-century continuously revised and reconfigured traditional forms of leisure and instruction.

This change of perspective could also be found by simply strolling around the metropolis. The improvements in technology, printing, and photography made it possible for Londoners to walk past image-covered shop windows or fences, buy cheap newspapers or journals, and, in other words, participate in the active machinery of the city (Nead 2000). As for the citizens' appetite for "amusement", a plethora of dance halls, theatres, circuses, and variety shows would satisfy even the most demanding pleasure-seeker (Bailey 2003, 2014). During the 1860s, public spaces such as the Cremorne Gardens in Chelsea evidenced the duality of London's popular entertainment offering: by day, the gardens were flocked to by respectable, middle-class families; by night, "fast" men and women of dubious morality sought a different kind of entertainment (*The Spectator* September 9, 1865, 1000-1001).

Of all the forms of entertainment available in the mid-Victorian metropolis, theatregoing was the most popular. Amidst the rapid growth of the city and the appetite of the masses for entertainment, a plethora of shows and performances of diverse nature promised to surprise and amuse the onlooker. Theatre was not, though, simply a gateway to the fantastical or spectacular: above all, it "staged explorations of the physical world of the city, the representation of changing social relationships between classes and genders, and the playing out and resolution of social anxieties and problems" (Newey 2010, 126). Theatregoing was much more than hollow entertainment: it was a collective experience, a process by which people could participate in the national culture. Playwrights and theatre managers catered for audiences' latest interests, usually exploiting well-known public events, adapting melodies and songs that everyone already knew, and redesigning, night after night, their "repertoires" depending on ever-changing popular mores (Davis 2012, 13). In this way, performance venues became a sort of "laboratory" where new roles and fashions were renegotiated and perfected; as Davis and Holland (2007, 96) contend, "a new conception of social roles and personal identity was being developed and played out both on stage and in the auditorium. The popular theatre, on and off stage, was becoming a new kind

of social process for articulating the texture and conditions of urban life." After all, it was the "age of crowds", a period where the public's opinions, wants, and needs were being constantly verbalised (Daly 2013, 5).

Ultimately, the popular theatre of the mid-century provided a space where characters could be twisted and reconfigured at will; in keeping with the revisionist feeling of the period, light theatrical genres adapted "serious" characters from classic or sensation drama and took inspiration from real events and public figures. To satisfy the theatregoer's interest in novelty, multiple hybrid genres such as the comedietta or the burlesque were created. As *The Reader* (8 April, 1865) puts it, a comedietta was a "dwarf species of comedy that is not so broad as farce, nor so light as vaudeville, nor so tragic as melodrama", and it epitomised the mid-century's efforts to return to "social comedy" (Nicoll 1970, 134). Indeed, the unequivocal influence of social issues in genres such as sensation, as well as the legal atmosphere of the pre-1860s, contributed to a renewed interest in the female figure on stage. In line with theatre's "mirrored reflection" (Davis 1994, 307), performances could—and did—influence society, intervening in culture, and leaving their imprint on society.

3. New Female Role Models: The "Girl of the Period" and the "Fast Girl"

In accordance with the traditional gender ideology of the first half of the century, the Royal Family served as a model of marriage bliss to all. After her marriage, the Queen was not just seen as a capable monarch, but also, as a successful woman who had fulfilled her sex's duty; in other words, she had conquered "her household, her children [and] her husband" (*Pall Mall Gazette* June 24, 1869, 12). In the paintings and photographs commissioned by the sovereign during the 1840s to 60s, the Queen would often appear as a *domestic angel*, surrounded by her large family. As an idealised angel-wife, Queen Victoria could be seen as "guide and comfort" for the young women who were still trying to find a place in a male-dominated world (*Macmillan's Magazine* May 1, 1863, 8).

However, the monarch's public image changed after the death of Prince Albert in December 1861, and she was transformed into what scholars have called "the invisible Queen" (St. Aubyn 1992, 353; Homans 1998, 58-66). As for many coetaneous women, widowhood posed to Queen Victoria the problem of individual representation and cast a figurative "veil" over her persona (Strachey 1921). Her demeanour in official photographs changed to suffering or longing for her husband: in her mourning clothes, she either cast her eyes downward, or directly to her late husband's memorial bust (Mayall 1863). Absent from any public engagements until the marriage of her firstborn, Prince Edward—later King Edward VII—to Princess Alexandra of Denmark, her active role as monarch

and *matron* of the country would manifestly be put aside in favour of the younger generations. Nonetheless, Queen Victoria was a popular icon, and she would go on to be included in collective biographies of women, which emphasised her timeless position as a role model for her female subjects; among her many virtues, Davenport (1884, 86) highlighted the Queen's "moral courage, her fortitude, her industry, her elevation of aim, and her tenacity of purpose."

It was, however, not just Queen Victoria who served as a moral guide for Victorian women. The popularity of poems such as Coventry Patmore's *The Angel in the House* (1854), which continued to be reworked and extended up to 1862, revered the figure of the model *celestial* wife or *True Woman*. The *Pall Mall Gazette* described such women as superior to men within their "domestic empire" (June 24, 1869, 12), while the *Morning Advertiser* praised their submissive, modest stance with "eyes bent earthward with unmerited shame" (August 7, 1862, 2). Indeed, the traditional approach to femininity in Britain still placed women in the domestic environment in the mid-century, despite the previous attempts of early proto-feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft and her 1790s' contemporaries to expand the horizons and prospects of women outside the home.

It is interesting to consider Queen Victoria's absence from public life during the mid-century, because as she receded, compelling reformist initiatives intensified. By the 1860s, many middle-class women were asking questions about controversial topics such as a woman's place in society, and fought for a better education, insisting on academic formation and civil rights. Female organisation began through the creation of communities, social gatherings, and women's clubs. Groups such as the Langham Place Circle of Feminists, established in London by Barbara Smith Bodichon and Bessie Rayner Parkes, fought for women's rights. They wrote pamphlets, crusaded around London, and made allegiances with politicians such as John Stuart Mill, who presented a petition for the female vote to the House of Commons in 1867—long before the 1928 Equal Franchise Act that granted the vote to everyone over the age of 21. Still, these early steps towards female emancipation had to be taken carefully; as their writings usually insisted, they did not "intend to convert […] wives and daughters into politicians, nor to disturb the peace of households" (*London Daily News* June 29, 1866). It was, after all, a matter of raising "public spirit" (*West Middlesex Advertiser and Family Journal* January 5, 1867, 3). As these suggest, women had to be incredibly careful with their words and position, or else they risked their own reputation.

With newspapers such as the *Morning Post* (July 16, 1860, 4) raising questions about the country's immorality with respect to modern times and modern debates, the critics put women under the spotlight: there was a problem with improper male behaviour, but it was the mission of the "young ladies" to stop their advances. At the beginning of the 1860s, the newspapers appealed to women

and their supposed moral and spiritual superiority, demanding their rejection of modern ways. Those who transgressed tradition and welcomed modernity soon received a new descriptive epithet: "fast girls". The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "fast" as "engaging in or involving activities characterised by excitement, extravagance, and risk-taking" (*OED* adj. 6), making clear the period's conception of the "fast girl". There were, though, two kinds of "fast girls": the "not-so-bad" and the "worst kind". The first kind was described as follows:

> [A "fast girl" is] a woman who has lost her respect for men, and for whom men have lost their respect. There may be nothing very bad in her—it is not a question of virtue and vice—but the edge of her modesty is off, and men approach her with a certain feeling of easy insolence. She does something or says something which she is not exactly expected to do or say […] She bets a little, and drinks a very little, and even sometimes smokes on the sly […] she never does any work, and will never marry any one but an officer. (*Morning Advertiser* July 31, 1860, 3)

The second type of "fast girl", the "worst kind", was not the most common. As the article explains, this kind has the bad habit of talking with men about subjects of dubious propriety and is most likely to be found in London. These young women were usually from fashionable society and were want to "permit men to forget in their presence the line that separates the impure woman from the pure" (*Morning Advertiser* July 31, 1860, 3). Indeed, throughout the rest of the decade the epithet "fast girl" was easily conflated with women of an "off-set" modesty—it was a term usually employed to refer to prostitutes. It was also a descriptive word for those who reconfigured their appearance and behaviour and participated in "male" vices (Boufis [1994] 2010, 101-102). Gossiping, drinking, and smoking were some of the characteristics usually attributed to the "fast girl"—traits that were considered rather *masculine* and that would end up being signifiers of the New Woman of the *fin-de-siècle*. Moreover, a well-known synonym of the "fast girl" is that of "strong-minded woman". In the end, both epithets served as prejudiced descriptions of the alternative, the girl who strayed from the norm (Monrós-Gaspar 2020).

By the end of the 1860s, and with the bustling feminist scene in London and Manchester, along came another plea for women's traditional decorum. Amidst the ongoing debate around whether Britain could still take pride in their women, the *Saturday Review* printed an anonymous article entitled *The Girl of the Period* (March 1868). The piece—which turned out to be written by a woman named Eliza Lynn Linton—was extremely successful as it voiced the nation's concerns about women's roles and their shifting identities. Linton described the "Girl of the Period" as:

> a creature who dyes her hair and paints her face, as the first articles of her personal religion; whose sole idea of life is plenty of fun and luxury; and whose dress is the object of such thought and intellect as she possesses. Her main endeavour in this is to outvie her neighbours in the extravagance of fashion. No matter whether, as in the time of crinolines, she sacrificed decency, or, as now, in the time of trains, she sacrifices cleanliness […]. With purity of taste she has lost also that far more precious purity and delicacy of perception. (Linton [1868] 1996)

As this excerpt suggests, contemporary women were being criticised for their efforts to look and behave like the "demi-mondaine" or prostitute, rather than like the traditional, fair English maid of the past. As Buszek (2006, 56) explains, the author Henry James commented on Linton's description of the modern woman and compared her to the professional woman—to actresses, more precisely—who were "accustomed to walk alone in the streets of a great city, and to be looked at by all sorts of people".

Against this idea of a sole definition of the "Girl of the Period", Fraser et al. (2003, 22) argue that the "Girl of the Period" is an example of "a multiform being", or in other words, she represents the multifaceted nature of women from the mid-century as well as the decade's efforts to debunk simplistic definitions of "woman". In fact, as Helsinger et al. (1983, 112) attest, an increasing number of mid-Victorian women rejected the imposed dichotomy of "Angel in the House" or "prostitute", seeking to transgress the norm without "forsaking true womanhood". There is no single definition of the "Girl of the Period"; publications such as the *Girl of the Period Almanack* and the *Girl of the Period Miscellany* continued to outline a wide array of "Girls of the Period", whose main characteristic was their deviation from the "girl of the past" (Moruzi 2009, 14). In a way, the epithet allowed for a revision of gender roles, and clarified a generation's attempt to reconsider what it meant to be a woman. Thus, in the first issue of the *Miscellany*, the editors evoked the real purpose of the "Girl of the Period" in this way: "let us get recognized […] that marriage is not the sole, or even the chief end of woman. Let us give her work. Let us give her free leave to do whatever a man does, if she can" (*Girl of the Period Miscellany* March 1869, 6). With its all-female editorial board, this magazine gave voice to the opinion of many women of the period who fought for female education and work opportunities, and continued to rebuke the unique, tight definition of womanhood.

The "Girl of the Period" finds its literary response in sensation fiction. The sensation heroine is usually classified as "strong-minded" due to her "unnatural" behaviour (*Morning Post* 22 October 1863, 3) and participates in the mid-century's questioning of femininity (Pykett 2011, 13). We should not forget that the 1860s were the heyday of sensation fiction and that successful

sensation novels with female protagonists, such as Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), went on to be adapted by other literary genres and adopted multiple forms. Perhaps due to the peak of mass production and consumption of the printed text, the "thrilling crimes, pathetic suffering, and devious villainy" (Eltis 2013, 61) that characterised sensation fiction gripped the public with their salacious plots, where the female protagonist is closer to the "Girl of the Period" than to the *Angel*. However, as we shall discuss in the following section, printed sensation fiction was not the only genre that featured these forms of transgressive femininity. On stage too, the fictional "Girl of the Period" and "fast girl" articulates society's expectation of women and warns about the perils of losing traditional femininity standards.

4. The Non-Traditional Girl on Stage: The Yankee Girl and the Young English Girl as "Girls of the Period"

As we have previously seen, *The Girl of the Period Almanack* had warned about the multiplicity of the "Girl of the Period". Accordingly, in this section we shall see two variants that fit Linton's definition: the American—or Yankee—girl and the young English "fast" girl. Our first selected piece is entitled *Our Female American Cousin* (1860) and was first performed in London's Adelphi Theatre on April 26, 1860.[3] Gayler, the author, clearly references Tom Taylor's successful farce *Our American Cousin* (Laura Keene's Theatre, New York, October 15, 1858; Haymarket, London, November 11, 1861). Taylor's farce was inextricably linked to the shift in leisure and entertainment that was occurring in Britain during the mid-century; as Banham (1985, 15) notes, Taylor wrote *Our American Cousin* after American tourists "flocked to the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851" and it evidenced the cultural differences between Americans and Britons.[4]

Gayler's inspiration in Taylor's *Our American Cousin* is evident in his shaping of the female protagonist. In Taylor's farce, the American protagonist is a man

3 All the following quotes from the play have been taken from the original manuscript, which is stored at the British Library in London, with reference Add. MS 52992 M.

4 Asa Trenchard was played by actor Joseph Jefferson in the original cast of *Our American Cousin*. However, it was Lord Dundreary, a stock comic character, who made an impression on the audience. In the years following the premiere, playwrights on both sides of the Atlantic created spin-offs of the original story, giving prominence to Lord Dundreary and his "Dundrearyisms" (Fisher 2015, 336). Coincidentally, Gayler wrote *Our American Cousin At Home; or, Lord Dundreary Abroad* (1860), and H. J. Byron—an acclaimed English burlesque playwright—penned *Dundreary Married and Done For* (1864), originally for the Haymarket in London (Davis 1984).

named Asa Trenchard, a cousin that arrives in England to claim an inheritance and ends up marrying a poor girl, despite the tight social class boundaries. Similarly, in Gayler's *Our Female American Cousin,* the main character is Pamelia, a young American girl who travels to Britain to meet her English relatives, the Appleby family. Like Asa Trenchard, Pamelia has to get past her family's prejudice and criticism about her "coarse" manners, but ends up engaged to Gerald Appleby, her British cousin and heir to the Appleby estate. However, we can observe a clear contrast between the status of the two protagonists: while Trenchard occupies a position of power even before his arrival in Britain—he is the heir and the British Trenchards are therefore at his mercy—Pamelia is at a distinct disadvantage because she is just the daughter of the long-lost brother of the Appleby patriarch.

The role of Pamelia was originally performed by the American actress Julia Daly, Gayler having expressly written it for her. Daly's reputation as a singer and actress on the other side of the Atlantic facilitated her popularity in London, especially after her success as Pamelia at the Adelphi; after all, the role of the "Yankee Girl" was her specialty (*The Players* June 23, 1860, 201). Accordingly, years after her first British performance as Gayler's female American cousin, the country's newspapers continued to describe her as an "eccentric American actress" (*The Illustrated London News* February 23, 1871, 183), and considered her the "unrivalled representative of the 'Irish and Yankee Gal'" (*The Era Almanack Advertiser* 1871). As the newspapers suggest, even though Julia Daly was an American, she specialised in the stock comic characters of the *Yankee* and the Irish girl. Besides *Our Female American Cousin*, in which she plays an American, she also starred in *The Irish Girl in America*, the theatrical adaptation of Mary Anne Sadlier's novel *Bessy Conway; or, The Irish Girl in America* (1861). As Murphy (1998) suggests, the literature of the mid-nineteenth century reinforces the stock character of the immigrant Irish servant girl, in both a comic and a dramatic light. When used in comedy, the "Irish gal" is usually an ignorant servant who is unaware of the rules of American or British society. She is impolite, makes inappropriate comments that make the audience laugh, and, in general, she is unable to fit into respectable society.

Something similar happens to the stereotypical American or *Yankee* girl. As Pamelia, Daly exaggerates the vulgar manners of the modern American girl, which are compared with the meek character of the English-born, middle-class woman. Indeed, Pamelia's transgressive femininity is evidenced by her rough speech and her unruly behaviour while she is at her relatives' English home. The *Morning Advertiser* described Daly in her role as Pamelia as "a popular delineator of American eccentricities" (June 20, 1860), while the *Morning Post* attested to her capacity to "mirror" reality through a "magnifying glass of extraordinary

power" (May 1, 1860). Due to the news from a socially convoluted America arriving every day, both the critics and the English audience would have been up to date on the American women's rights movement. Additionally, echoes of American feminism and Britain's own problem with the *Woman Question*, would perfectly frame Daly's character in the minds of the audience. In the play, Lady Appleby apparently verbalises the public's expected reaction after hearing about the arrival of the American girl in the Appleby household; Lady Appleby, the matriarch and Pamelia's aunt, assumes Pamelia's lack of position in respectable society and compares her to a "savage":

> LADY APPLEBY: A savage from America? Good gracious, I hope you will keep her caged. (Gayler 1860, f.7)

Evidently, the London stage revels in the go-aheadism of American society—and especially of American women—as markers of the social changes some British women were embarked upon. Two years after the first performance of *Our Female American Cousin,* novelist and critic Anthony Trollope would publish his memoirs recounting his American travels, *North America* (1862). Trollope's social commentary on American society and American women foregrounds the "improper" and "misbehaving female" of the period (*The Athenaeum* May 24, 1862, 687). As Trollope puts it, the contrast between "ladylike" and "vulgar", though apparent in England, is far stronger in America, where women can be "either charming or odious" (*The Athenaeum* May 24, 1862, 687).

In *Our Female American Cousin*, Pamelia is represented as a coarse-mannered girl who destabilises the respectability of an English family due to her easy-goingness around men, her lack of respect for her older relatives, and her free mobility both inside and outside the family home. As a representative of the growing American Women's Rights movement, Pamelia brings to the London stage a threatening picture of the incipient future of British women; a future of which Linton would warn about a few years later in her *Girl of the Period* article. In the end, Pamelia's role not only caricatures the contemporary modern American girl, but also reminds the audience of the country's own femininity problem. However, some critics suggest that Daly "breaks a lance for her countrywomen" and reverses the popular conception of the vulgar American woman (*The Players* June 23, 1860, 201). Even though Gayler's comedietta is packed with "Americanisms", as some newspapers suggest, and the acting of Julia Daly is particularly focused on accentuating the mannerisms of the stereotypical modern American girl, her final address to the audience reminds them of the artificiality of the role; as Pamelia states at the end of the play, this image of the American woman only exists in the audience's imagination:

> PAMELIA: I have shown you your idea of an American Woman, such a type as I am proud to say, only exists in the imagination of old time story writers. (Gayler 1860, f.31)

Nevertheless, Daly's final tag is weak in its assertion, for the message that comes across after witnessing the whole play is precisely the opposite. Daly's stereotypical manners as a celebrated Yankee girl are in fact reminiscent of the much-condemned "fast girls" and "Girls of the Period". Daly's reputation seems inescapable, much like the "Girl of the Period" epithet was for some women. While Daly profited from her fame as the model "Yankee Girl", other actresses mocked the artificial stereotype and capitalised on the public's erroneous perception of modern femininity off stage. Years after Daly's memorable performance as Pamelia, English actress Lydia Thompson took advantage of her own public image as a modern, "fast girl" and posed for a series of photographs in order to turn a profit from her ridiculous reputation.[5] Like Pamelia in Gayler's comedietta, Thompson satirises and exaggerates the public's assumption about the modern "Girl of the Period" and takes it to the extreme (Buszek 2006, 56-59). In America, Thompson and her troupe of "British Blondes" collected both admirers and detractors due to their performances of burlesque adaptations, extravagant costumes, and *fast* behaviour both inside and outside theatres (Gänzl [2002] 2014). In accordance with her public image, Thompson's photographs from 1868 depict her holding a fashionable riding crop, with her bouffant hair arranged in an ostentatiously long braid, which is topped off by a racy taxidermy squirrel hat. Moreover, Thompson sports a monocle, smokes a cigarette, and holds a riding crop, all the masculine markers that her coetaneous critics warned the readers about. In this way, Thompson successfully appropriates the condescending stereotype of the "fast girl" and uses it to her advantage.

As the character of Pamelia suggests, and as Thompson attempted to prove with her photographs, young women were especially scrutinised during the 1860s, no matter their nationality. The comic genre is fixated upon the young women's future role in the "domestic ideal", which mainly consists of "a kindly uxorious husband" and a "loving wife who dutifully submits herself to her husband's authority in all matters except for those of housekeeping trivia" (Booth 2004, 131). Essentially, the comic popular stage explores the delimited role of women and exploits their possibilities for propriety or impropriety in both their private and public life. Victorian popular drama, especially burlesque, farce, comedietta

5 Thompson's *carte-de-visites* can be consulted online at the Billy Rose Theatre Division of The New York Public Library Digital Collections (https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47df-56da-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99)

and the like, tended to expose the period's preoccupations: as Fisher (1988, 652) attests, "because of their reliance on fantasy and the incredible incident, these forms can mask their serious issues with frivolity, self-parody, and musical spectacle, trivialising their serious concerns, and rendering morbid or sentimental their lighter themes". In the case of Pamelia, we see her as a deviation from the domestic ideal, a travelling woman whose unrestricted mobility and behaviour earn her the epithet "savage", as we have previously seen. We cannot understand Pamelia, the "Yankee girl", if we are not aware of the dominant discourse against *bloomerism*.6 On stage, the Yankee girl comes alive in front of the audience, who witness an anomalous female identity that they had so often heard or read about outside the theatrical venue. In the end, as Pamelia reminds us at the end of the play, she might only exist in her critics' imagination. In a way, she is inadvertently warning everyone about the invented constructions of femininity that were proliferating during the period.

The mid-Victorian stage is also interested in the debates on female public and private spaces in the Victorian city. In light comedy, we can visit gendered spaces such as the drawing room at a lady's home, shops, or even boarding schools for girls. The latter are sometimes also known as "finishing schools", where the daughters of upper-middle class families were sent to learn the necessary skills before their coming out into society. These are perfect examples of gendered spaces: peeking into a boarding school—though fictitious—assimilates the experience of entering a lady's boudoir, a private space where the identity of the young girl is being formed in a controlled environment. Such settings had the same attraction for the spectator as the exotic seraglios described by adventurers such as Richard Burton. To be able to observe a young woman in a female-only space allows us to understand the process of the creation of female identity.

In popular comic drama, the male protagonist will often go out of his way to gain access to such feminised spaces. Such is the case in our second piece, the Strand's farce *My New Place* (Wood, November 19, 1863), where the male protagonist, Tom Larkspur, trespasses in a girls' boarding school after briefly conversing with Jenny, a young student.7 The farce introduced the now-forgotten

6 Amelia Bloomer was the editor of *Lily,* an American journal that promoted women's rights. In 1851, she published an article advocating a change in female fashion, describing the advantages of wearing a shortened skirt with full trousers underneath. Soon, the press named this style "the Bloomer". The term *bloomerism* went on to epitomise the changing gender ideology of the mid-century, and it quickly became a synonym for feminism. Because of Bloomer's nationality, *bloomerism* was typically associated with American society, even though it also reached Britain. See more about *bloomerism* and Amelia Bloomer in Cunningham (2003, 31-74).

7 The Lord Chamberlain's Catalogue of Plays records the character's name as 'Jenny' in the original manuscript (Add. MS 53027 K); however, *The Illustrated London News* indicates

author and actor Arthur Wood onto the London stage, even though it did not leave much of an imprint in the Strand. The *London Daily News* (November 24, 1863) classified it as "not at all deficient in vulgarity", perhaps because the farce exploits the risky adventure of Tom, who dresses as a female to get inside the girls' school. Cross-dressing might not have been a problem, as the audience was more than accustomed to seeing actors and actresses in *travesti*; after all, popular genres did break down the sexual codes of the period (Fisher 1988, 652). However, it is surprising that Wood's farce escaped the censorship of the Examiner of Plays as it features a particularly controversial and eroticised scene in which Tom chases the young students to kiss them while he is disguised as a female (Wood 1863, f.18).

Even though Tom Larkspur is clearly the protagonist of the farce, it is the string of "fast", flirty girls that dream of leaving the school to pursue other romantic journeys that catch our attention. The main female character is Jenny, a "romping" girl (Wood 1863, f.1). We soon see that her behaviour is considered "threatening" and "corrupting"; while the girls are under the scrutiny of the "spinster" school mistress, Miss Virginia Verjuice, they must conceal their blatant flirting with visiting men. The mistress, in accordance with the role of the older generation, oversees and restricts the girls' romantic musings, prohibiting certain topics of conversation and the reading of materials such as Lord Byron's *Don Juan* (Wood 1863, f.12). To prevent Jenny from "polluting" her school with her libertine and *fast* example, Miss Verjuice insists on locking her away:

> MISS VERJ: (to JENNY) when you have dined, you will […] remain in that closet until you are sent for […] I cannot permit your example to corrupt the minds of my young charges. You will therefore bring your tasks and follow me to that room, where I desire you will continue, and I hope will reflect on your conduct (Wood 1863, f.8-9)

In Miss Verjuice's words we can hear the echoes of the older generations who insisted on censoring the modern types of femininity. As the strict matron of the school, she symbolises traditionally minded individuals. The audience knows that Miss Verjuice's task is not an easy one; she is in charge of young female students whose attention is directed to "fast" conducts rather than to reading deep philosophical texts (Wood 1863, f.12). In this way, Miss Verjuice's attempts to stop the girls from misbehaving come across as ridiculous and comic; for

that she was renamed 'Fanny' (November 28, 1863). The following transcripts belong to the manuscript version and so I have decided to use the original name.

instance, she makes Jenny wear a veil in order to keep her from the view of "the libertine", or male trespasser:

> MISS VERJ: (to JENNY) Here, at least you are secure from the insidious approaches of the reprobate. We must have no lures here to catch the unsteady eyes of the libertine—so, in future, Miss Trentham, you will always wear a veil and walk with me.
>
> JENNY: Well, I don't care. There, then. When you were of our age, you were not so particular, I dare say. That is, if you could get any one to look at you at all and I don't believe you could unless you are very much altered. (Wood 1863, f.13-14)

Jenny's response is to attack Miss Verjuice for her beauty—or rather, her lack thereof. Again, Jenny seems to have little respect for Miss Verjuice's generation, and after being reprimanded, she accuses her schoolmates of being hypocritical:

> JENNY: I don't mind if I do leave your school and never come back there then, I'd sooner be a Jamaica slave! I would! And I'll never try to learn my lessons again, there, I won't! and Miss Jones and Miss Green are sanctified hypocrites, they are! They are as bad as I am when they have the opportunity for't, nasty things! Miss Green always nods to the man with the bulls eyes, and Miss Jones writes v-v-valentines to the b-b-baker *(sobbing)* (Wood 1863, f.14)

Barbara Smith Bodichon had argued three years earlier at the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science meeting of 1860 that the schools were still in need of providing a "sound, general education" for girls, one that would eliminate the existing "vanity" and "false ideals of what is lady-like" (*The English Woman's Journal* November 1860, 6). In turn, the popular drama shows finishing schools and boarding schools for girls as self-contained spaces where the girl is *unpolluted* by outside perversities. On stage, the finishing school is revealed as a re-creation of the domestic environment, where traditional feminine identities are forced upon the *prisoner* girls. However, dramatic criticism makes the audience think about the struggling young women, whose resistance to the gender rules is manifested in their *fastness* and in their desire to escape such spaces. In a way, and as Linton would suggest a few years later, society's obligation was to protect these young minds—to behave as a sort of Miss Verjuice—to prevent the ultimate pollution of the "soft sex".

4. Conclusion

As we have seen, these representations of modern, fast women during the 1860s are not perceived as positive; instead, the playwrights go to great lengths to portray an uncomfortable new definition of femininity. As Pamelia and Jenny exemplify, the "fast girl" and "Girl of the Period" provokes in the audience rejection or, at most, laughter, but not understanding. On the popular stage, these women are risible figures, perhaps mere tools for processing the ongoing debates on *proper* femininity. However, their existence evidences the relevance of transgressive female identities in the first place.

In the first sections of this article, we have seen how the performative culture in London developed hand-in-hand with a culture of entertainment. The celebration of big events in the capital further contributed to the blurring of the line that separated "entertainment" and "metropolis" and made the city a spectacle in itself. It is within this scenario that new role models of femininity transgressed traditional standards and served as inspiration for many. First the "fast girl", and then the "Girl of the Period", were deemed such because of their outspoken verbalisation of the anxieties of mid-century women. While the first feminist groups of the period still had to be careful with their words in order to be taken seriously, the stereotypical "fast girl" dressed and behaved as she liked. It was, after all, a deviation from the "girl of the past" (Moruzi 2009, 14).

This social context is reflected on the popular stages of London. Lighter comic genres like the comedietta cast aside formal restrictions and turned to social commentary. In between jokes, puns, and double-entendres, the audience was given the opportunity to reflect on the ongoing social debates, and process their fast-changing society. After all, and as we have seen in this article, the theatrical venue also became a place for instruction.

On stage, the myriad identities of women were oversimplified and manipulated. We have seen the examples of two almost forgotten plays, an abounding type of the period. Both the Adelphi and the Strand were extremely popular with both affluent and working-class citizens because of their light satirical plays (Booth 1991, 53, 196; Davis and Emeljanow 2002, 186). Thus, neither Pamelia, the American girl, nor Jenny, the fast young English girl, would have involved much of a shock for regular theatregoers. As we have discussed, the audience would have identified in Pamelia and Jenny the feminist trend of the period and they would even have been reminded of specific events recounted in the press. In short, these characters prepared the audience for the forthcoming decades, when groups of real women would continue to subvert the norm.

Finally, we can argue that the "fast girl" and the "Girl of the Period" are both precursors of the *fin-de-siècle* New Woman. At the end of the century, *New Women*

were still being compared to the "fast girl" (*Punch* October 3, 1896, 158), and they still struggled to move beyond the traditional definition of womanhood. For instance, the American or "Yankee gal", whose coarseness makes pristine British society feel uncomfortable in the mid-century, was revived at the end of the century in social plays such as Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* (1894). In Wilde's play, the young Hester Worsley becomes an outspoken observer of English customs, wittily commenting on the social situation of British women during the *fin-de-siècle* and denouncing the hypocrisy of British society. Unlike Gayler's Pamelia in *Our Female American Cousin,* however, Hester Worsley is seen as an elevated, refined version of femininity. On the other hand, the fast young English girl of the mid-century, unable to find a place in respectable society, continues to cause controversy even at the end of the Victorian period. Like Jenny in Wood's *My New Place,* they were still reprimanded by the older generations, who insisted on metaphorically concealing them behind a veil or, in other words, in keeping them from scrutiny.

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"Come, Dark-eyed Sleep": Michael Field and the Performance of the Lyric as a Radical Fantasy

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Abstract:

This article seeks to illustrate how the Michael Fields articulate their Sapphic poetry in *Long Ago* (1889) not only in keeping with their own Shakespearean aspirations and with Robert Browning's hybrid formula of dramatic lyrics, but also in connection with Jonathan Culler's theory of the lyric as a performative genre. Much recent scholarship has broken ground in the rediscovery and reappraisal of the Fields' literary stature, yet the general critical approach has been divisive in addressing their poetry and their verse dramas separately. Some critics have taken heed of how their lyrics in general exhibit an intrinsic dramatic temper, yet no systematic inquiry has discussed how this lyrical dramaticity is manifest in any particular instance. Thus, this article singles out *Long Ago*'s second poem for its powerful performative energy, offering a close reading of each line, and demonstrating that it amounts to a hybrid dramatic lyric, as well as a tragic and transgressive performance in which a new Sappho takes centre stage as a Dionysian apologist of radical erotic fantasies.

Keywords: Michael Field; lyric; performance; *Long Ago*; Sappho

1. Introduction

Fin-de-siècle authors Katharine Bradley and her niece Edith Cooper, a prolific duet who wrote pseudonymously as Michael Field, have attracted considerable critical attention, particularly since the 1990s. However, critics have generally approached their work from at least two separate directions. Their poetry has generated broad and diverse scholarship, including an entire monograph written by Marion Thain (2007), as well as multiple chapters and articles (Leighton 1992, White 1996, Prins 1999, O'Gorman 2006, Dellamora 2007, Madden 2007, Evangelista 2009, Olverson 2010, Cantillo-Lucuara 2018, Parker and Vadillo 2019). On the other hand, their dramatic production has also received enthusiastic attention from several other critics. Bickle (2010, 2012), Bristow (2019), Eastham (2011), Kirby (2017), Krisuk (2010), Lee (2019), Olverson (2015), and Parejo-Vadillo (2007, 2015) have made concerted efforts to amend and revise histories of late-Victorian drama with a view to foregrounding the Fields' plays, appraising their conspicuous originality, and empathically, revealing their intrinsic queer aesthetics. The overall result of this considerable scholarship is a now well-established view that Bradley and Cooper's lyrics and dramas constitute a large-scale repository of fluid, experimental, transgressive forms and ideas that resonate powerfully with our own cultural moment.

Nevertheless, it is striking that no approach has considered the two areas in unison or considered how Michael Field's lyric poetry is by no means separable from their dramatic writing. Not only are their numerous plays self-evidently poetic, written in the most classical or Elizabethan verse: their poems have at their core an inherent performative or dramatic energy. This lyrical dramaticity, the most salient concept in the present article, might be explained in light of two significant facts. Firstly, throughout the poems and plays of Michael Field there seems to be a general devotion to the dramatic word, a performative sense of rhetoric, a holistic understanding of life as/through dramatic tragedy, and more notably, a steady quest for Shakespearean excellence. Indeed, as Thain claims, the Fields always "saw themselves as dramatists and were caught up in the Victorian fervour for discovering a new Shakespeare" (Thain 2007, 8). In addition, as Biederstedt (1963) comments in one of the earliest doctoral studies on the Fields, they should be paired with their mentor and poet Robert Browning on account of their shared "distinctive manner of dramatizing a lyric" (43). This suggests that, for Bradley, Cooper and their eminent friend alike, their poetry should never be dissociated from their drama: both genres intersect in innovative and fruitful ways under a hybrid formula of particularly dramatic lyrics, as with Robert Browning's *Dramatic Lyrics* (1842), *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics* (1845),

Men and Women (1855), *Dramatis Personae* (1862) *Dramatic Idylls* (1879) and *Dramatic Idylls: Second Series* (1880).

It is true that some critics have noted Michael Field's poetic theatricality, but it is done in a sweeping manner that fails to accurately explain where this special feature comes from or how it is textually manifested. In her reading of *Long Ago*, Michael Field's volume of Sapphic poetry published in 1889, Sturgeon (1922) was the first to claim that "their aim was simply to make short *dramatic* lyrics out of the scenes suggested to their imagination by the Sapphic fragments" (90, italics added). Similarly, in relation to the same volume, Thain (2007) has pointed out that the Fields' lyricism "*dramatises* […] the gender *drama* played out in *Long Ago*" (60, italics added). In these critical assessments, though they acknowledge how dramatic *Long Ago* appears to be, how this dramaticity materialises is not addressed.

Framed within a general reflection on performance, this article aims to illustrate how the Michael Fields articulate their Sapphic poetry not only in line with the aesthetic parameters outlined above –their Shakespearean quest and their association with Browning, – but also in prospective connection with new theories. More particularly, I focus on *Long Ago*'s second lyric in order to show how it lends itself to a close reading predicated upon Jonathan Culler's (2015) latest theory of the lyric. This genre, argues the British critic, often operates as a true performance in itself for several reasons: it has the performative power to deploy "language which accomplishes the act to which it refers" (15); it relies on ritualistic structures that make it sound as if "composed for reperformance" (37); it tends to appear to "us as something happening now, in the performative temporality of the lyric" (63); it seeks to achieve the perlocutionary effects of "moving readers, provoking reflection, leading them to act" (130); and finally, it functions performatively in that "it acts iterably through repeated readings and makes itself memorable" (131). In sum, the lyric should be understood not as a mere form of textuality printed on a silent page, but rather as a performative and ritualistic genre that involves the reader/audience as a necessary and immediate participant in the poetic utterance.

Premised on Culler's notion of the lyric performance, this article shows how Michael Field's second poem in *Long Ago* most effectively illustrates the dramaticity of their verse by shaping what could be viewed as a performance of erotic insomnia, anxiety and self-deception in which a reinvented Sappho becomes a persuasive dramatic persona through the use of apostrophes, imperative forms and other rhetorical devices of ritualistic iteration not only to seek divine assistance in her romantic tragedy or to make her disdainful beloved, a ferryman named Phaon, more attainable, but also to engage the reader in the memorable repetition of her assertive desire. This is lyric II in full:

COME, dark-eyed Sleep, thou child of Night,
Give me thy dreams, thy lies;
Lead through the horny portal white
The pleasure day denies.

O bring the kiss I could not take
From lips that would not give;
Bring me the heart I could not break,
The bliss for which I live.

I care not if I slumber blest
By fond delusion; nay,
Put me on Phaon's lips to rest,
And cheat the cruel day! (ll. 1-12)

2. First Quatrain: Performing Insomnia and Oneiric Desire

Lyric II is sheer deception in its form. Its *opsis*, or what Culler (2015) refers to as "the ritualistic dimension of lines and stanzas" (252), creates an immediate yet misleading idea of order and harmony. Each of the lines finds its place within well-measured, rather symmetrical quatrains, which follow a visual, alternating pattern of two long lines (the first and the third), and other two short ones (the second and the fourth). Likewise, the poem's *melos*, or its "aural dimension" (Culler 2015, 35), reinforces the formal effect of order and harmony with a sound patterning based on an alternate ABAB sequence, a salient usage of plosive consonance, and a system of lexical and structural repetitions. Nevertheless, this overarching sense of formal regularity is rather deceptive: one might imagine the speaker of lyric II to be in a measured frame of mind, yet the content-based meaning of the poem hints at something radically different. It seems the Sapphic speaker is not a tranquil or carefree voice, but rather a desperate, vehement insomniac who hopes imperatively for the divinely orchestrated irruption of her beloved into her dreams. Accordingly, as soon as one enters the performance of lyric II, there arises a clear tension between form and content –between the pretension of emotional order and the reality of anxious insomnia.

The visuality of lyric II is, though, far more complex than its mere stanzaic arrangement. The notion of *opsis*, as reformulated by Culler, not only refers to poems as visual constructions, but also to the ways in which "the poem produces/represents images" (2015, 256). As an optical construction, lyric II works as a uniform sequence of quatrains, yet the image it produces with its meanings is far from orderly and harmonious. Reading the poem as an imaginary ekphrasis

or a visual performance, one can picture the Sapphic speaker fully awake, in utter solitude, in the middle of the night, anxiously brooding over her absent beloved, finding no release for her exuberant erotic energy, and praying for divine intervention in her tragic romance. This image, however, comes as no surprise given the long tradition of Sapphism, particularly from Ovid's *Heroides* onwards, for it is "the one bequeathed to posterity, for many centuries the definitive, [that of the] forlorn, love-struck and suicidal Sappho who has given up the love of women for an unrequited passion for a young man" (duBois 2015, 108).

What may surprise or engage any reader, though, is how immediate that traditional Sapphic persona feels in lyric II –her "performative temporality" as Culler puts it (2015, 63). Whether Lesbian, Ovidian, ancient or archaic, Sappho enacts her elegiac performance in the immediacy of the present time and, even more strikingly, in the urgency of the imperative forms she uses in poem II. The directness of her voice seems to contradict the titular pastness of the volume to the extent that there is no sense of long ago-ness whatsoever. Sappho's imperatives do not lose a single trace of their validity and vigour. No temporal distance comes between them and our reutterance of the poem. As we read or perform it aloud, lyric II sounds resolute and rhetorically persuasive. As readers, we can feel convinced that Michael Field's Sappho is in touch with us, synchronously sharing her despair and even hoping to trigger what O'Gorman (2006) identifies in his interpretation of *Long Ago* as our "universal sense of human emotions" (650). Indeed, in lyric II, Sappho manages to readily perform transhistorical feelings of erotic despair that would appeal to any sensitive reader/audience. In this sense, the Fields show how the lyric can achieve the perlocutionary effects of "moving readers, provoking reflection, leading them to act" (Culler 2015, 130).

In the first line of poem II ("COME, dark-eyed Sleep, thou child of Night"), we abruptly encounter Sappho calling on a pagan god with imperative force. Arguably, she finds herself all alone, desperate for romance yet self-insufficient, and hence inclined or even condemned to obtain assistance from a superior power. Since her lover lies far beyond her reach and control, she has no other choice but to apostrophise Hypnos, the god of sleep. The direct apostrophe she makes is so clear and emphatic that it sounds pleonastic. The invoked deity is characterised not only by the epithet of his dark eyes, but also by the specifying apposition of his origin. Here it seems rather tempting to speculate that the reference to Hypnos is so much more than an apostrophe. Sappho is probably limning a self-prosopography that likens herself to the god, making them share a space and their appearance. Put otherwise, one might imagine Sappho being immersed in the night and affected by a darkness around her eyes attributable to her erotic penury and insomnia.

Interestingly enough, the nocturnal god is addressed in a very straightforward manner. He becomes both an unmediated thou and a recipient of Sappho's orders.

Her attitude is not that of a tearful supplicant, but rather of an assertive, or even aggressive, lover who disposes of all formalities and enjoins the deity to aid her. Sappho treats him as nothing but an equal and a necessary interlocutor who must attend to her wishes. This implicit portrayal, based on the first and subsequent imperative forms in lyric II, intimates something unexpected and disruptive in Sappho's lyric performance: she does not come across as a feeble, sleepless, bed-confined lover; instead, and despite her unreciprocated passion, she adopts a decisive voice that does not hesitate to make itself clearly heard, even among the gods. As will be discussed later, this image of a formidable and dangerous Sapphic performer systematically underlies the entirety of poem II from start to finish.

The second line ("Give me thy dreams, thy lies") can be read as the epitome or the climactic encapsulation of Sappho's erotic performance. Once she has commanded the god of sleep to visit her, she renders her order clearer and very specific. All she wishes is to fulfil her desire regardless of the means for doing so. She renounces the high values of rationality, truth, and reality, and chooses to be deceived by Hypnos and accept a simulacrum or a mimesis of this fulfilment. In a convincing combination of asyndeton and isocolon between "dreams" and "lies" with their iterated possessives, Sappho makes a radical metaphysical point: she can all too easily give up her barren reality of lovelessness for a fictitious, oneiric romance. In this voluntary renunciation, an ineluctable ontological conflict emerges between reality and non-reality with the former seemingly insufficient for Sappho, and the latter coming to guarantee her gratification. Thus, should Sappho gain access to the non-reality of dreams, they will certainly become her authentic emotional reality, and as a consequence, the previous antagonism loses its validity.

In Sappho's oneiric metaphysics, dream and reality or lie and truth are no longer at odds with one another, because her desire makes their synergism and co-presence possible. The mere dream of her beloved, although induced by Hypnos, promises to acquire some degree of reality that the lyric voice presumes to be sufficiently satisfactory. Likewise, the lie of her beloved's presence involves the potential to be felt as some kind of truth capable of assuaging Sappho's passion and despair. In her desiring consciousness, reality and veracity are no longer measured as factual magnitudes: they become ductile emotional categories whose respective boundaries are broken and obliterated in an attempt to reach some level of erotic fulfilment. This obliteration is what turns Sappho's idealised dreams and lies into legitimate affective variants of truth insofar as they render the object of her desire more real, accessible, and even controllable under the regime of her own imagination.

Dreams and lies operate as intermediary forces that can bring lover and beloved together within an order of oneiric idealism. Just like the traditional subject of

Western epistemology, who accesses the object-world in the ontogenetic act of knowing, Sappho aspires to possess her beloved by dreaming him into pseudo-existence as an erotic idea. The mere idea of him would become, complete, or totalise her full reality. However, although it is clear that she would have the upper hand in her oneiric dimension, an inevitable question arises as to what position her beloved would occupy there. One can presume that he would be ontologically reduced, subdued, and dominated in the most objectifying and possessive way possible. Within Sappho's dreams, he would fall prey to an erotic economy of appropriation or reification. He would be debased into a static, passive, and dependent object at the mercy of Sappho's desire. As a result, what we see in this oneiric metaphysics is a transgressive gender performance—one in which Sappho acts as a domineering dreamer and liar while her beloved is implicitly reduced to a malleable, ideal object.

Such is Sappho's need to imprison or possess her beloved, that it becomes exponentially enhanced through the Homeric image of "the horny portal white" (l. 3). This line has at least three rhetorical devices at play: hyperbaton, anastrophe, and more importantly, what Heinrich Plett (2010) classifies as "meta-intertexteme" (281). The first figure appears as a prepositional phrase that separates the main verb from its direct object with the result that both references to the "portal" (l. 3) and "the pleasure" (l. 4) take pride of place. The anastrophe, which involves the postposition of the adjective "white" (l. 3), not only ascribes further, and literal, centrality to the "portal" (l. 3), but also enables the emergence of a prosodic oxymoron between "Night" (l. 1) and the adjective. Both rhetorical phenomena play a salient role in shaping and emphasising the Homeric figure of intertextual derivation (or meta-intertexteme) that can be pinpointed in the third line. Indeed, Michael Field's Sapphic speaker is alluding to what Homer presents in Book XIX of his *Odyssey* as the Ivory Gate of Sleep and the Horny Gate:

> For two are the gates of shadowy dreams, and one is fashioned of horn and one of ivory. Those dreams that pass through the gate of sawn ivory deceive men, bringing words that find no fulfilment. But those that come forth through the gate of polished horn bring true issues to pass when any mortal sees them. But in my case, it was not from thence, methinks, that my strange dream came (l. 561–569).

Strikingly, Michael Field's portal seems to be a combination of the two Homeric gates, for it is "horny" and "white" at the same time. In a footnote to his edition of lyric II, Ivor C. Treby (2000) finds this combinatory intertext "unfortunate" (58), suggesting that the Fields should have referred solely to the Ivory Gate, with its symbolic linkage to fantasy and deceit, in order to reinforce the idea that their

Sappho wants to inhabit an unreal world of erotic dreams and lies. However, it could be argued that, whether accidental or purposeful, the merging of the two gates into a single one helps to form and consolidate a more cogent idea: Sappho's dreams are endowed with the strategic ambivalence of being both deceitful and potentially conducive to an affective oneiric truth. In other words, Sappho's dreams are white and horny at once to the extent that she knows they are lies, but her immersion in them might bring her the erotic fulfilment she so lacks.

As mentioned above, there is a suggestive prosodic oxymoron between "Night" (l. 1) and "white" (l. 3). This figure becomes indispensable to our understanding of the last line in the first quatrain ("The pleasure day denies"). Sappho needs the god of sleep to make her hedonistic dreams come true and prevail over the sterility of her days, which, or *who*, are subject to a pathetic fallacy and receive the blame for her misery. A structural antithesis shows itself here. Lyric II clearly bases its own theory of the world on various binary constructs—internal chaos and formal order, night and day, darkness and whiteness, falseness and truth, dreams and reality. In each of these antithetical pairs, the former denotes what Sappho seeks and covets, the latter what she loathes. The resultant conception of life that she advocates is utterly unconventional: she privileges the deviant, perverse or irrational over what is atavistically viewed as ideal or righteous. It seems, therefore, that Sappho embraces the Dionysian at the expense of the Apollonian and becomes a possible Nietzschean apologist. This may sound far-fetched, but the truth is that the Fields looked up to Nietzsche and upheld many of his aesthetic ideas to the point that, as Vadillo (2015) remarks, they were among the first generation of English intellectuals who "recognised Nietzsche's importance for modernity" (204). It is thus plausible to argue that Sappho's transgressive performance of desire in lyric II amounts to a Dionysian embrace of darkness, deceit, and dangerous dreams.

3. Second Quatrain: Performing Unstable Gender Roles

The second stanza of poem II radicalises the transgressive gender performance outlined above. Sappho now exposes her erotic psychology in an extreme light. Not only does she insist on keeping her dramatic imperative tone, but she also transforms her desire into an emasculating force of possession or capture: "O bring the kiss I could not take" (l. 5). In this line, Sappho specifies what she demands of Hypnos, limiting her request to just a kiss from her beloved. However, the kiss she covets is a metaphysical one, the product of a mere dream or a lie, and yet the very climax of Sappho's erotic antirealism. With this fictitious kiss, Sappho wishes to make up for her failure to possess the object of her desire. It seems, on account of the modal verb she employs in line 5, that she has tried to kiss her

beloved, but failed to do so. This vain attempt is certainly what motivates her to embrace an antirealist approach to love. Given that her beloved has rejected her once, all she can now do is settle for the idealism of making him hers and kissing him in her dreams. The bare infinitive used in line 5 effectively designates the type of action Sappho wishes to perform with her oneiric imagination: she wishes to take, capture, arrest or confine her beloved and keep him in her own interiority, against his will and with all the undertones of violence and despair behind this act of erotic imprisonment.

The sixth line of the lyric ("From lips that would not give") reinforces a previous central idea and presents a new one within what proves to be a paradoxical dis/order. On the one hand, there is a labial synecdoche that clearly refers to Sappho's beloved and confirms the tacit representation of him in the previous lines. He has so far been silhouetted as a prey, an oneiric prisoner, and at best an erotic dream or lie. Now, in the second quatrain, he is reduced to a pair of lips Sappho once tried to assault, but which withdrew from her. As a mere labial synecdoche, he becomes the potentially reified, passive, and receptive object of Sappho's violent kisses. On the other hand, although he is given quite an emasculated identity at first, Sappho's beloved gains a certain degree of action and autonomy in his evasive reaction to the aggressive Sapphic kiss. This disdain has two concomitant effects: the beloved manages to preserve his own space of freedom, but Sappho loses every prospect of romantic conquest and thus feels compelled to adopt a desperate creed of erotic antirealism –one in which her beloved no longer retains his freedom and falls under her oppressive economy of desire. This ideal oppression, alongside the labial synecdoche, may also intimate that Sappho's beloved is only superficially masculine. As the Ovidian convention has it, she falls for a ferryman whose name appears explicitly at the close of poem II. However, his true subjectivity seems to be so elusive, coy, and reducible to Sappho's extreme desire, that his identity might transcend heteronormative presuppositions in favour of more fluid, unstable, and amorphous gender categories—as though his synecdochic labiality were a poetic indicator of his potential femininity and hence of Sappho's homoerotic attraction towards his feminised persona. Using Thain's words, it could be argued that Sappho is not the only figure within Michael Field's "category-defying mixture of sexual imagery" (2007: 50): given his labial and emasculated representation in poem II, Phaon should also be added to this subversive mixture.

The seventh line of the poem ("Bring me the heart I could not break") brings together at least three rhetorical phenomena: a parallelistic reduplication of line 5, a metonymic pleonasm, and a disintegrative metaphor of love as domination. Repetition seems to work as the best way for Sappho to articulate the urgency of her address to Hypnos. The imperative tone, the use of the same lexical and modal

verbs, and the compact hypotaxis of relative clauses, all configure the rhetoric of despair that defines lyric II. Sappho insists on gaining access to her beloved at all costs and urges the god Hypnos to assist her once more. Now she targets her beloved's heart as the focal point of her fervent desire. He becomes nothing but a synecdochal victim that she once tried, and failed, to assault. Where he was just a mere pair of lips a line ago, he now has his identity configured as a potentially fragile heart that Sappho seeks to govern in a radical manner. At the end of line 7, she makes use of a bare infinitive (*break*) that points to the crudest possible version of a metaphorical convergence between desire and destruction, love and loss. Indeed, with this infinitive, one cannot but corroborate what lyric II has since the outset represented as a direct equation of female desire with violence against a male object who becomes breakable and thus undergoes an extreme loss of identity and masculinity.

However, the second quatrain ends in a paradox: "The bliss for which I live" (l. 8). In its *opsis*, this is a standalone line, structurally identical to the final clause of the first quatrain, and yet syntactically dependent upon the main verb used in the immediately preceding sentence. In actual fact, the paradox arises from the imperative form "Bring" (l. 7), whose transitivity generates two semantically contradictory direct objects. The first object, as indicated above, involves a synecdoche that tacitly portrays Sappho's beloved in an objectifying and potentially castrating light. However, the second object, her erotic bliss, overturns the power dialectics intimated by the previous synecdoche. Now Sappho exposes her existential vulnerability in the plainest way by acknowledging that her very bliss hinges on her beloved –her life is shown to depend not on the factual possibility of conquering him, but merely on the fictional chance of dreaming of him. This paradoxical dialectics with Sappho in an ambiguous position of power between domination and dependence comes as no surprise, for it has formerly been disclosed through references to her beloved's disdain. Nonetheless, line 8 does make her position more manifest and even pitiable, evoking a miserable Sappho who craves erotic fulfilment but appears to force herself to settle for just an antirealist experience of this fulfilment.

4. Third Quatrain: Reperforming Metaphysical and Physical Fantasies

So far lyric II has devoted its first quatrain to the presentation of Sappho's erotic idealism or antirealism, and its second to the paradoxical articulation of how her antirealist approach to love translates into unstable gender categories. Now, the third quatrain seems to operate as an overarching conspectus of the previous stanzas that can be divided into three subparts. The first, comprising lines 9 and 10, represents a return to the opening quatrain and a cogent reassertion of

Sappho's self-deceiving idealism. Nevertheless, unlike the first quatrain, lines 9 and 10 sound far more performative, though for different reasons. Sappho's ego comes to the foreground in such a direct and unadorned manner, that she seems to be speaking to us with no sense of temporal distance, as if sharing an immediate *hic et nunc* with us—a genuine dialogue. The temporality and simplicity of her address seem extremely close or contiguous: "I care not if I slumber blest" (1. 9). Here her language is far from ornamental, elaborate or oblique. Rather, she feels unashamedly carefree and categorical in admitting that she has made the conscious choice to trade reality for fantasy. She openly acknowledges that her erotic success may only be a mere product of her sleep or slumber. This tragic form of anagnorisis, rather than affecting her, proves to be a natural, fully embraced fact for her. Sappho has made up her mind in favour of unreality.

There is more to line 9. Sappho ends it with a suggestive past participle that behaves almost like a catachresis or abuse, for it appears to betray its own semantic nature. Indeed, in their most common sense, the forms *blest* or *blessing* denote divine gifts, spiritual benefits or religious invocations. However, Sappho clearly abuses or misuses the sanctity of such terms and their denotations by implicitly charging them with subversive, profane connotations. Her idea of blessing is in no way devotional, but rather overtly secular and sexual. To her being blest means gratifying herself through erotic dreams or fantasies in which her beloved is under her control. In this respect, one might argue that either Sappho has no sense of spirituality and acts as an impious hedonist, or that her devotion is wholly Dionysian, and thus she expects her sighed-for blessing to come from ancient pagan gods –particularly those who proselytise all forms and varieties of pleasure.

As a syntactic structure, the tenth line is nothing but an agentive: "by fond delusion." It simply serves the purpose of determining the sort of blessing Sappho awaits –a blessing that puts her to sleep and fools her into believing that her fulfilling dreams are now her definitive reality. Nonetheless, transcending its mere syntactic function, line 10 adds further pathos to Sappho's counter-realism. She execrates her existence as preferably exchangeable for a "fond delusion." The noun she uses here not only sounds all too clear and consistent with the thematic substance of the entire poem, but also defines her attitude to life and sums up the creed of oneiric hedonism she advocates. Sappho is a committed self-deceiver, a radical self-illusionist, and an intentionalist in her deliberate will to renounce truth in favour of a love unilaterally lived in her dreams. More interestingly, the adjective "fond" reveals Sappho's tragic awareness that her romantic aspirations are not just self-deceitful, but naive and arguably absurd. On account of their acknowledged fondness or foolishness, Sappho's dreams will most likely fail to match her libidinous expectations.

The second subpart of the closing quatrain is constituted by line 11 alone, in which Sappho mainly reverts to the thematic line of the second stanza. Indeed, she reemploys a violent metaphor of erotic possession, together with an objectifying synecdoche, in order to insist on her need to at least gain an oneiric yet bodily experience of her beloved: "Put me on Phaon's lips to rest" (l. 11). The labial synecdoche, cohesively readopted from line 6, shows again that Sappho's desire entails no modesty or purity. Rather, her sense of love is clearly erotic, material, corporal. The emphasis on her beloved's lips intimates this deliberate corporality. It seems Robert Browning detected this sexual innuendo when he read the first manuscript and suggested replacing the labial synecdoche with a subtler and tenderer reference to another body part: "Why not 'in arms'?" (Treby 2000, 58). However, the Fields preferred to stick to their emasculating discourse of labiality in line with the second quatrain.

In keeping with Sappho's systemic subversion of gender conventions, line 11 exerts noticeable metaphoric violence on her beloved, who now receives the very first onomastic mention in *Long Ago*. He has formerly been a mere pronoun, a synecdoche, and an eroticising absence at best, but now his name appears in order to humanise his identity to some degree—or at least he ceases to be just Sappho's beloved and becomes more individualised and nameable. Nevertheless, the fact that Phaon is endowed with a proper subjectivity of his own does not have a lasting effect. Whether *nameful* or nameless, he continues to indirectly undergo Sappho's erotic violence. The imperative verb "put" and the preposition "on" are distinct indications that her desire is a tyrannical force and an imposition upon its object. In her imagination there is no intention to embrace Phaon or fall into his arms, as Browning would have preferred. Instead, she wishes to put herself or superimpose herself on him regardless of his will. Interpreted as a catachresis, the infinitive that Sappho uses at the end of line 11 reinforces the tacit representation of erotic despotism. Her idea of rest does not seem to indicate repose, stillness, or mere habitation. More plausibly, Sappho is abusing the infinitive and perverting it into a catachresis that equates rest to power, control, action, motion, and even sexual domination. Her definition of rest works simply as a euphemism for her oppressive lust.

The third subpart of the last quatrain corresponds to its closing line: "And cheat the cruel day" (l. 12). Here Sappho makes a semantic iteration that refers us back to the opening stanza and transforms the entire poem into a circular composition—a literal yet poetic circumlocution. It seems clear that Sappho is ensuring her address to the god Hypnos ends with a repetitive, and expectedly imperative, insistence on her embrace of self-delusive idealism. However, unlike previous articulations of this idealism, the final line argues for it in a cruder way, with the unambiguous, detrimental verb "cheat." Sappho has no reservations

in stating that she wants to be cheated, dislocated from reality, and sunk into a pseudo-world of dreams. This self-inflicted fantasy does not necessarily place her in a weak position, though. After all, she always maintains the upper hand as the active, voracious, and radical dreamer, while her beloved is ideally represented as her potential prisoner and cheated prey. Cheating thus becomes a powerful defence mechanism or survival strategy that Sappho devises in the face of her loveless facticity—against what she styles as "the cruel day." This simple phrase constitutes at once a pathetic fallacy, a reformulation of line 4, and a metaphoric expression of Sappho's dichotomous conception of existence. In her view, existence appears to boil down to a marked antithesis between day and night with the former symbolising a ruthless form of emotional death and the latter promising her a possibility of erotic success—even if this success is but mere fiction. Sappho hopes to exist in an eternal night of ideal fantasies.

5. Conclusions

Sturgeon and Thain have taken note of a certain dramaticity behind Michael Field's verse, particularly in their Sapphic volume *Long Ago*. Indeed, even the quickest reading of a poem of theirs triggers what Culler would call a series of perlocutionary effects that transform the very experience of reading into a performance in its own right. Lyric II is a paradigmatic case in point of Michael Field's poetic theatricality. As demonstrated in this article, when reading lyric II, we enter a direct dialogue with a firm-voiced Sappho who engages us not only in her immediately present temporality, but also in her tragic context of lovelessness and despair. This context is not explicitly described, but it does result from the urgent rhetoric of the repetitious imperative anaphors that Sappho uses to structure nearly every line of the lyric and to convey her sore need to gain any sort of access to her absent beloved. Consequently, and as if the poem were an ekphrasis from start to finish, we are automatically led to form a mental yet performative picture wherein Sappho becomes a desperate insomniac longing to dream of her Phaon with the aid of the god Hypnos.

The pictorial and performative power of poem II makes us bear direct witness to Sappho's romantic suffering, listen to her address in an unmediated *hic et nunc*, and even share with her a universal, transcendental affect. Once in this position of readerly empathy, we are invited or exposed to a performance of radical ideas and emotions dramatised by Sappho. Given its rhetorical complexity, the lyric performance unfolds in two different yet complementary directions. On the one hand, there is a Sappho that acts as a radical metaphysician, despising the Apollonian regime of truth and reality, embracing the Dionysian forces of darkness and delusion, redefining desire as an imaginative experience, and therefore

advancing a peculiar hedonism that offsets the facticity of erotic deprivation with the mere promise of a fictitious, subjective, and immanent pleasure. In this sense, Sappho addresses both us and her god from the staunch yet self-detrimental perspective of a lover who refuses to remain weak in the face of tragedy and devises a strategic metaphysical plan to possess her reticent beloved.

On the other hand, there is another dimension to Sappho's performance of desire. Not only does she uphold a firm belief in ontological self-deception as a source of erotic gratification, but she also adds a transgressive gender view to this same belief. As lyric II reveals, especially in its second quatrain, Sappho's erotic metaphysics of dreams and lies is informed by a whole synecdochic dialectics in which she breaches all gender conventions, transforms her beloved into a passive object, and portrays herself as a sublime woman—almost a *femme fatale*—who wishes to possess, control, and dominate him. Although, or because, she is well aware of her vulnerable position as an unrequited lover, Sappho represents her beloved Phaon as a pair of tempting lips and thus makes him occupy a non-normative space of objectified effeminacy. It may seem a stretch, but the fact that Phaon comes across as an emasculated figure suggests that Sappho's desire is only superficially heteroerotic and potentially homoerotic in that her beloved stands closer to femininity than to masculinity. What is clear, however, is that lyric II reads as a radical performance in which Sappho speaks directly to her timeless readers and welcomes them to an eternal night of metaphysical and subversive fantasies.

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Section 2.
Performing Politics and Aging

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Performing Political Persuasion in the United States in the Early Years of the Republic

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Abstract:

Theater productions were born out of a paradox in the United States of the Revolutionary War and shortly afterwards. While the nation's dominant ideology was anti-theatrical, theater often served a nationalist agenda, co-defining the new American nation and its nascent identities – such were, for example, productions of Joseph Addison's *Cato* at Valley Forge in 1778 and William Dunlap's *André* at the New Park in New York in 1798. These theater events empowered the audience to publicly perform their national identity as Americans and exercise their republican fervor. Similarly, a production of *Bunker-Hill* by J. D. Burk at the Haymarket in Boston in 1797 was crucial in helping define the social and political identities of its audiences, who were motivated to attend the performances as an expression of their partisan preferences. This article shows that literary, theatrical and social practices served to constitute performatively the early American national identity.

Keywords: theater history; performance studies; American theater; history of the United States – 18th century.

Although various seminal concepts of performativity, such as Austin 1962, date back nearly sixty years, recent years have seen a renewed interest in performance and performance studies among scholars from a variety of fields. These contributions further develop the original ideas of thinkers such as the literary critic Kenneth Burke, linguist John L. Austin and sociologist Erving Goffman that marked the beginning of what has been regarded as "the performative turn" (Schechner 2015, 158-159). Performance Studies has since been established as a discipline, thanks to the creative energy of the likes of Richard Schechner and his visionary collaborators – such as the anthropologist Victor Turner, who "placed performance at the center of a larger view of culture as constructed, embodied, and processual" (Hamera 2006, 46). Turner's studies of rituals have facilitated a better understanding of various cultural practices and phenomena. Judith Butler introduced a political view of the performance as a constitutive force of fluid, performative categories such as "gender" and "race". Since then, the power of the performative to assert a much wider assortment of categories, such as nationality and partisanship, has been accepted by a number of performance scholars.

A more or less concise theory of the multifaceted field has been formulated, for instance in the comprehensive overviews *Performance Studies: An Introduction* by Schechner (2016 [2002]) and *Performance: A Critical Introduction* by Marvin Carlson (2018 [1996]). In line with these developments, this article does not understand categories such as nationality and class as objective, but rather as fundamentally performative. The paper explores how notions of performativity help understand historical events as dynamic, constitutive activities, which have helped to define some of the most fundamental issues in American culture. In the following pages, issues such as republicanism, American national identity, and a (dis-)belief in a social class system will be shown as constituted in performance through an active participation of performers as well as audiences. Three case studies will show, (1) how a text performs republican values (in the case of a historic performance of Joseph Addison's *Cato* for officers of the Continental army at Valley Forge on May 11, 1778); (2) how a theater production constitutes national identity through symbolic gestures (as in the performance of *André* at the New Park Theatre in New York on March 30, 1798); and (3) how theater attendance as such becomes a performance of political views, as in a visit to the Haymarket theater in Boston to see *Bunker-Hill* by J. D. Burk in February 1797. The article will thus present a performative approach to literary, theatrical and sociological practices from the early history of the United States.

The United States of the late 18th century was not a theater-friendly country. Besides the general hardships of colonial and early republican life, which left little

space for leisure and a relative paucity of theater institutions such as buildings and companies, theater was considered morally corrupt and inappropriate in most states, especially New England. This "tradition of distrust in many kinds of artistic representation" (Gainor 1999, 8) was a result of a Puritan heritage, which dominated the discourse on pastime activities in most American states. Even in Williamsburg, Virginia, and Philadelphia, which were the theatrical hubs of the time, theaters and public performances were tolerated at best. This is well illustrated in the fact that the first Continental Congress meeting in Philadelphia passed a ban on theater as one of its first official acts in 1774: "its members committed themselves to discountenancing and discouraging 'every species of extravagance and dissipation, especially all horse-racing, and all kinds of gaming, cock-fighting, exhibition of shews, plays, and other expensive diversions and entertainments'" (Wilmeth and Bigsby 1998, 5). In other words, one of the first legal actions by the American legislature was, effectively, a ban of the theater.

By way of coping with this handicap, theaters incorporated various other functions besides mere entertainment into productions. Theater shows were often advertised as moral dialogues, since various classical tragedies revolve around moral questions. More importantly, though, theaters became an important part of the ongoing political struggle that was underway. Theater productions of plays opposing tyranny, such as *Richard III*, and promoting Roman republican values, such as *Julius Caesar* – to provide illustrative examples from Shakespeare's *oeuvre* – became manifestations of the period's American revolutionary spirit. Following upon Austin, a performative is a unique occurrence of an utterance in a particular spatial and temporal context. In the theater, dramatic speeches gain a context-dependent meaning depending on the context of a performance. This explains why the above Shakespearean examples resonated with the American revolutionaries despite the fact that they had been written for different audiences and with different intentions. Political plays then attracted audiences who did not primarily enter the theater for entertainment or aesthetic pleasure, but rather as a political arena: "The spirit of revolution in the United States created theater as a sphere for political discourse, but one much more robust and raucous than the rational deliberation envisioned by Jürgen Habermas. The audience was both a crowd and a public, or a hybrid of the two" (Butsch 2008, 24-25). It may seem like a paradox, thus, that the institution of theater was deemed immoral and banned on the one hand by the early republicans, while it served as an arena for a political discussion promoting republican ideas. To go to see a play was an actual performance of democratic, patriotic, and partisan values.

Revolutionary America abounded with performances that reached far beyond the sphere of the theater. As Jacques Derrida (1986) showed, the founding act of the United States of America, the signing of the Declaration of Independence,

was itself a performance where the performer – the people's representative – is being created in the act. The document is a declarative statement but the question remains, "*who signs, and with what so-called proper name, the declarative act which founds an institution?*" (emphasis in the original; Derrida 1986, 8). And since there was no American people before this act, there could be no signer of the Declaration, either. The only possible reading is thus a performative one: by the act of signing, the signer is established together with the people he represents by his signature in "a vibrant act of faith" (Derrida 1986, 12). The Declaration is a performative of the American nation, its representatives and the existence of a country, together with its name, the united states of America all at once. It takes its authority not from the law or custom – as so many performatives studied by Austin – but from God himself.

The signing of the Declaration of Independence, as analyzed by Derrida, serves as a case in point that the United States of the late 18th century built its identity in a political process of self-fashioning. The national identity, values, and politics were performed on frequent public occasions, a lot of which were related to the theater as the political forum: "Theaters were actively used for these political performances and they flourished as never before. Formerly condemned as an aristocratic pastime, theater gained newfound legitimacy as one of few indoor gathering spaces for republican political participation" (Butsch 2008, 25). Theaters became the space for political action establishing, defining, and shaping the new American identity: "The stage, then, becomes […] a platform where players and audience may enact conceptions of identity and community, where 'America' becomes both the subject and the consequence of artistic, cultural, and social negotiation" (Mason 1999, 4). In other words, theaters supplied the context where politics was performed and were a part of politics.

The following part of this article deals with the case studies, exemplifying performances of various early American political activities in nationalist speech acts, gestures, and social activities. Theater performance of *Cato* by Joseph Addison by the American army during the Revolutionary war will illustrate that a mere staging of a play is a performative act. In particular, this theatrical event became a political action of reaffirming a republican identity among American rebels by recontextualizing the British play into the American revolutionary settings. In other words, to stage the play was a performative act in itself.

Joseph Addison's *Cato* (1712) is an Augustan tragedy about the eponymous Roman senator's futile struggle with Julius Caesar. Yet, "scarcely anyone reads Addison's tragedy anymore, for reasons that are apparent from its clumsy structure and belabored political intrigues" (Fuller 1999, 131), as well as the heavy "ironclad verse" (Fuller 1999, 128). The play was nevertheless a long-standing favorite of audiences on both shores of the Atlantic at the time, with

"an ardent admirer" (Bryan 2010, 123) within the ranks of the rebellious Americans: General George Washington himself.

Washington assembled his officers at the encampment at Valley Forge, where the Continental Army had spent a long and debilitating winter, on May 11, 1778, to watch a hastily rehearsed performance of the play. This was no frivolous matter, but a serious war-time maneuver: it aimed to boost the troops' morale as well as send out a clear message about Americans' determination: "by the time of the Valley Forge *Cato*, theatrical productions had become acts of war – bombastic salvos in a campaign whose arsenal included not only rifles and cannons but culture as well" (Fuller 1999, 130). A republican ethos of the play resonated strongly among soldiers who regarded it as a confirmation of the righteous nature of their rebellion against tyrannical monarchy.

When the Numidian prince Juba asks Cato for his daughter Marcia's hand in the midst of the politically tumultuous time, Cato ponders the nature of virtue, both in romantic and stately matters: "It is not now time to talk of aught/ But chains or conquest, liberty or death" (Addison 1713, Act 2, Scene 1). He acknowledges that virtue is only born from action, not from a philosophical discussion. His conclusion is to put the stately matters to the fore since it is in the fight for freedom that virtue is born. There is no reason to live – and thus no prospect of marriage either – without an active participation in a fight against tyranny. His "declamation of freedom" (Saxon 2011, 98) resonated with the assembled officers, as it used a well-known phrasing of a central theme of the American revolutionary war. Continental army officers identified themselves during the performance as inheritors of ancient Roman patriots rebelling against Caesar's rising tyrannical power.

The performance at Valley Forge helped to define the officers present as audience. It established Cato as the model of republicanism. The officers saw his beliefs, behavior, and sacrifices as parallel to their own and, vice versa, the performers spoke directly to the audience when addressing Cato, as when Juba praises Cato's political stance and personal qualities in the opening scene of the play:

Juba: A Roman soul is bent on higher views;
Turn up thy eyes to Cato;
There may'st thou see to what a godlike height
The Roman virtues lift up mortal man.
While good, and just, and anxious for his friends,
He's still severely bent against himself;
And when his fortune sets before him all
The pomps and pleasures that his soul can wish,
His rigid virtue will accept of none. (Addison 1713, Act 1, Scene 1)

The verses are an explicit expression of an idealized republican at war with tyrannical rule. As such, they are performative, establishing a norm for an ideal of American's political values as well as personal traits. Moreover, they establish a new nobility – instead of the British corrupt, hereditary one, the new American nobility is solely based on virtues. The "Roman virtues" (Addison 1713, Act 1, Scene 1) of republicanism become American ones. Thus, the performance establishes a direct link with republican ideology, presents an idealized form of the American righteous rebellion, and substitutes for the corrupt British nobility a concept of a virtuous one, which is republican.

As Fuller (1999) states, "the audience response to the Valley Forge *Cato* is impossible to reconstruct" (136). Yet, it is possible to illustrate its effect by commenting on the impact of the performance, which has become one of the defining moments in the creation of the revolutionary American identity. There is only scarce evidence of the event itself, encapsulated in a single piece of historical evidence: a letter from a stationed soldier and a member of the audience, William Bradford, Jr., to his younger sister written three days after the performance. Bradford's letter has been quoted as a proof that the performance boosted the morale of the army, "a gift from Washington and his elite commanders to the weary men who had survived the full encampment and to the many new recruits who had reconstituted the Continental army" (Bryan 2010, 123). Yet, as Bryan (2010) concludes from his research of available evidence, there is no proof that the production was a great open-air spectacle accommodating a large audience. Quite the contrary, the evidence suggests that the audience was very limited. Still, supporters of the American revolution capitalized on the republican imagery of the play and have created a false mythology around the Valley Forge performance as a morale booster for the weary army.

This strategy worked and the myth was established. Before the turn of the century, "four or five" American editions of *Cato* were printed and sold in large quantities as republican artifacts (Fuller 1999, 136). These copies include an epilogue "explicitly linking Washington and the hero of Addison's play". Jonathan Mitchell Sewall's direct parallel between the play and the American revolutionary institutions and representatives is explicit: "Our senate, too, the same bold deed has done, / And for a Cato, arm'd a WASHINGTON!" (Bryan 2010, 125). The performance of the tragedy *Cato* at Valley Forge entered the American national imagery as a performance of a revolt against tyrannical rule and a celebration of republican virtues, which, through the performance itself, was defined and established. The fact that the play was an English hit of the time remains a matter of historical irony.

The years following the American Revolutionary War saw a rapid development of theater in the United States. The center of this artistic activity moved to New

York, where it would eventually remain. William Dunlap was one of the most important figures propelling this development as a historian of the American visual and performing arts, theater manager, translator, and playwright. As someone who obtained his education and spent a substantial portion of his life, including the recent wartime years, in Great Britain, he sided politically rather with the loyalists to the crown, yet he saw it as his duty to advance American theater and dedicated all his talent as well as possessions to this goal. In 1798, he realized that the new country lacked a native tragedy in verse, which he also saw as a commercially promising endeavor: "Perhaps Dunlap hoped to cash in on the popularity of recent history as a stage subject by himself turning to a war he missed, the American Revolution" (Richards 1997, 59). The result was the first tragedy in verse written in the United States of America, *André*.

The play "is based on the 1780 capture, trial, and execution of British officer Major John André, who conspired with the Continental general Benedict Arnold to surrender West Point to the British" (Dunlap and Miller 2005, xiv). Dunlap expected he could count on the audience's fresh memories of the war as well as the protagonist, who had been a popular socialite in wartime New York and a person actively participating in the British military theater activities. The story of André's capture and execution resonated strongly among New Yorkers. The play begins with André's capture, and proceeds to his death sentence and, finally, execution. It involves no dramatic twists and its plot can be summarized a series of supplications of André's friends, admirers, and relatives to the General, but all of them fail. The General – who clearly represents Washington – is torn between two loyalties: one toward a military duty, and the other toward an officer's virtue. While the former forces him to convict and execute the British spy Captain André, the latter pressures him to pardon André, since he has always acted fairly and proved his virtuousness. However, the General is not moved by all the supplications or his own sympathy, and sentences André to death.

Captain Bland, the General's aide, reminds the General of Andrés' virtuous behavior in the past when he saved Bland's life, and the two thus had become friends for life. But the General dismisses the plea. At that point, Bland understands that his appeal for André's life has failed. He realizes that the United States army prefers victory to virtue, which is in conflict with his code of honor. Despite the General's approval of his attempt to save his friend, Bland parts symbolically with the cause of the Revolution:

General: […] Thy merits are not overlook'd.
Promotion shall immediately attend thee.
Bland: Pardon me, Sir, I never shall deserve it.
The country that forgets to reverence virtue […]

> I serve not. […] Thus from my helm
> I tear, what once I proudly thought, the badge
> Of virtuous fellowship.
> *(Tears the cockade from his helmet.)*
> My sword I keep. (Dunlap 1997 [1798], 86-87)

In Bland's view, there is no honor in wearing the symbol of the American Revolution, the cockade. He throws it to the floor in an act of a symbolic denunciation.

This irreverent act was performed in front of New York audiences, who may have been as torn apart about André as the General in the play, but just like the General, they were clear about their loyalty: "The audience thought this act unpatriotic and hissed the actor" (Dunlap and Miller 2005, xiv). But clearly, their new republican loyalty to the United States prevailed. Ironically, this gesture prompted a response in the audience members, who in return expressed their loyalty to their new country; in other words, the audience performed their citizenship.

After the first performance on March 30, 1798, "the feeling excited by the incident was propagated out of doors" of the New Park Theatre (Dunlap and Miller 2005, 226). Dunlap realized that he needed to change the script so that the anti-American gesture was revoked before the play was over in the following performances: "As a sequel to the affair of the cockade, the Author has added the following lines, which the reader is requested to insert […] instead of the lines he will find there, which were printed before the piece was represented" (Dunlap 1997 [1798], 65).

Further in the Preface, he has supplied new lines:

> Bland: […] Even in the presence of the first of men
> Did I abjure the service of my country,
> And reft my helmet of that glorious badge
> Which graces even the brow of Washington. […]
> M'Donald. […] To me, in trust, he gave this badge disclaim'd,
> With power, when thou should'st see thy wrongful error,
> From him, to reinstate it in thy helm,
> And thee in his high favour.
> *(Gives the cockade.)*
> Bland *(Takes the cockade and replaces it.)* […] Ne'er shall my helmet
> Lack again its proudest, noblest ornament,
> Until my country knows the rest of peace,
> Or Bland the peace of death! (Dunlap 1997 [1798], 65-66)

Bland, who in Scene 3, Act 1 tore off the cockade, now in Act 5, Scene 1, accepts the General's view after his friend and fellow officer M'Donald's appeals to Bland's sense of military duty. Bland can see now that the General has acted against his personal will, a necessary sacrifice at war, which is fought for the right cause.

Historical sources such as Dunlap (2005) do not mention how the audience received this altered treatment of the desecrated national symbol. A few scenes from *André* were then incorporated into *The Glory of Columbia – Her Yeomanry!* in 1803, "a more overtly patriotic vehicle […] which became a July fourth staple for years afterward" (Richards 1997, 61). This play was a more traditional expression of nationalism, with displays of the national flag, nationalist dialogues, and patriotic songs. Thus, a play that performed an act of anti-American criticism in 1798 became a nationalist spectacle, a performance of full-blown nationalist propaganda only five years later. Perhaps, Dunlap could see that in the postwar period, a blunt performance of national identity would be received by the audience with more ease than a complicatedly structured performance of a criticism of breaking with the nation's core values in a symbolic act – a theatrical gesture.

That being said, it is necessary to note that there has been no single American national identity. As Jeffrey A. Richards (2005) writes in his study of constructions of American identities in the early United States, "there is no monolithic 'American' identity to which all residents of the United States subscribe – only a changeable cluster of identities that individuals or groups might recognize as pertaining to them" (19). Performances like that of *André* were an opportunity for American citizens to assemble and practice democracy by establishing an imagined community (Anderson 1991) of Americans for the duration of the performance. The audience became a community of strangers, who may have had their differences over several details of the issue, yet shared core values and identified themselves with the same markers of their identity in the making, such as that of the cockade.

Post-revolutionary Boston's theater culture provides yet another example of the performative power of the period's theater over establishing republican identities. The capital of Massachusetts was at the heart of the Puritan anti-theatrical prejudice. Several prominent Massachusetts politicians, such as the Governor John Hancock, effectively prevented arrival of professional theater to the city until the end of his tenure in 1793 when, at last, "the Legislature of Massachusetts repealed the law against theatrical amusements" (Dunlap and Miller 2005, 133). In February of the following year, Boston Theatre – later known as The Federal Street Theatre – opened and it "was soon considered the finest theater in the country" (Boston Anatheum Theatre History). The choice of the first production reflected the post-revolutionary sentiment. *Gustavus Vasa*, written in 1739 by Henry Brook, is a tragedy about an eponymous Swedish

rebellion leader. Boston audiences saw a direct parallel between Vasa's fight for freedom and their own recent history. Moreover, "the performance of a play well-known to have been censored in Britain was an act in itself" (Strand 1999, 26). The managers and audience saw it as an important symbolic break with the British.

In the following years, however, the development of theatrical culture in Boston reflected a political struggle among the two American political parties, the Federalists and the Democratic Republicans. It was common in the early republic's politics that "political factions in America used the theater to promote contradictory political agendas" (Wilmer 1999, 1). This was mostly done by the choice of plays and commissioning of prologues celebrating a particular party by theater managers who – like the above-mentioned William Dunlap – had their own political agendas. A partisan struggle, however, became more extreme in Boston in the mid-1790s: "The theatres in Boston and New York […] were particularly affected by political divisions, and in Boston so much so that, in the 1769–97 season, its two theatres attracted separate partisan audiences" (Wilmer 1999, 3). Three years after the Federal Street Theatre, a new theater opened in Boston, the Haymarket.

The Federal Street Theatre's shareholders capitalized on the success of *Gustavus Vasa* in 1794 and continued to propagate the post-revolutionary ethos of Washington's republic. The theater's management became strongly pro-Federalist and the party's ideology became visible in the theater's policies. Naturally, it "encouraged pro-Federalist pieces" on the bill (Wilmer 1999, 5). It introduced stark differences in ticket prices to distinguish the high society from common citizens in the pit and gallery. Architecturally, the theater "emphasized implied social distinctions in the organization of traffic to and from the playhouse: a covered arcade for coaches on Federal Street supplied entrance to the boxes through a large lobby; the pit and gallery each had separate entrances without lobbies" (Strand 1999, 22). The management further insisted that the stockholders should only include "the most respectable citizens" (Strand 1999, 23). The most striking element of this competition between the two Boston theaters was that the audiences were forced to take a side. Once they attended one of the two theaters, they were strongly discouraged from attending the other: "If [Federalist managers] were unable to sell all the tickets, the shareholders would apparently give the remaining tickets away on condition that the recipients would refuse to patronize the rival Haymarket Theatre" (Wilmer 1999, 4). Theater attendance became a performance of party affiliation.

On the contrary, the Haymarket Theatre "fostered a Democratic Republican agenda" (Wilmer 1999, 5). From the moment when it was founded, it "was designed as a more radically democratic institution" than the Federal Street

Theatre (Strand 1999, 24). It collected funding from all social strata, was overtly egalitarian, refused a paywall, had a rather plain, unsophisticated auditorium, and was generally more inclusive.

The Democratic Republican agenda of the Haymarket was reflected in the choice of plays. Some of them "were seen as straightforward bids to please Republican stockholders" (Strand 1999, 25). One of the most overt examples of this Democratic Republican billing is the 1797 production of John Daly Burk's *Bunker-Hill; or, The Death of General Warren*. Burk was an open supporter of the party and his "adherence to Democratic Republican principles was clearly expressed in *Bunker-Hill*, which he dedicated to Aaron Burr (a leading Democratic Republican […])" (Wilmer 1999, 6). The play depicts a melodramatic story of the popular national hero and a Massachusetts native, General Warren, his fight against the British, the battle of Bunker-Hill, and his heroic death. The production was extremely popular at the Haymarket, as it accorded with the postwar patriotic sentiment.

Burk "depicted General Warren […] as an altruistic patriot who does not demand a privileged social position but wants to do whatever he can to help his countrymen" (Wilmer 1999, 6). Despite his military rank, he considers himself equal to all other soldiers. Republican citizenship, which is egalitarian in principle, is the highest virtue for General Warren:

> General Warren: And shall I then, inglorious, stay behind,
> While my brave countrymen are braving death? […]
> No – Liberty will ne'er be woo'd by halves,
> But like the jealous female, must have all
> The lover's heart or none. (Burk 1831 [1797], 39)

The soliloquy appeals to notions of bravery and liberty, associating them with qualities of the heart rather than rank. Moreover, General Warren is inspired by his countrymen; it is the common American citizen who sets an example of true patriotic behavior and military service.

As General Warren is dying in the final battle, he becomes an idealized representation of a republican citizen. He praises only virtue, which must be earned and is equally achievable by anyone and sees hereditary titles as degenerate. He explicitly scorns aristocracy:

> General Warren: All riches and rewards my soul detests,
> Which are not earn'd by virtue: I prefer
> One hour of life, spent in my country's services,
> To ages wasted midst a servile herd

> Of *lazy, abject, fawning, cringing* courtiers. (emphasis in the original; Burk 1831 [1797], 63)

He refuses all personal profit besides a symbolic gain. He dies in the close company of fellow soldiers, having substituted his personal ambitions to a sole item of value: a free American republic consisting of equal citizens. In the character of General Warren, Burk invests the American cause with the ethos of an idealistic struggle.

With its emphasis on egalitarianism and anti-aristocratic rhetoric, "*Bunker-Hill* was not simply a patriotic or nationalistic play. It affirmed Democratic Republican principles and attacked values held by the Federalists" (Wilmer 1999, 10-11). The play's rhetoric thus met the political goals of the Haymarket Theatre's management. In effect, Haymarket performances of *Bunker-Hill* became assemblies of the Boston Democratic Republicans. The audience performed their political persuasion by theater attendance, which established their partisan identities.

Burk's play propagated the Democratic Republican agenda against the Federalist one, but it still remained an American patriotic spectacle. "By setting it during the War of Independence, Burk integrated his partisan politics into a nationalistic frame in order to appeal to a wide audience" (Wilmer 1999, 8). The play was also performed in New York, where the partisan division among theaters was not as explicit as in Boston at that time, possibly due to the fact that there were several competing theaters in New York, while there were exactly two in Boston. The two parties thus saw the Boston theatrical scene as an arena for partisan struggle, in a sense a forum, which served to express political views, contest them, and perform political loyalties. This was a great shift for Bostonians' political elites since the adoption of an antitheatrical ordinance in 1750.

In conclusion, this article has discussed various performative aspects of several theater productions in the early history of the United States. It shows that theater attendance is in itself the performance of a political affiliation, particularly so at a tumultuous time such as that of the War of Independence and the early post-war period. It has discussed the Valley Forge *Cato* performance for military officers as an act of duty, service, and honor; the audience's hostile response to the desecration of a national symbol – stomping on the cockade – at the New Park Theatre's production of *André* as an act of citizenship and American national identity; and attendance at Haymarket's *Bunker-Hill* as an act of affiliation to the Democratic Republican party. It has shown that an approach based on performance studies widens our perspective of understanding theater performance as a social practice, one where the rhetoric of the play is interpreted in relation to the actual time and place of the performance and in a creative exchange with audiences and their wider social context.

Americans would go on throughout the nineteenth century and beyond to define and redefine themselves through their experiences as theater audiences. Their political and ideological identities will be shaped at productions of various abolitionist plays like the phenomenal *Uncle Tom's Cabin*,[1] which would become an institution of its own kind. Their political allegiances will be redefined at war play, dealing with reminiscences of the Revolutionary War such as Joseph Jefferson's adaptation of *Rip Van Winkle* (1859) as well as propagating an ideological understanding of the Civil War in melodramatic renditions such as Bronson Howard's *Shenandoah* (1889). Throughout the nineteenth century, performances such as theater and related forms of entertainment will establish specifically American genres and forms, thus further shaping who Americans are as a nation, politically as well as culturally in the wider sense.

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1 There are dozens of adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel for the theater. The most popular and frequently played theater adaptation is by George L. Aiken. Its first version was performed in 1852 and the script was finalized and published in 1858 under the title *Uncle Tom's Cabin; or, Life Among the Lowly. A Domestic Drama in Six Acts* (Aiken 1858).

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Disrupting Temporalities, Multiplying the Self: An Age-Studies Approach to Two Contemporary Plays

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Abstract:

In our increasingly aged societies, old age continues to be equated with decline (Gullette 2004) and becomes the source of the most invisible yet persistent forms of discrimination, namely, ageism (Butler 1969). Even though theatre, like other artistic forms, has traditionally promoted a negative image of ageing (Mangan 2013), some contemporary plays have begun to favour more complex portrayals of old age. Nevertheless, when considered from a gender-based angle, these portrayals often acquire quite a problematic undertone: while roles for older female actors remain exceptional, many peripheral or, if centred, mainly problematic dramatizations of ageing femininity in the theatre arena fuel age prejudice against older women on and off stage. This article offers an age-focused analysis of two plays that counteract stereotypical images of female ageing through various dramaturgical strategies: Michel Tremblay's *Albertine in Five Times* (1984) and Matt Hartley's *Here I Belong* (2016). Through a comparative analysis of the Naturalistic and Non-Naturalistic devices employed in the two plays, and the examination of the meanings of age generated by the characterization of the two female protagonists, we hope to demonstrate that Tremblay's and Hartley's texts contribute to creating a truly anti-ageist theatre while at the same time enhancing the visibility of the older woman on the stage.

Keywords: modern drama; ageing studies; cultural gerontology; gender; drama criticism

1. Introduction: Ageing Studies, Theatre and Contemporary Drama

Ever since classical authors like William Shakespeare or Calderón de la Barca established the trope of 'the theatre of the world' in the Renaissance, and seminal sociologists like Erving Goffman (1956) or philosophers like Judith Butler (1990, 1993) recognized the 'performative elements' that help explain aspects of our socially- and culturally-constructed identities, theatre has been regarded as an ideal domain through which human behaviour and society in general can be interpreted and understood. By giving visibility to certain topics in such a complex way, theatre artists inevitably reinforce, undermine or even help transform the discourses that shape them. Among many of the challenges affecting our world, ageing is, indeed, one of the main preoccupations of our contemporary society. Contrary to its alleged universality as a biological process, the experience of ageing is a multifaceted phenomenon in which social and cultural factors play a central role. Consequently, the representation of old age on the stage is also highly conditioned by the socio-cultural background of the ageing figures, in which gender difference is paramount. As observed by the pioneering age scholar Margaret Morganroth Gullette, women are "still aged by culture younger than men are" (2004, 23). The theatre world mirrors the double alienation that older women undergo in our youth-obsessed, patriarchal societies, by either rendering them gradually invisible on the stage, or giving them predominantly marginal roles. Resorting to the increasingly intersecting frameworks of theatre, ageing and gender studies, this article draws attention to the dramatic representation of ageing, and of older women in particular, in two contemporary plays that offer a more complex portrayal of female old age: namely, Michel Tremblay's *Albertine in Five Times* (1984) and Matt Hartley's *Here I Belong* (2016). This study concurrently invites to develop further research in contemporary theatre through the lens of ageing studies. While integrating a critical examination of old age (and its intersection with gender) into theatre criticism enriches the analysis of modern drama with a highly significant contemporary perspective, providing more visibility to alternative portrayals of female old age on the stage contributes to dismantling reductive perceptions of later life and femininity.

Old age has been part of the history of theatre from its beginnings: in the Western world, the iconic figure of Oedipus, which Sophocles recreated as an old man in *Oedipus at Colonus* was, after all, one of the main sources of inspiration for Shakespeare's emblematic tragedy of ageing: *The Tragedy of King Lear.* However, it is not until quite relatively recently that the topic of ageing has started to re-emerge in contemporary drama from a modern perspective. In the so-called advanced societies of the Western world, the ageing demographic is regarded as both a sign of

progress and, at the same time, a source of individual and collective concern. The contradiction of the so-called "longevity revolution," as Robert Butler has named it (2008), lies in the refusal to celebrate the extension of our later years as a scientific and social triumph, and to accept old age as a valuable stage of life. Instead, our aged societies cling to youth as a core value (Woodward 1991; Gullette 2004), deny the inevitable reality of death (Elias 1985), and consider older people as a social burden (Butler 2008, 40), while at the same time condemning them to a subaltern position whereby they are homogenized and denied agency or even visibility (Gullette 2011). This marginalization is a manifestation of the general social anxiety towards ageing itself. It is also the cause of what Butler (1969) coined as "ageism," that is, prejudice towards people due to their age.

In her insightful book *Aged by Culture* (2004), Gullette invites the academia to move beyond the boundaries of disciplinarity through the consideration of age from the social sciences and the humanities, with key concepts in common such as those of "cultural age" or "age as a narrative." Other age scholars have encouraged the same disciplines to generate a fruitful dialogue among their perspectives and methods (Swinnen and Port 2012). Instigated by the defiance to accept decline as the dominant element of old age, ageing studies foregrounds the "inside of ageing": as Stephen Katz contends in a foundational article, this interdisciplinary field pursues to answer the eternal question of what the process of growing old really means (2014, 20). Valerie Barnes Lipscomb, one of the initiators of the intersection between ageing and theatre studies, has argued that theatre is a perfect domain to explore and theorise about age from at least one of these three main perspectives: "the performative on stage, the narrative in the script and the critical questioning of ageism and chronological/biological age in the multiple realities of performance" (2012, 118). Other age-focused approaches to theatre and performance that started the field (Basting 1998; Lipscomb and Marshall 2010; Fuchs 2014) have developed more recently into monographic analyses, with relevant contributions to dramaturgical analysis (Goldman and Switzky 2016; Lipscomb 2016b; Bronk 2017; Henderson 2016), senior performance and/or applied theatre (Basting 1998; Bernard and Munro 2015; McCormick 2017; Gillespie and Rowen 2020), or specific analyses of productions (Mangan 2013; Moore 2014), to name a few. Much of this scholarship stimulates a shift from ageist and stereotypical images of old age, as have been traditionally promoted on stage (Mangan 2013, 23), towards some alternatives to the "authoritative narrative[s]" of decline (Gullette 2004, 13) that dominate contemporary ideologies on ageing.

Gender has also played a significant role in quite a few of the approaches that theatre scholars have taken towards age. In fact, the importance of gender is not a novelty in the fields of ageing and theatre studies: "gender," as Gullette has put it, "always has an age too" (2004, 160). Even taking this connection further,

quite a few influential ageing scholars, like Kathleen Woodward, contend that ageing is a truly "feminist issue" (2006, 181), not only because women dominate the ageing demographic (Peace et al. 2007, 4-5), but also because this complex process, as significant as any other stage of life, is "treated in terms of being weak, dependent, passive–and thus de-valued"; in other words, all too often ageing is feminized (Wehrle 2020, 77). The way women see themselves represented, and hear themselves discussed in the theatre (and, likewise, in films, TV series and other cultural texts with a direct social impact) may determine the way they can envisage, perceive, experience or perform their own old age in their lives (Byrski 2014, 17); in other words, these representations generate specific "age effects" in them, as Bridie Moore, drawing from Butler, contends (2014, 164).

Departing from the composite framework of theatre and age studies, also in its intersections with gender, this article aims at examining current conceptualizations of ageing and old age through the study of two modern plays. In the light of notions central to ageing studies, such as the narrative of decline, age-related stereotypes, the social and psychological dimensions of age, the life review, young/old and carer/cared binaries, and derived concepts such as 'age effects', our analysis intends to show that, by depicting lives of women who either 'age' on stage or interact with their multiple selves, Tremblay's and Hartley's scripts and their resulting shows provide the reader with the possibility of disrupting stereotyped notions of female ageing. Through an age-centred examination of the various dramaturgical conventions used in the two texts, in which both Naturalistic and Non-Naturalistic or Brechtian devices are observed, the article explores the ways in which *Albertine in Five Times* and *Here I Belong* undermine the prevalent view of old age as a separate life stage predominantly defined by loss, while at the same time staging different (sometimes contradictory) cultural constructions of female ageing, all of which enhance the complexity and diversity of the experience of growing older from a gender perspective. As will be shown, whereas Aristotelian dramatic structures and Naturalistic strategies of characterization ground the portrayals of the two older characters firmly within their respective socio-cultural contexts and generate empathic 'age effects' in readers and audience members, the Non-Aristotelian approaches or Non-Naturalistic/epic conventions utilized in the two playscripts aim, à la Brecht, at a distanced, and, therefore, more critical representation of the process of growing older as a woman in all its complexity. Ultimately, the study considers how, through the combination of Aristotelian and Non-Aristotelian structures, and Naturalistic and Non-Naturalistic resources in the two plays, as well as their respective and complementary 'age effects,' Tremblay's and Hartley's plays contribute to paving the way for a truly anti-ageist theatre in which older women are endowed with rich characterizations in lead roles.

2. Stages of Ageing: Matt Hartley's *Here I Belong*

Here I Belong is a four-act play that the British author Matt Hartley wrote on commission for the UK-based rural-theatre company *Pentabus*. The show premiered at Bromfield Village Hall, Shropshire in 2016, and received about fifty performances in two different tours between 2016 and 2018.[1] Initially devised as a two-hander, *Here I Belong* certainly allows for a small-production format that can easily be transferred and adapted to all kinds of theatre spaces and community halls. In fact, a village hall is the play's only presentational space, which signals rural life as one of the central themes of the piece. At the same time, the plot focuses on one of the community members over six decades of her life, which renders female ageing one of the most salient aspects of the text. Our age-focused examination of Hartley's piece highlights the following aspects: the structure of the play and its connections with different discourses of ageing; the importance that 'age' plays in the protagonist's characterization; and, finally, the potential "age effects" that the emotional responses embedded in the text may have on its readers and audiences.

From various complementary perspectives, ranging from social (Bytheway 2011; Hepworth 2000; Katz 2005) through cultural (Gullette 2004; Gullette 2017; Woodward 1991; Dolan 2012; Worsfold 2011), historical (Cole et al. 2010) or narrative (Hartung et al. 2009; Randall and McKim 2008; Kenyon et al. 1999) angles, age critics have noted the powerful impact that stories and re-tellings of ageing may have in prevailing conceptualizations of age. At a dramaturgical level, Elinor Fuchs contends that traditional forms of drama, based on the Aristotelian model, tend to favour a structure of 'peak-and-decline' that runs in parallel to the sociocultural perception of ageing as a period of decadence and loss (2016). In contrast to this pattern, Non-Aristotelian or epic structures have the capacity to imagine alternative conceptualizations of old age. *Here I Belong* straddles between these two dramaturgical poles: on the one hand, its four-act structure, with a lapse of about twenty years or more between each of the acts, generates an epic representation of Elsie's life that stresses four particular moments. Through it, an open representation of her process of ageing is offered, where each episode has its own entity and, as in a Brechtian piece, Elsie's personality and personal story are signified as resulting from the accumulation of various kinds of circumstances, including historical events that frame turning points in her life (like the coronation of Queen Elizabeth, or the onset of Margaret Thatcher's era). On the other hand, the presentation of the four acts in chronological order generates the illusion

1 Information taken from the section devoted to this production on Pentabus' website (https://pentabus.co.uk/index.php/here-i-belong)

of a 'unified' character within a cohesive life story, so even if the unity of time is disrupted, the sequential presentation of the character's biography provides unity to the action, as well as the illusion of a narrative arc whereby the character is constructed and understood. The superimposition of epic and Aristotelian structures in the piece leads to a composite narrative effect with regard to the play's representation of ageing: whilst the epic pattern enables the possibility of knowing and re-interpreting Elsie through different age-identities, the play's compliance with the principle of succession in its dramatization of time offers, instead, a representation of her ageing process as mainly submitted to the laws of biology and to heteronormative sociocultural conventions. These, at the same time, tend to evoke the narrative of decline. Hence, the references to loss and death (actual or imagined, of others, or Elsie's) increase as of Act III, in the same way that Elsie is gradually depicted as less connected with the new ways of life epitomized by the younger figures. For example, in the last Act she appears to be the last member of the community to maintain certain traditions, such as reading the *Radio Times* (100), and the absence of younger people in the village is depicted as a problem (96, 99, 100, 103).

The analysis of Elsie's character creation leads to a similar contrast of age-based connotations. Starting with the presentation of 'four ages' in Hartley's Non-Aristotelian, epic rendering of the character, one could say that each of them leads to 'four different performances of age.' Despite the relative value of age-categorizations as segregated life stages, these can be identified as 'late youth' (represented by Elsie in Act I, when she is twenty-seven), 'late middle-age' (symbolized by Elsie at the age of fifty-three, in Act II), 'old age' (in Act III, when Elsie is seventy-two) and 'old old' age or 'fourth age' (which shows Elsie on her ninetieth birthday). In general terms, the 'four ages' through which Elsie is depicted conform to traditional/heteronormative views of the life stages they refer to, with recognizable turning points that connect each of the four moments, and several aspects of characterization that signify different aspects of the 'age construct.' For example, in Act I, twenty-seven-year-old Elsie is presented as a hard-working, vital woman, pregnant with her daughter and active in the community, and full of hopes for the future, at both personal and communal levels, as well as plagued with insecurities as the 'stranger' from London who has married into the village. In Act II, the fifty-three-year-old version of the same character shows her as a strong woman who starts to display minor signs of physical ageing, like the loss of sight; and as a confident and important member of the community, who becomes an improvised mentor for her best friend's daughter, Marion, while she adjusts to her own 'empty nest' at home. The same conventional and, yet, multi-faceted depictions of 'age' are detected in Act III, when at seventy-two Elsie is presented as a less dynamic and more poised character, aware of the changes the village has undergone, and coping

with the death of her husband, while at the same time retaining a dignified attitude on his funeral day. In Act IV, Elsie's 'old old' age is visibly constructed through the character's more noticeable physical and cognitive fragility; and complemented, at a symbolic level, by her isolation as a member of her age group in the village and, emotionally speaking, by her puzzlement at having reached an age she would have never thought she would get to be.

As the examples aforementioned demonstrate, Hartley resorts to a realistic combination of biological and social aspects of age in order to recreate Elsie's journey through her life course. Coherent with the Aristotelian/Naturalistic conception of the character as a unity, he associates Elsie's biological and sociocultural circumstances with particular psychological effects, hence offering a portrayal of female ageing that conforms to normative scripts of age and gender. Thus, in each of the four acts, Elsie behaves as the 'average woman of her age' by complying with traditional scripts of age and gender that intersect, also in predictable ways, with her other markers of identity. By stressing her personal development as a heterosexual, working-class Londoner who enters her small community as "the outsider" (12) and ends up regarded as the village's "Queen" (89), the playwright enhances the symbolic value that Elsie's process of ageing has at a communal level.

However, *Here I Belong* is also innovative "agewise"—to borrow from Gullette's pun (2011)—in that it focuses on life stages where the process of ageing becomes more self-conscious for its female protagonist. More significantly, it devotes two of the four acts of the play to the representation of old age—a fairly uncommon feature in contemporary drama, especially if we consider the prevailing invisibility "or disturbing absence," as Moore puts it, of the so-called 'fourth age' on the stage (2018, 15). Thus, the youngest of the four 'Elsies' is in fact about to enter a life stage in which, as a mother, she will become particularly aware of her own age and her mortality (Kuchner and Porcino 1988, 274-275); and especially as of Act II, which coincides with an important turning point for female ageing that is often identified with the menopausal years (Greer 1992), most of the play enhances Elsie's various transitions into later life as a grown, older, or 'old old' woman. It is relevant to note that the categories 'older' and 'old' are not signalled as 'final stages' in the play, but as distinctive and constituent parts of a continuum in which different categories of 'agedness' can be distinguished. In this way, the play's presentation of late youth as a starting point (instead of as an ending, as typical of youth-centred narratives) and, more significantly, of young old age as another transitional phase full of potential, instead of as a pathologized transition due to menopause (King 2013, 134) or a simplified culmination, reinforces the many transformations that its protagonist undergoes in her allegedly 'settled' adulthood. In the same vein, choosing to close the play

with Elsie's making a wish over her ninetieth birthday cake enhances the play's celebration of 'old old' age; but, above all, it reinforces the dynamic presentation of all ages as thresholds of future actions.

The representation of midlife-ageing into old-old age as a constant process of 'becoming' leads to an anti-ageist theatrical narrative: not only does it underline the dynamic nature of age throughout the life course, but it also reinforces the human capacity to change and/or adjust to changes at all ages. At the same time, the play also constructs the gendered component of ageing in a similar way: Elsie's process of continuous transformation also entails a perpetual re-construction of her own womanhood, one in which femininity remains subject to constant re-adjustments at personal and public levels, and for which 'age' is an important conditioning factor (Cruikshank 2009; Friedan 2001; Macdonald and Rich 2001). In this sense, Hartley's contrasting Elsie with another character who is always in her twenties in each of the four acts helps visualize the diverse forms of femininity that result from the combination of age and gender: while Marion, Scarlett and Katie, Elsie's counterparts in Acts II, III and IV, always remain dynamic, vital, and yet full of insecurities, very much like Elsie herself in Act One, the 'older Elsies' gradually become more fragile throughout the play and less in touch with new fashions and trends, but grow in self-determination, courage, and wisdom as the play advances, all of which enables them to mentor their younger partners.

Beyond the sociocultural meanings derived from Elsie's characterization as an adult/older woman, and closely connected with the strong psychological basis of the character, it is also possible to consider her subjective or personal age, to use Woodward's categorization (1991, 149). It is through this particularized dimension, which expresses how the character 'feels' about her age, that Hartley also undermines scripts of 'age and gender.' This becomes especially evident in Act III, when despite feeling deeply about the loss of her husband, Elsie is also capable of imagining her later years as a period full of possibilities: as she tells Scarlett, the young girl she accidentally meets before the memorial for her late husband: "We weren't joined at the hip. I'll find things or even more things if those things aren't enough" (78). Elsie's pro-active attitude in front of an essential loss is developed further in Act IV when the presence of her ten photo albums reveals that she went travelling around the world when she was in her eighties. This information certainly undermines the stereotypical view of the older widow confined to her home; as Katie, her young carer in Act IV, puts it, it is hard to find "many eighty-year-olds that go backpacking around the world" (93). The image of Elsie's mimicking the famous orgasm sequence from the film *When Harry Met Sally* during the same trip is supposed to create the same effect, or at least it shocked Elsie's own daughter when they visited the emblematic diner in New York (93). Besides revealing the character's sharp

and often self-parodic sense of humour, the anecdote (like others of a sexual nature in the play) presents Elsie as a sexual being, before and during her fifty-one-year-long marriage, even when her husband's "rubbing and blowing" her hands due to her bad circulation "always led to something else" (97). Through this aspect of her characterization, the piece counteracts the sexist and ageist stereotype of the asexual (older) woman (Liddy 2017, 167-180), and underlines sex, instead, as a natural part of both her own life and the life cycle. Even more than this, the evocation of sexuality throughout the play becomes an expression of Elsie's love for life itself. Apparently in contrast with this, and thanks to her integrated view of the life course, death also becomes an important part of the character's thirst for life. Her direct acquaintance with death throughout her life—ranging from the loss of her mother at a very young age (26), through the hardships of the war (49), to the many other deaths to which, in her seventies, she says do not come as a surprise (66)—does not prevent the character from maintaining the vital disposition that she already shows, as a young woman, at the beginning of the play. As she tells Scarlett in Act III: "When you know a lot of life has been lost so young you embrace every second, you do not wish it to end" (77).

Having considered the dramaturgical elements and aspects of characterization that signify different dimensions of age and ageing in the play, it is worth considering the "age effects," to quote Moore (2014), that the piece can exert on its readers and viewers. In her essay on mainstream British theatre, the age and theatre scholar adapts Butler's notion of 'effect' as a way of understanding identity as culturally-informed (2006, 199). Building on this adaptation, we can state that the combination of Elsie's predominantly Naturalistic conception with a highly coherent episodic presentation of her life favours an empathic response towards the character, through which readers and viewers get to feel 'with' her the different changes that life brings. In addition, positive traits of her personality that are sustained throughout the four acts of the play (such as her sense of humour, her caring disposition towards others, her strong sense of friendship, and her loyalty to the community) reinforce the channels of empathy towards the character and, in this way, favour a deeper understanding of what it means to grow older. It is through the mechanism of dramatic irony that this 'empathic age effect' is more effectively attained. This is produced every time one of the young characters ignores a detail of Elsie's life (for example, the fact that she has lost her husband), or goes through a situation that Elsie has had to cope with in previous acts (such as that of being the stranger in a close-knit community). In all those cases, and thanks to the knowledge gained about Elsie's life throughout the play, the reader/viewer is capable of imagining what the main character is feeling for, through, or because of, her younger counterpart.

These moments of 'empathic revelation' offer, again, invaluable insights about the experience of ageing. Some of them bear an overtly anti-ageist message, especially when Elsie vindicates herself as a person (beyond, despite or even because of her old age). This is clearly the case in Act IV, when Elsie's overprotective carer tends to patronize her, even infantilize her, especially when Elsie looks confused at times. Interestingly enough, Elsie responds to some of those moments of age-based inferiorization with an ambivalent response that empowers her—"I chose not to remember," she tells Katie, when she had briefly forgotten that the community is preparing a birthday party for her (100)—or, even more intensely, and with great comic effect, with an exaggerated performance of her own frailty that ridicules the younger character—by playing with her deafness, she makes Katie repeat three times that she is a fool (98). Through these examples, the play emphasizes on the performative aspects of (old) age and, in this way, dismantles essentialist notions of ageing that disempower or reify the older person, while at the same time recognizing a space of agency in one's re-presentation of old age. Elsie's asking Katie not to "patronise her" towards the end of the last act, when Katie thinks they should get home because the excitement of returning to the village hall is making her too tired (100), signifies even more directly Elsie's vindication of her personhood (and her age).

More than recreating intergenerational tensions, however, the piece reproduces different perceptions of time based on the characters' own age. While to the young Elsie and the other three young characters, time follows the sequential logics of Newtonian time, to the more mature and older Elsies, time becomes an intricate web of experiences, places, people, affections. The "ghosts" that the older Elsie 'sees' in the village halls, and the moments she evokes while re-visiting the space again and again, are the same characters and scenes the audience and readers have seen or come to learn about throughout the play. When she tells Katie that "[p]eople, moments, are clouding up" (92), Hartley seems to evoke, through her perception, the multi-layered, non-linear experience of time that philosophers like Jan Baars associate with ageing (2012). Closely connected with this, and reinforcing the non-confrontational portrayal of intergenerational dialogue that the playwright recreates in the four acts, Elsie offers her own house to Katie at the end of the play; in this way, Katie and her family can continue living in the village and, at the same time, contribute to the community's survival. Elsie's gesture of intergenerational solidarity also becomes a sign of "gerotranscendence," to borrow from Lars Tornstam's term (2005); through it, the older character is capable of imagining (and caring for) life (and the community) beyond her own lifetime. As she tells Katie, who is at first confused by her offer: "I want my home to be a home. I want the person who lives here to have what I did. I want this place to survive. I want the school

to stay open. Will only happen if you stay." (104) By accepting her own finitude, Elsie replaces a one-directional relationship of care (in which she, as the oldest one, is the one cared for) by one of interdependence, in which the binary carer/cared for becomes undermined. In a way, at ninety, Elsie is capable of realizing what Elsie at fifty-three already said to her daughter's best friend and protégée, and which is one of the most powerful anti-ageist messages of the play: "People grow up. People grow older. People get weaker. But let them do it on their terms. Marion? On their terms." (55)

3. Re-Constructing the Ageing Self: Michel Tremblay's Albertine in Five Times

Revisiting life in search of one's identity and self-forgiveness is the dominant topic of *Albertine in Five Times* (*Albertine, en cinq temps*), an award-winning play by Michel Tremblay, one of Canada's most renowned and multifaceted writers. Thirty years after its first production at the Théâtre Français of the National Arts Centre in Ottawa in October 1984, it has come to be considered by many as Tremblay's most widely produced and translated play. Like Hartley's piece, Tremblay's text focuses on a seventy-year-old woman, Albertine, who evokes various stages of her life on her first day at a retirement home. However, she does not interact with other characters, but mostly with herself. The playwright indicates that Albertine has "the detached tone of someone returning from far away" (9). It soon becomes clear that she was revived after she had abused some pills. Left 'alone' with her memories, Albertine talks to Madeleine, her long-dead sister and only confidante, and, more significantly, with four younger versions of herself, as she was at the ages of thirty, forty, fifty and sixty. In one of the interviews, Lorraine Pintal, the 2014 production director, states that *Albertine in Five Times* "is the pinnacle" of all the 'Albertines' found in many of Tremblay's works.[2] More than three decades after its premiere, this play is still timely and contemporary in its description of women, their struggles for selfhood, fears of loneliness, and, above all, their experience of ageing. In this section, we will examine the ways in which the play's structure and its treatment of space and time are connected with alternative representations of old age. At the same time, we will analyse the author's disruption of the very notion of character, which facilitates alternative depictions of female ageing.

In a way similar to *Here I Belong*, in *Albertine in Five Times* we also find a combination of Naturalistic aesthetics (especially reflected in Tremblay's use of

2 See '*Albertine, en cinq temps* Returns, 30 Years After its Creation at the NAC,' National Arts Centre https://nac-cna.ca/en/stories/story/albertine-en-cinq-temps-returns-30-years-after-its-creation-at-the-nac

language and the psychological basis of the character conception) with Non-Naturalistic theatrical devices (more evidently manifested in the multiplicity of "selves" into which Albertine is divided, very much reminiscent of a 'Chorus'). This combination reflects the playwright's classical influences, ranging from Greek drama to Samuel Beckett ("Tremblay, Michel"). From the Greeks, the author takes the unity of plot, which can be traced throughout the sequence created by the protagonists' memories; like Beckett, he suspends time and dramatizes the fragmentation of the self. From a structural perspective, Tremblay 'compresses' Albertine's life in a one-act play, in which the action takes place from the sunset to the moonrise, very much like Aristotelian tragedies were supposed to (Aristotle 1989, 11). Nevertheless, this unity is undermined by the portrayal of life images that span forty years. Seen from the perspective of ageing studies, such treatment of time generates its own "age-effects," since it dramatizes ageing as both an interplay and a collage of events, instead of as a linear journey (usually of decline).

When it comes to the play's treatment of space, the piece must also be interpreted in Non-Naturalistic terms, especially because Tremblay divides the dramatic space into five separate locations, from which all Albertines interact. The stage directions inform the reader about the various positions and dramatic spaces that the women concomitantly inhabit, hence establishing the "horizontal" geographies as well as "the "vertical" chronologies of time" in the play (Killick 2011, 107). Whereas the former are more fixed, and notably bound to social timelines and affairs, the latter are more flexible, and linked to intimate experiences of each character (Killick 2011, 107). Tremblay's multi-layered rendering of time and space generates, to borrow from Lipscomb's words, "a temporal plasticity that foregrounds the *social* construction of the self" (2016a, 193; italics added), and which highlights the public and private positions (and roles) that Albertine has occupied throughout her life. Indeed, coherent with the precepts of Brechtian or epic theatre, Albertine's life experience is closely connected to various significant historical and socioeconomic life conditions corresponding to twentieth-century Québec (Killick 2011). At the same time, it reflects several historical landmarks, such as the first moon landing and broad access to television. Like Elsie in *Here I Belong*, Albertine's ageing body is, in Maren Wehrle's words, "lived from *within*" but "formed *from without*" (2020, 75; italics in the original). Thus, in Tremblay's play, very much as in Hartley's piece, the process of growing old is linked to "an endless variety of political, economic, social, and cultural contexts" (Kunow 2010, 296), all of which construct, borrowing from Lipscomb's words, "not just a story on stage but an identity" itself (2016b, 7). At the same time, the character's identity can be connected with and re-interpreted through diverse stances and viewpoints. Within its multi-spatial, polivocal dramatization of space (and its

associated timeframes), Tremblay's portrayal of Albertine's five selves underlines the layered process of identity formation.

The synchronous fragmentation of the main character or the multiplicity of her own self is, however, the main dramaturgical mechanism through which *Albertine in Five Times* generates its complex representation of ageing. Age scholars like Mangan (2013) and Lipscomb (2016b) have regarded this device as a significant conceit for critical understandings of ageing, since it enables the representation and 're-organization' of identity throughout the life course. Tremblay's main characters in *Albertine in Five Times* re-organize their life through what Robert Butler called the "life review" or "the progressive return to consciousness of past experiences, and [...] the resurgence of unresolved conflicts" that are commonly associated with the awareness of approaching death (1963, 66). Even though the life review may occur at any age, it is commonly associated with the last years of life (Butler 1963, 67, 73). Its implied characteristic is "orderliness" (Butler 1963, 67), but Tremblay's 'dialogic' representation of Albertine's life review is in fact a multi-directional narrative that is generated in both retrospective and forward-looking ways. His depiction of Albertine's life reflects the complex interaction and interdependency of multiple selves, and at the same time weakens any essentialist idea of identity as 'stable' or even 'fixed.' By unsettling the unity of the ageing character, and depicting it as both estranged from and connected with her younger versions, the playwright exhibits the self as—in the words of Mike Hepworth—"a living process" that evolves throughout the life course (2000, 29). At the same time, and in contrast to the sequential multiplicity of 'Elsies' in Hartley's piece, Tremblay juxtaposes Albertine's fragmented selves against Madeleine's "core self", which expresses, again borrowing from Hepworth's words, a "sense of continuous personal identity" (2000, 29). Through this contrast, and more symbolically than Hartley in his duet scenes, Tremblay offers the opportunity to examine what theatre and ageing studies scholars call "an age-old conundrum" of the singularity and plurality of the self (Mangan 2013, 135), or the "paradox of unity and multiplicity" of ageing that are also inherent to the theatre (Lipscomb 2016b, 14).

Albertine's splitting identities also convey social and cultural readings of age. Through its pentagonal characterization, Albertine effectively disrupts the binary division between 'young' and 'old' by creating what Woodward terms "age gradations" (1991, 6), that is, the decade-ageing pattern that underlies a continuous progression and interconnectedness between various stages of life. As sociologist Justine Coupland elucidates, within the "*cultural* time" context, ten-year units are frequently used as measurements by which society prescribes certain beliefs, tenets, manners, and priorities to a particular decade (2009, 960; italics in the original). However, when it comes to "*personal* time", decades typecast leitmotifs "of bodily appearance, capability, social capital, preferences

and practices" that, in general terms, empower "the decremental biological model" of ageing (Coupland 2009, 960; italics in the original) and, consequently, pave the way for "the master narrative of decline" (Gullette 2004, 132). *Albertine in Five Times* and its eponymous quintet is an exemplification of the 'ebb and flow' of the decline narrative that, despite the dramaturgical innovations of the piece, is embodied in the ageing (gendered) character.

The fact that Tremblay presents Albertine in five different ages suggests that the construction of female ageing is socially embraced and culturally exposed within the patriarchal world that marks (older) women as inferior to men. Through Albertine's 'five times' or life stages, Tremblay exemplifies the ways in which the female protagonist internalizes or reacts against her double marginalization as an older woman by either embracing or rejecting various traits of all her former female selves. Abertine is introduced to the reader as a woman of seventy; however, the first self she encounters is her thirty-year-old counterpart. The construction of Albertine's age for the reader starts with young adulthood, just as the first Elsie in Hartley's piece. Seen form the point of view of the young protagonists, this, in Gullette's terms, is "a dangerous age—a tense, threatening, crowded, and overwhelming time" (1988, 6). Albertine at 30 perfectly embodies this danger much more than the young Elsie does. A bit fleshy, though very attractive, the young Albertine has escaped to her mother's farmhouse in Duhamel from her arduous and stressful city life, as well as from her suffocating domestic imprisonment as a married woman and a mother, to which she reacts with violence. Hence, the thirty-year-old Albertine entrusts Madeleine with the story of beating her daughter Thérèse, and the scaring inability to manage and control her own anger. The desperation caused by her incapacity to adjust to the traditional woman's roles, and the perplexing feeling of being "in a hole […], in a tunnel, in a cage" (41), clearly mirror what Betty Friedan labels as the nameless "problem" or "the feminine mystique" (Friedan 2001), and result in loud, yet action-less, outcries caused by her frustrated and enraged femininity. This fury is aggravated by social disdain and her hopelessness within the ageist society in which the young Albertine's predicts a disappointing future: "In ten years, twenty years, we'll still be there, in our cage, behind bars! And when we're old, when nobody needs us anymore, they'll put us in a cage for old ladies! And we'll die of loneliness!" (42)

Tremblay anticipates various 'tragedies' in Albertine's life: one of being a *woman* in the patriarchal world, and another of being an *old* woman in an ageist society. The former starts manifesting itself a decade later, when Albertine at 40, "a bit plumper than she was at 30" (11), with hardened features and shabby clothes, speaks from the balcony of her flat on Fabre Street, and confesses that she is stuck in burdensome housewifery and family responsibilities. Consumed with anger against the world she is trapped in, she claims: "I've got no reason to

cry, just to scream" (71). Deprived of sympathy and love, and now a widow left alone with her problematic children, she claims that it is rage that "keeps [her] alive" (48). At the threshold of middle age, she is torn apart by jealousy towards Madeleine, her guilt for having failed as a mother, and, above all, her regrets for not having reacted against the sense of inferiority that is imposed on her as a woman: "Men are all the same. They always end up on top. What do you expect, they're in charge. We let them have their way and they take advantage of it, they're not stupid! It's their world. They're the ones who made it." (64)

In her often quoted essay *The Double Standard of Ageing* (1972), the American feminist writer and activist Susan Sontag alerts about the dangers of being a woman in a world that idolizes youth, and renders ageing women invisible, asexual and useless. For this reason, she asserts that disobedience is the way towards freedom (Sontag 1972, 38). The jolly and very thin Albertine at 50 seemingly epitomizes Sontag's stance, as she has found the pleasures of rebellion, disobeying and self-fulfilment. While working at her first and only job as a sandwich-maker at a restaurant in Parc Lafontaine, this Albertine has relieved herself from the constraints of housewifery and family charges, and now enjoys her newly found freedom in her late-middle age. However, her apparent "midlife progress narrative," in Gullette's terms (1988), is not built on solid ground: as her sixty-year-old self virulently reminds her, "[t]hat won't last. […] Because it's just an act [of] pretending to be a happy, positive person." (48) The paradoxical happiness of fifty-year-old Albertine lies in what Woodward calls "pretense" and "masquerade [of her] self-representation" (1991, 148), since this character lives in an imaginary world where the past is never confronted (45).

Interestingly enough, the most noticeable dissonance within Tremblay's multi-vocal portrayal of ageing occurs between Albertine at 60, who is at the limit of the socially constructed category of old, and Albertine at 70, who has already crossed it. Following her period of disobedience while in her fifties, sixty-year-old Albertine ages into a decade of self-pity, sorrow for the death of her daughter, indifference and distrust towards the whole world, hence complying with the Aristotelian peak-and-decline dramatic structure. For the oldest Albertine, however, old age has become a period for reflection, revelation and self-forgiveness. Her move into the retirement home has cured her "of everything, except [her] memories" (78) which, embodied through the other Albertines, become the expression of her self-knowledge. Thus, it is the seventy-year-old Albertine and not her closer counterpart that represents a vital take on life: in fact, she blames Albertine at 60 for giving up on life or, in Lynne Segal's words, for not "staying alive to life itself" (2014, 4). Nevertheless, her life review does not transform her into an archetypical wise woman, immune to mistakes; on the contrary, it allows her to accept the inevitability of human tragedy in

an ironic way: "What's the point of living? We should have the right to live a second life. But given how we're made … we'd probably make a mess of it again." (55) Thus, Albertine at 70 knows what her younger selves cannot escape from; but the knowledge she has accrued also foregrounds the inevitability of change in the ageing self, which at the same time saves every Albertine from the finality of the 'tragedies' of each age. Having survived her latest one (the overdose from which she was revived), Albertine embraces her own death with humour: "Anyway, next time I land there, I'll be happy to stay. I sure don't want to spend my old age travelling back and forth like that." (10-11) While death does not happen for her, she welcomes her new home, where she says she feels quite comfortable (9-10). Even though the nursing home is commonly associated with decline and senility (and, in fact, in *Here I Belong* it represents the form of institutionalized care that Elsie wants to avoid), it does not receive negative connotations in Tremblay's play. As perceived by Albertine at 70, "this is home, from now on," and she appreciates the good organization of the place itself (10). Together with her capacity to adjust to new situations, her ability to laugh at herself becomes her most effective emotional weapon. With it, she fights the declinist comments of her sixty-year-old counterpart, to whom she responds "No, I can't let myself discouraged … help me!" (43), and, at the same time, she rebels against the ageist stereotypes of the world in which "people made [her] feel so ugly when [she] was growing up […]" (15).

An important aspect of the play's polyphonic representation of the ageing self, and probably one of its most evident 'age effects,' involves what some scholars term as the "age hierarchy" (Dickerson-Putman and Brown 1998; Gullette 2004, 173-175) that is established among the five Albertines, and which associates old age with knowledge, mentorship and virtue: thus, the older ones counsel the younger ones, anticipate the future to them, and even correct their memories. The older Albertines question the choices the younger selves have made and alert them about the consequences of their decision-making for the next Albertine. "Our fate depends on you", says Albertine at 70 to the youngest self (54). This peculiarity of the choral characterization favours an anti-ageist consciousness. Even though there is notable disagreement between the five Albertines, Tremblay not only portrays the oldest one as braver, wiser and emotionally stronger than their younger versions, but also much more satisfied about her present life. Besides, some of the other Albertines explicitly express their dislike for whom they had been at earlier stages: "I wish I had never been like you!" (28), claims Albertine at 50, complaining about Albertine at 40. In this way, the piece subverts the declinist notion that, as we age, we become nostalgic about the past and about how we were. Beyond these inter-generational, intra-personal conflicts, the final scene indicates a certain reconciliation between all the selves as they contemplate

the moonrise, suggesting that Albertine, at 70, has finally reached what for Erik Erikson was the stage of "ego-integrity" (1998), that is, one in which all past experiences are finally contemplated and integrated into a complete sense of self.

4. Conclusion: A Modern Drama of Age(ing)

Due to their reliance on narrative and the notion of character, dramatic texts remain significant sources whereby theatrical conceptualizations of age and ageing can be examined. Even though their predominantly conventional rules may favour the perpetuation of traditional age ideologies, usually influenced by the narrative of decline (Mangan 2013; Moore 2014), they may also resort to dramaturgical mechanisms that bring about age-centred innovations. As has been shown in this study, *Here I Belong* and *Albertine in Five Times* constitute two significant examples of playtexts that recreate alternative narratives of ageing and old age through their structures and processes of characterization, while at the same time illustrating the myriad identities that the ageing self integrates. Despite the three-decade distance that separates the two original scripts, both plays approach the topic of ageing in a similarly complex way.

Albeit in different degrees, in both cases the Naturalistic conception of the character is enriched with an epic or Brechtian presentation of its different faces (and ages), hence recreating the "sense of essential self" (Lipscomb 2016b) that facilitates an emphatic identification and/or understanding of the main figure, while at the same time offering various angles from which to re-interpret it. The protagonists' ever-changing age-identities are largely explained through various sociocultural factors (of which gender is paramount) that condition their life course, and help explain their process of ageing at a 'public' level. At the same time, their capacity to integrate all their life experiences and related ages at an advanced stage of their life (in Albertine's case) and/or to transcend their own finitude (as with Elsie's) offers a more personal and dynamic image of ageing, namely, one in which the present engages with the past and, yet, the future continues to matter.

In both plays, too, the superimposition of sequential plot lines centred on the protagonists' adult years, with the episodic or synchronous representation of fragments of their lives, generates a multi-layered temporality that brings the experience of ageing closer to the audience or readers. The composite or fragmented timeframes of the two plays discussed highlight the "mutable" nature of an ageing self (Lipscomb 2016a, 204) as well as the appreciation of what Segal defines as the "complex layerings of identity" that are produced in old age (2014, 4). By offering critical moments of the main characters' lives through episodic or fractal narratives, Tremblay's and Hartley's pieces enable to both

decode and re-compose the age identities that these figures develop over time. In this sense, their readers and viewers are approached to the sense of 'difference' that is experienced by the older person, and by the older woman in particular.

With regard to the characters' 'gender' difference, it is significant that both Hartley and Tremblay explore the intricacies of ageing through a female character. Despite the different periods in which the two texts have been written, both *Albertine in Five Times* and *Here I Belong* respond to the global phenomenon of ageing through a gendered lens. At one level, this choice may be related to the feminization of ageing itself, especially if the predominant demographic trends are considered. However, this coincidence can also be explained in symbolic terms as a choice that expresses more acutely the sense of Otherness for which, as Geraldine Cousin puts it, "[t]heatre is ideally suited," and which is often expressed through "a multiplicity of timescales and places [that] mesh together" (1996, 2). Tremblay's overlapping account of female memory, as well as Hartley's re-construction and vindication of an anonymous woman's life, can be considered as "gendered strategies" (Port 2005, 109) with which the character's 'alterity,' manifested through both their age and gender, is expressed.

Closely related to the notion of 'alterity' and the feeling of estrangement associated with it, the theatrical convention of discontinuous acting used in the two plays, whereby one character is performed by various actors (essential in Tremblay's text, and also possible in Hartley's piece whenever four actresses play Elsie), or even the explicit 'performance of age' that *Here I Belong* may lead to (if, as in the original production, the character ages in front of the audience at the end of every act), enhance the performative (and, therefore, dynamic, transformative and also constructed) dimension of age. Whereas by highlighting the performativity of ageing, Hartley and Tremblay dismantle essentialist views of late youth, midlife, old age, and old old age represented in their plays, by generating 'Other' versions of their main characters (either sequentially or simultaneously) they invite readers and viewers to engage with the characters' own experience of becoming. In many ways, *Here I Belong* and *Albertine in Five Times* re-present the particular sense of "uncanniness" with which age scholar Amelia de Falco defines the experience of ageing (2010, xv), as well as the feeling of "estr(age)ment" that Fuchs, playing on the Brechtian alienation device, has detected in theatrical renderings of old age (2014). The composite performing styles implicit in the two plays, which draw from both Naturalistic impersonation and Non-Naturalistic or epic acting, favour a critical, and at the same time empathic, form of reception from which the two ageing characters can be understood throughout their constant changes.

The double decoding involved in the reading of the plays' structures, temporalities and character (dis)continuities is rendered natural by theatrical

convention. In all the cases, the dramaturgical strategies that *Albertine in Five Times* and *Here I Belong* resort to potentially facilitate the development of a more acute age awareness, either through implicit mechanisms of identification, or the appreciation of different age-identities, or both. While Tremblay's multivocal text illustrates how a play can alter social values about female ageing, or, in the words of Howard Barker, witness not only "the reiteration of common knowledge but a dislocation of perceptions" (1993, 29), Hartley's piece dramatizes age as a particular 'place' from which one can perform the self distinctively, and ageing as a journey from strangeness (to the community, but also, symbolically, to the self) to self-acceptance and self-knowledge, where one finally 'belongs.' Together, and beyond their thirty-year-long gap, the two plays recreate the destabilizing, uncanny and, yet, liberating effect of regarding the older person through all the dimensions and factors that conform their multi-layered identity. In so doing, they contribute to paving the way for an anti-ageist society, in which all ages can be represented, in their complexity and gender specificities, on and off the stage.

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Section 3.
Theatres of Violence

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Performative Encounters: Memory Violence in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*[1]

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Abstract:

In their biographical play *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* (1996), Adrienne Kennedy and her son Adam P. Kennedy retrace family memories to describe the aftermath of police brutality in 1990s America. They narrate the brutal beating of a middle-class, young Black man named Teddy and the events taking place later at trial. The playwrights make use of "memory violence" (Olick 2018) to elicit the spectators' emotional response and construct a performative encounter in which the figures of perpetrator, survivor and bystander are questioned and redefined. Through this violence of remembering, they manage to insert unrecorded moments of abuse in our collective imaginary, moving from staged nightmares, distant courtrooms and individual sleep deprivation chambers into a figurative shared space where Black lives do matter.

Keywords: Adrienne Kennedy; Memory Violence; Black Lives Matter; Reparative Drama

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1. Introduction: Performing Memory Violence

In her 2018 Theater Hall of Fame address, Adrienne Kennedy speaks movingly of the influence of literature and art as taught by her parents. Kennedy explains how her upbringing shaped her interests as well as her worldviews, and elegantly reminds her audience of "the power of the stage" (in Kennedy 2019, n.p.). In her speech, she briefly looks back on her childhood and remembers her parents: "They took me everywhere," the playwright recalls, "they told me stories: A. Philip Randolph, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marian Anderson and Langston Hughes. My mother gave me a library card when I was five. They gave me a book of Gilbert and Sullivan operas, piano lessons and they always talked about the condition of American blacks" (in Kennedy 2019, n.p.). Kennedy's family memories are emotive and personal, and also mired in social uncertainty and implied violence. It seems that the more the playwright focuses on treasuring her childhood memories, the more discernible her menacing background becomes—her transformative literal and literary journeys set between the 1930s and 1960s in an America defined by racial terror.

Family memory, in this particular case, responds to a crisis of signification that takes place when the official narratives that serve to memorialize the past fail to represent one's family history. And, as such, it gains political meaning as it opposes affective politics to systemic power structures, and disputes official versions of the past. Kennedy's childhood memories contrast sharply with official American history as they situate Black experience at the center of a historical narrative that has consistently disregarded African Americans. These memories are family relics and, as such, they hold the potential to challenge the hegemonic erasure of others from national narratives, as well as the manipulation of spaces and temporalities of history-writing (Boyarin in Olick 2003a, 3). Kennedy is well aware of this, and in her drama, she draws from her family biographies to understand her childhood and debunk political mythologies. Specifically, she claims, "I write about my family […] I see my writing as being an outlet for inner psychological confusion and questions stemming from childhood" (Kennedy and Lehman 1977, 42). Her plays, to this end, bear the responsibility for representing, both visually and materially, "the virtualities of childhood" (Davidson 2009, 332), thereby addressing ambiguous emotion as well as processes of memory re-structuring. And, because it is defined by memory, the playwright's creative process becomes an act of documentation and history re-writing through which the subject re-imagines her past in order to secure a present, and achieve self-definition, however painful that may be.

Kennedy's genealogy retraces steps in order to repair the social life and transmission of cultural memory in a time when, in the words of Duncan Bell (2009,

346), "the past haunts the contemporary imagination", Imani Perry extending this notion to say that it also *hunts* it (2019, 111). For memory does not simply store past violence and haunt the self. Memory possesses its own kind of violence. In its clash with legitimized versions of history, memory can become violent in itself as it "violates and transgresses […] our sense of order [and] integrity" (Olick 2018, n.p.). It becomes threatening because it contests rather than reaffirms or reifies. Remembering violence therefore implies re-living traumatic events, which might shed some light on contemporary debates on the legitimacy of Civil War commemorations in the US, for instance. Jeffrey Olick furthers this argument in his examination of the memory-violence correlation, first outlining a change of paradigm in our perception of what violence is and what it entails for others beyond physical wounding; then, reintroducing memory as "a way of ascribing meaning to what has happened in history, […] a way to redeem suffering in some fashion or other" (2018, n.p.). His views thus complicate notions of memory (and) violence, because, if it is we ourselves who assign meaning to past events—always in retrospect and via introspection while conversing with prior discourses—then, how do we, as a society, decide when/if violence is legitimate?[2] Which forms of memory (individual, collective, public, emotional, traumatic) are to be inscribed in the fabric of history? And (how/when) should we represent them in art and culture? These are some of the concerns this article aims to throw some light on.

1.1. Memory and Violence in Sleep Deprivation Chamber

Adrienne Kennedy's work has often been considered ambiguous and unsettling. Its characters are contradictory, its racial stand is not always definite. This is because, in most of her plays, Kennedy performs memory violence as a source of affective ambivalence. The playwright understands memory's potentialities and draws on family biographies to call for historical and individual re-signification. Plays such as *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1964) and *The Owl Answers* (1965) evoke memory as a liminal stage in which "identity secrets" can be discerned, re-possessed and articulated via memory artifacts. Or, as the playwright herself acknowledges in her autobiography *People Who Led Me to My Plays* (1987, 96), "[s]oon I would understand that I was in a dialogue with the photographs, prints, postcards of people. They were my alter egos." For this reason, some scholars perceive in Kennedy's work a taste for intermediate spaces and racial interdependence. More specifically, authors such as Werner Sollors see in her plays "mysteriously divided and related characters [that] repeat sentence sequences" in the midst of an "enigmatically ambiguous action" (1991, 508). Others, like Patti Hartigan, understand Kennedy's work as

2 For examples of socially legitimized forms of violence, see Olick (2018).

an attempt at building realities where "romantic innocents are threatened by the persistent presence of racism" (2000, 112), exploring the inevitability of violence as an ideological cause of suffering, and the historical effect of social injustice maintained over time. Like his mother's, Adam P. Kennedy's drama is also very autobiographical, and contingent on experience and, especially, family relics. This article consequently reads the Kennedys' reliance on (family) memory not as an attempt at sanitizing or correcting public memory through the exposure of subjective pain and the total erasure of memory's violent parts, but as a careful meditation on the aftermath of memory violence that, when being performed, accounts for the suffering of those who live (and re-live) violent events in/through history, thereby calling for solidarity networks and active social intervention. It is my contention that Kennedy sets her writing efforts directly against "legitimating traditions" (Olick 2003a, 1) in a bid to reconsider the role of active witnessing and the rhetorical reproductions of oppressive discourses onstage as a creative means to unravel the mnemonic potential of violent theater acts.

Specifically, this article studies the notion of memory violence in the 1996 play *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, which Adrienne Kennedy co-wrote with her son Adam P. Kennedy. The play narrates the brutal beating of a middle-class, young Black man named Teddy and the events that take place later at trial. After the attack, Teddy is accused of having assaulted his assailant, a police officer, and has to prove his innocence in court. With Adrienne Kennedy's characteristic blend of shock and surrealism, and both playwrights' autobiographical styles, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* examines the dehumanization and vilification of blackness in America. It explores the abjection imposed on Black bodies as markers of difference and exclusion that are experienced as subjective horror, in Kristevan terms (1982). It also probes the memory scars these experiences leave on cultural and political bodies, social communities and statist power structures in an attempt to foster public recognition and, possibly, empathy. In contrast to most of Adrienne Kennedy's plays and the memories mentioned in her 2018 speech, this co-written work is not set in the period between the 1930s and 1960s, her usual source of inspiration (Vorlicky 1997, 67). Instead, it tells the more recent beating of her son Adam and the family's involvement with the criminal justice system—to clear his name—afterwards. It connects with recent debates on the status of Black lives in the US, siding with ideologies now summed up by the Black Lives Matter movement.[3] Making a conscious use of

3 Adrienne Kennedy "never wanted to identify totally with women playwrights or Black playwrights or anybody." She did not "write for a total audience" or believe in segregation in the theater. Instead, she "wanted to communicate with people," those who made her suffer at Ohio State, and those who did not (Kennedy and Binder 1985, 107-108). This

fictional devices, Adrienne and Adam Kennedy share their memories of the event to address racial disparities and injustices in America (Parks and Kennedy 1996, 45). They delve into family memories to "represent and invent what [they] can no longer spontaneously experience" (Olick 2003a, 3) and denounce the political systems that allow and, indeed, feed on racism. These invisible structures result in adapted forms of pre-emancipatory violence, which Philip C. Kolin bluntly describes as "highway apartheid" (2007b, 4), such as racial profiling, brutal aggression or even murder. To counter these, the play contests racial impositions of silence and invisibility and turns the theater into a "third space" where "objects of otherness" are identified and vindicated (Bhabha 1990, 211). *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* adheres to Audre Lorde's desired "transformation of silence into language and action" (2017 [1977], 1), voicing memory, violence and their contemporary aporias to challenge audience complicity in sustaining degrees of oppression, the legitimized (ab)use of gun-force and urban states of insecurity.

2. Courtroom Rhetorics in the Theater of Memory

To say that African Americans are at considerable social, economic and political disadvantage is nothing new. Black populations now constitute a disproportionate percentage of imprisoned, murdered and impoverished people. The fact that they systematically face extremely violent responses from police authorities is similarly known, and is further verified by the massive number of arrests and the excessive use of force shown during the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests—which far exceeded the same police tactics at the US Capitol riots in January 2021 (Tolan 2021, n.p.). Yet, the extent to which these practices rely on a rhetoric of structural injustice and racial inferiority—and, more particularly, the possibility of contesting and, conceivably, undoing its logic through literature and performance—is in need of further analysis. Much has been said about police brutality in America. From outraging statistics to excruciating testimonies, the sore aftermath of lethal force in the US is undeniable. And yet, Olick states (2018, n.p.), citizens continue to be partially complicit in state violence; legitimizing bloodshed for protection and justifying it when exerted against those deemed a threat. Chandan Reddy (2011) explores this, considering it "violence from freedom," and commenting on the tendency to accept brutal—

is partly the reason why she was not included as a Black Arts playwright—other reasons being the fact her plays are not fully affirmative of Black identity and her being a woman. Yet her political views, as presented in her plays, do coincide with the tenets of the Black Lives Matter movement. This is perhaps most evident in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, where she and her son examine the lack of public accountability and the certainty of police brutality in modern-day USA.

and even deadly—force to defend the integrity of the body (politic). Discourses on national protection have commonly been used to justify acts of violence that are neither legitimate nor admissible, for, as Olick points out, the fact that the use of violence is conditionally legitimized is not the same thing as making "*use of legitimate violence*" (2018, n.p.; italics in original). In other words, whilst using conditional violence might seem acceptable and necessary in certain situations, the legitimization of all violent acts is contingent upon circumstances.[4]

The role literature and the arts play in signifying injustice is therefore crucial to elicit feelings of "co-resistance" (Kricorian 2015), making audiences witness the characters' struggles and fostering an emotional urge to join them in their fight for justice. Plays can foster social situations that elicit public comprehension, recognition and a desire for solid active change. This is, indeed, the purpose behind Adrienne and Adam Kennedy's play. The authors aim to raise awareness of the inevitability of police brutality, which seems to have infected most social geographies. In an interview with Patti Hartigan (2000, 113), Adrienne Kennedy explains that she never expected her son to be assaulted by a police officer. She elaborates on the illusion of their family's "white house with yellow shutters" and the false fantasy of protection it conveyed to them before the attack (Hartigan 2000, 113). However, she also contends that, later on, she realized that these assaults happen "all the time" (Parks and Kennedy 1996, 45). In fact, almost thirty years after the publication of *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, police abuse remains an imperative danger for African Americans. The intention of the play, then, is to make this problem known, seen and publicly acknowledged, which the playwrights make possible by mimicking a courtroom rhetoric that undoubtedly exposes the biases behind it.

In the play, space is negotiated as a speaking organism that stores and administers political meaning. The authors recreate traumatic space in both realistic and oneiric scenes to comment on the emotional, psychological and physical after-effects of this type of violence. Places in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* are, therefore, real sites—the stage, the theater building—imbued with intimate memory and familiar architecture—the family house, the street, the neighborhood, Antioch College, Ohio, etc.—and, as Tonya Davidson contends (2009), they *remember* and haunt the people within, while embodying multiple memories of characters, authors and spectators. In the performance of the Kennedy's family memories there exists an embedded collective memory that the playwrights bring to the fore in order to assess social assumptions and expectations. *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* works at different semiotic and semantic levels, making use of intertextual devices, and meta-theatrical

4 For common situations in which violence is publicly accepted, see Olick (2018).

strategies that open up new interpretations for both the referenced sources, and the real events described. One such example would be the meta-performance of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* in the protagonist's classes. Suzanne, the protagonist, is a drama professor at Antioch College. She is also the mother of Teddy, who is brutally assaulted. By entwining the plot of *Hamlet* with that of Teddy's aggression, the Kennedys combine biographical memory with the imagination, with oneiric experiences and with nightmares. They hint at desperation through a mention of Ophelia who, in her madness, could also be said to operate from a liminal and limited threshold. The play makes use of these elements to explore and revise the characters' feelings of insecurity inasmuch as they are representative of the biopolitics at play. The performance thus becomes a figurative encounter where the conventional categories of victim, perpetrator and bystander are reconsidered. These clearly demarcated figures meet onstage and merge with one another via emotion—primarily empathy—breaking dramatic expectations to offer alternative responses to brutal violence. Peggy Phelan states that performance is short-lived and only exists in the present, that it "cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations *of* representations" (1993, 146; italics in original) as it escapes systemic reproduction and indulges in mimicry instead. If she is right in this assertion, then, it is in its organic disappearance after each new representation that performance contests our social economies since it works as a liminal, temporal encounter where most categories are dissolved in the name of deconstruction and revision.

Furthermore, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* carries a space in its title. One that is capable of evoking nightmares, of making the protagonists lose sleep, and, maybe, of opening up the possibility of social change through a semi-Artaudian exposure of violence (1958). This non-representational space is a figurative rendition of the human psyche, a conceptual place where trauma memories are symbolically stored. Nonetheless, through its onstage performance, it becomes a real space that not only retains symbolic meaning but also operates as a material platform for social complaint and change. In this represented allegorical space, the injustices of a discriminatory penal system can be exposed, criticized and condemned. Adrienne and Adam Kennedy's sleep deprivation chamber is a room defined by the fracture of the fantasy of protection their actual home projected; it is a staged space that figures as an emotional prison that cannot be escaped in the play. This chamber is not simply an enclosed space where characters are interrogated. The room also makes reference to the characters' mental space—particularly the mother's—and their incarceration into a painful sequence that they seem to experience in a loop. For Suzanne this implies dreaming of bloody crime scenes represented on stage, imagining her son being beaten in various

scenarios and, also, writing letters. This figurative representation of uncertainty and insecurity is heightened by the intertwined references to the plot of *Hamlet*, the presence of a figurative ghost (of memory), and the meta-fictional rehearsals of *The Ohio State Murders*, another of Adrienne Kennedy's plays, performed by Suzanne's drama students (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 21).

Performed space constitutes an essential part in Kennedy's drama in general, and in this co-written play. It is not simply that the playwright names some of her plays after alternate spatial figurations of the paradigmatic prison (the *fun(ny)house*, the private rooms, the chamber)—which, as Eduardo Mendieta remarks (2004), point to the same shared social topography as do the prison, the plantation and the ghetto—but Kennedy herself has a deep connection with the spaces she considers to be tainted by history. In an interview with Suzan-Lori Parks, Kennedy explains that, for her, the space where she writes is important: "I love the architecture of New York. The architecture. I feel immersed in… really profound history," she remarks (1996, 45). And, although she uses this to explain her return(s) to the Upper West Side, her statement also hints at her personal understanding of space as a bearer of memory; not an empty signifier, but a political category that stores and, in each representation, restores and retells the past.

Similarly, the occupation of space by the protagonists portrays distinct forms of entrapment. Whereas Suzanne is stuck, permanently "motionless" writing letters that never receive an answer (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 44), Teddy is constantly shifting settings, from interrogation rooms to the court chamber, police offices, his father's porch and his own car, just to name a few. Their enactment of trauma is therefore different; Suzanne's performance depicting emotional distress, best illustrated by her nightmares, while Teddy's concatenated actions are but a physical re-enactment of traumatic shock. Unexplained gaps between scenes similarly underline this conception.

Their family wounds are also depicted in the play through metaphorical references to natural disasters. The pain of discrimination, exclusion and racism is examined through symbolic representations of catastrophes and collapse. One such example is Teddy's uncle's claim that "The Bay Fall Bridge is fallen. We live near the epicenter" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 64). With this statement, the character reveals the extension of the damage caused by brutal violence and introduces it in the form of symbolic reverberations that reach the entire family unit. As the character clarifies, they are located "near the epicenter" and cannot escape its effects. In this example, Teddy's assault is described as a real earthquake, shaking the ground beneath the characters' feet. Yet, these symbols are not the only representations of racial violence. The courtroom rhetorics alluded in this section's title are perhaps more conspicuous in the literal performance of onstage interrogations:

> UNSEEN QUESTIONER: So when he hit you, you didn't go to the ground?
> TEDDY: I went to the ground when he first hit me and then that's when he proceeded to drag me across the driveway while he was kicking me and hitting me.
> UNSEEN QUESTIONER: Well, what position were you in when he first started to drag you?
> TEDDY: I was basically crouched on the ground.
> UNSEEN QUESTIONER: You were in a crouch?
> TEDDY: Well, crouch maybe—I was bending when he hit me I sort of—I moved to the ground—I was bending at the knees and he put his hand behind me and proceeded to drag me across, all right (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1996: 9).

Here, Teddy is forced to re-live an event whose effects he has not yet fully processed in order to provide his unseen questioner with details of his assault. The coldness of their encounter and questions, together with the unknown name, face and character of the questioner, seems to suggest indelicacy and lack of basic empathy, which is later complemented by (and revisited in) a nameless student actor's more direct asking "[t]his is what they teach at the police academy? This is the police manual?" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 24). His rhetorical questions are there for the audience to reply to.

This urge to make the audience react is also perceived in Suzanne's letters to various political authorities, in which a progressive change of tone suggests a transformation in the character's perception of the governing powers. Her letters are Suzanne's way of intervening in an uncertain situation that causes her insecurity and that is out of her control: her son is suffering and in the middle of a trial for an assault he did not commit. Yet, in her progressive adaptation of her tone—from hope to disillusionment; from specific real details to the account of her dreams (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 7-31)—one can also identify the character's embrace of her deeply traumatic emotional state, pointing to a reality on the verge of ontological collapse. After all, Ben Brantley is not without reason when he states that in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* reality and fantasy meet and "meld into a prison of the mind" (1996, n.p.).

All the spaces in the play are particularly significant because they respond to a rhetoric of surveilled topographies. This discourse, though, is not exclusive to contemporary fiction, but has been a repeated, versatile trope in African American literature since time immemorial. One that responds to the existence of structural forms of oppression and their consequent administration of national space. Connected to these surveillance politics and their political implications is the playwrights' decision to introduce in Suzanne's letters a classic convention of slave narratives: the ratification of the speaker's reliability, morality and good

intentions. She informs the Governor that "[a]ll our lives we have tried to fit in American society and improve our society" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996). Black writer Ishmael Reed (Carter Harrison et al. 2012, 93) sees in this modern replica of demonstrating narrative reliability a fear of facing the kind of white jury "who acquitted the men who killed Emmet Till," and, by extension, of all those law enforcers who have murdered Black individuals like Breonna Taylor, and more recently, George Floyd. Reed's interpretation points to the extension of dramatic action beyond the limits of the play's narrative frame. This convention is also used in Suzanne's letters to Governor Wilder, and it is interesting, first, because it serves to establish deep connections between the institution of slavery and police brutality in contemporary US settings, and, second, because it progressively subverts reliability politics to denounce racial bias. The first letter opens with a statement underlining the respectability of its writer and her family: "We are an outstanding Black American family. My former husband, David, is head of Africa/USA. My plays and stories are taught widely" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 8). In Suzanne's opening, it is easy to identify a desire to account for the truthfulness of the family's testimony by introducing herself and her family as good—non-violent—citizens and, hence, reliable narrators. This urge is perhaps informed by a fear rooted in the historical questioning of Black testimonies (albeit modernized), which is similarly addressed in slave narratives such as those of Harriet Jacobs and Frederick Douglass. And it is particularly significant because it serves to establish links between slavery and the present. This correlation is even more evident in the following statement, "[w]e are now a grieved family. Our son is being persecuted by the Arlington Police Department just as surely as happened in the Deep South in the 1930s or during Emmet Till's time" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 8), where Suzanne traces a chronology of injustice to firmly condemn abuses against Black peoples in front of her audience. Thus the play's representation of trans-historical precarity serves a dual purpose: to lay bare the characters' vulnerability in the face of unjust situations, and to raise feelings of accountability in their spectators. As such, then, these connections are testimony to the magnitude of America's often-denied "race problem."

The archeological project of *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* therefore depends on a biographical rendering that later develops into dramatic storytelling, and social complaint. The Kennedys insist on introducing Teddy to the audience through his "achievements as a student leader" (Harrison et al. 2012, 93). He is presented as a brutalized, non-violent citizen: "On Friday night, January 11, my son, a fine citizen who has never been in any trouble whatsoever, was knocked to the ground and beaten in the face, kicked repeatedly in the chest and stomach and dragged in the mud by an Arlington Virginia policeman whose name is Holzer" (Kennedy and Kennedy

1996, 8).[5] As mentioned above, the detail with which the protagonist recounts her son's brutal assault shows conventions of slave autobiographies. However, it is worth noting that, while slave narratives do this to frame the author's legitimacy, in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* its aim is to challenge racial bias. Through mimicry and emotional distancing, Suzanne revises this convention to build empathy and dramatic tension. Hers is not a letter seeking to convince the Governor of her son's reliability. Rather, it is demanding accountability and recognition for the violence and injustice he endured. In each new letter, the protagonist makes reference to the murder of Emmet Till, comparing it to her son's beating and constantly reminding her audience of the existence (and persistence) of racial profiling. This allows for a revision of both reality and fiction which questions the characters' actions and words, and also the real situations that they mimic.[6]

In terms of form, the play is equally transgressive. Seen by Elin Diamond as "a concatenation of dreams, texts, enactment and voices" (2007, 666), *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* makes use of original dramatic strategies that, along with Adrienne Kennedy's surrealist aesthetics, turn the stage into a site of simultaneous witness and repair. Kennedy, as Kolin remarks (2007a, 62), builds "surrealistic dreamscapes [where] the voice of history is so strong" that the characters react physically to the exclusion from the public sphere. These performances serve for her to combat racism onstage (Kolin 2007a, 63), forcing her audience to react to the violence to which they are exposed. Nonetheless, it is language that redeems the protagonists from historical impositions and injustice, in the end, transforming the stage into a site and a theater of memory.

3. Reparative Representations of Uncertain Spaces

Sleep Deprivation Chamber explores the after-effects of memory violence to discern family memories as sources of emotional knowledge. Such memories are the traces of violence that Katharina Schramm claims (2011, 5) have "profound effects on individual consciousness as well as collective identifications." This connection between individual/family memory and public remembrance is

5 This concern is shared by Imani Perry in her epistolary biography *Breathe: A Letter to My Sons*, where the author presents her children as "people. Black boys. People," "not a problem" (2019, 1). A contention similarly presented by Kennedy in, for instance, Suzanne's phrasing "[m]y son has never been in any trouble at all. He is a fine citizen and student at Antioch College" (Kennedy and Kennedy, 1996, 8).

6 The use of repetition in *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* falls close to Suzan-Lori Parks' original dramatic mechanism of repetition with revision, formally known as "Rep&Rev" (Parks 1995a, 9), where the characters progressively revisit their words (and actions), accessing new meaning in their rewriting of the past through literature (Parks 1995b, 4).

similarly examined by Claudia Barnett who, drawing on Chezia Thompson-Cager's analysis of Kennedy's work, identifies in the plays a disruption of the audience's position "as pacified observers or voyeurs" (Thompson-Cager in Barnett 1996, 152). Barnett (1996, 152) believes that, in presenting the audience with violent images, Kennedy "attempts […] to awaken the collective memory of horror they have hitherto repressed—and to awaken it [in pure Artaudian terms (1958)] through the cruelty of recognition." Hence, to answer the questions that opened this study regarding the legitimization of violence and the representation of memory, *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* proposes the solution of exposing racial violence to foster emotional attachment, inscribing subjective forms of remembrance that are never recorded in the fabric of history and doing so violently, to shock society and elicit cultural intervention.

This realization that others are indeed vulnerable is particularly pertinent because family memory, Marianne Hirsch reminds us, "has [a] shared, tentative and vulnerable quality [whose] inherent visuality and contingency is exposed in pictures" that can be shared (1997, 127). That is, family memory—which is what interests Kennedy the most—is always a potential act of creative imagination led by the visual "fragmentary remnants" (Hirsch 1997, 127) of a shared past that require an audience. And, as we see—witness—them, we remember snatches of our collective history, distant echoes, bits and pieces that are reworked and re-signified into narrative to make sense of a disjointed reality. This notion is similarly explored by Olick, who explains that, after the failure of (national) memory, a proliferation of alternative—subjective—memories and stories emerge (2003a, 3). Olick assesses the complex interrelation between public memory, history and the nation to conclude that there exist scattered memories that recall "unitary history," and also subversive testimonies that go beyond cultural relativism to contest a homogenizing rhetoric based on nationalist nostalgia (2003a, 3-4). These alternative accounts, Olick continues, transform memory into "a matter of explicit signs, [rather than] implicit meanings" (2003a, 3), which is the reason why testimony wavers "between victimhood and protest" (Edkins 2003, 9). We no longer make sense of the world through a single narrative that provides us with a shared collective identity and purpose, but rather make use of memory as a narrative platform informed by specific locations and cultures.

Olick's views are particularly relevant in/for theater, as signs in drama constitute the performance itself. The visual and discursive elements of a play are encoded in the cast's actions and can be interpreted as one of those "explicit signs" that are articulated to give concrete (and new) meaning to seemingly distorted truths. These memory traces are not solely incorporated as discourse in the Kennedys' play, but are also embedded in the dramatic spaces and objects onstage. Hence, it is the responsibility of the audience to discover the hidden meanings and stories

that memory sites and artifacts conceal. In the play, these material articulations of collective memory are related to Teddy's assault, which is seen as a public spectacle and concern. This is because violence "lives on and through the monuments [and objects] marking it" (Olick 2018, n.p.), reproducing trauma injuries at a symbolic level. For us to disentangle the complex web of allusions and references made in the play, we must "enter into constructive" conversation with previous memory discourses, though, and reconsider the legitimacy of claims over the erasure and/or commemoration of certain pasts (Olick 2018, n.p.). Thus, as spectators of Adrienne and Adam Kennedy's stage, we become "captive observers," shocked by the brutality on stage, but no longer caught up in the machinery of "a society of the spectacle that manipulates [our] eyes"; knowing, as Geoffrey Hartman (2004, 258) explains, that "[t]he mind's safe house is no longer safe." The fantasy of protection is broken, and it is through second-degree traumatization that we perceive "the geometry of memory" (Olick 2018, n.p.), which identifies a person's degree of participation, either as victim, perpetrator or mere bystander of our own social world.

In *Sleep Deprivation Chamber*, the playwrights retrace family memories to describe the aftermath of police brutality in 1990s America. They do so alternating realistic and surrealistic scenes where "*dream sequences have fragments of the dream acted out onstage*" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 6; italics in original). These alternating realities indirectly comment on the process of trauma writing, and the need to share one's story in order to begin healing: the stage directions read "*[l]ight on Teddy. He remembers as Suzanne writes"* (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 7; italics in original). Hence, Suzanne's letter-writing—just like the Kennedys' playwrighting—helps Teddy heal. For it is in her dreamscape that Suzanne responds to her son's desperate cries for help, offering "the Policeman" who hurt her son symbolic retribution in the form of "poison" (Kennedy and Kennedy 1996, 12).

4. Conclusion

In Kennedy's drama, as Jeanie Forte suggests, the spectator is usually forced to rethink their own position within a culture built around violence and forgetting, condemning structural racism as they reconsider their part in it (1992, 165). Hence, the Kennedys' work is emotionally challenging for both actors and spectators, writers and readers. *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* specifically navigates liminal affects and systemic cruelty to address social concerns that, unfortunately, continue to be as relevant as ever in a world in which Black lives are still lost daily to gunfire and deadly force. In the play, the authors interweave Teddy's testimony with his mother's letters in his defense, exploring the family's most intimate fears and emotions. They also entwine courtroom scenes with oneiric passages that point to the traumatic nature of their memories of both past violence and the violence of memory itself.

It is precisely this interaction between memory and violence that has been the interest of this article, the many ways in which theater, as performance and as a performative act, can help survivors (and the general public) visibly enact trauma and revisit the ghosts of the past in a second act of witnessing, or "co-witnessing" (Kacandes 2001) perhaps, that mobilizes vulnerability and collective memory, and calls for accountability and the social recognition of pain. In exploring the impact of remembering violent pasts and, particularly, the violence of remembering (memory violence) as a creative mechanism, the play makes Black vulnerability visible and brings about feelings of solidarity and, possibly, social change.

In an attempt to build a "connective future" (Hirsch 2017, 223) where the feelings of dislocation and uncertainty that pervade *Sleep Deprivation Chamber* can disappear, the Kennedys resort to memory violence to elicit the spectators' emotional response and construct a performative encounter in which the figures of perpetrator, survivor and bystander are questioned and redefined. The audience unconsciously perform the role of bystanders, perpetrating a violence that is not fictional, but actually played out on many US streets. Similarly, the survivor of trauma becomes a patient observer who dissects the event in writing, and stages it to foster public recognition. The perpetrator is dispossessed of power and becomes a marginal figure as the survivor's story takes the stage. Through this violence of remembering, the playwrights manage to insert unrecorded moments of abuse in our collective imaginary and reclaim gun violence, police abuse and safety deprivation as global, and indeed feminist, concerns (Kendall 2020, 16) that move from staged nightmares, distant courtrooms and individual sleep deprivation chambers into a shared space—the theater, the streets—where Black lives do actually matter, and are represented and recorded in stories (Sontag 2004, 28). If Ron Eyerman (2004, 163) is right to argue that "[f]ounding narratives are about creating, constituting, a collective subject as much as they are about creating an 'imagined' community," then, it is in theater that Adrienne and Adam Kennedy articulate the possibility of reparations, identity formation, cultural recognition and healing; of a fair tomorrow that rises from a disjointed world onstage.

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Adaptation against Myth: Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* and the Violence of Austerity

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Abstract:

This article explores, from the standpoint of socio-political myth-criticism, the processes of revision and adaptation carried out in Gary Owen's 2015 play *Iphigenia in Splott*. The play, a dramatic monologue composed in the rhythms of slam poetry, rewrites the classical Greek myth of Iphigenia in order to denounce the profound injustice of the sacrifices demanded by austerity policies in Europe—and more specifically, in Britain—in the recession following the financial crash of 2008. Reassessing contemporary social, economic and political issues that have resulted in the marginalisation and dehumanisation of the British working class, this study probes the dramatic and mythical artefacts in Owen's harrowing monologue by looking back to Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the classical play which inspires the title of Owen's piece and which serves as the mythical and literary background for the story of Effie. The aim is to demonstrate how Owen's innovative adaptation of the sacrifice of Iphigenia, slurred out in verse, resentful and agonising, speaks out a desperate plea against myth, that is, against a dominant social ethos that legitimises its own violence against the most vulnerable—those who, as in the classical myth, suffer the losses that keep our boats afloat.

Keywords: Adaptation; Gary Owen; myth-criticism; Iphigenia; austerity

1. Introduction

Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott* was first performed at the Sherman Theatre in Cardiff on May 8, 2015. It went on to win, among other accolades, the James Tait Black Prize for Drama at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe and the UK Theatre Award for Best New Play in 2016, earning the acclaim of critics and audiences alike. Furious, sharp and witty, the play is a profoundly shattering monologue composed in the fast-paced rhythms of performance poetry that rewrites the classical Greek myth of Iphigenia in order to denounce the unfairness of austerity politics in Europe—and more specifically, in Britain—after the financial crash of 2008 and the economic crisis that followed. Fully imbricated with contemporary movements in British political theatre, Owen's play probes the limits of adaption, engaging in a process of mythical revision that posits the aesthetic exercise of literary reinvention as a practical tool for political protest. *Iphigenia in Splott* dramatises and exploits socioeconomic concerns and popular narratives that have dehumanised, stigmatised and marginalised the British working class in recent decades, only to then brutally debunk such narratives. It looks back to Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* to continue the age-old trend of mythical adaptation, recreating the story of the tragic Greek princess—the daughter of Agamemnon who was sacrificed to the gods for the sake of Greece—amidst the drama of south Cardiff, where the life of impoverished Effie spirals in a turmoil of drunkenness and tragedy as she suffers the cruelty of welfare cuts in post-recession Wales. Experimental and frantic, Owen's play conveys the futility of an individual's self-determined story against the fatality of the myths that codify the ill-will of the gods. It readjusts, in the form of innovative political drama, the capriciousness of the ancient Greek divinities to cry out desperately against the cruelty of a dominant narrative, the myth of austerity, which legitimises its own violence and injustice.

2. Rewriting Iphigenia: The Politics of Adaptation

Linda Hutcheon famously defined the notion of 'adaptation' as "repetition with variation" (2006, 4) or, what is effectively the same, "repetition without replication" (7). She extended the definition to specify that an adaption needs to be an "extensive transposition" that "always involves both (re-)interpretation and (re-)creation" and constitutes, in fact, "a form of intertextuality," since we necessarily experience adaptations through our knowledge of the source material (7-8). Thus, adaptation implies change, but the alterations carried out with regards to the original are not arbitrary. They are an adjustment. Variation is required

so that the source material is made suitable for the contemporary context. As Komporaly argues, the point is to change the story to make it "relevant for the here and now" (2017, 1).

Komporaly, indeed, goes as far as arguing that the convergence between a pre-existing source and a contemporary aesthetic trend, along with a concern for the ongoing socio-political circumstances, are "at the foundation of theatre making" (2017, 1). This is perhaps especially on point when discussing a kind of political drama that, as Fragkou notes, "saw renewed energy in bridging arts and activism" (2018, 175) with the reactivation of political action after 2011. Such plays—among which Fragkou specifically places Gary Owen's *Iphigenia in Splott*—"directly responded to the cuts using confrontational dramatic voices," and, "although not themselves performing direct street action, […] capitalised on the politics of dissent and anger performed at grassroots level" (2018, 175).[1] Significantly, going back to the issue of dramatic adaption, it may be helpful to note that this kind of intervention on a text "deliberately situates single-authored plays alongside performance work rooted in collaborative practice and devising" (Komporaly 2017, 2). Adaptation emphasises the collective, communitarian practice of theatre, which makes adaptations a particularly fruitful subgenre for the exploration of contemporary political drama. From this perspective, adaptation constitutes a dramatic strategy that helps tie together theatre and political action by providing reinventions and recreations of well-known stories that offer new approaches, often aggressive and dissident, that demand the interrogation of traditional meanings, and that allow for the transgression of boundaries (Komporaly 2017, 4). It follows then, unavoidably, that artistic experimentation cannot be detached from the socio-political consciousness of plays that provide "destabilising and deconstructive readings" and obey "a genuine desire for recontextualisation" (2017, 5). Thus, adaptation can logically be seen as a necessary process which alters the original work to make it applicable and relevant within the contemporary context.

Bearing this notion in mind, it is quite telling that, as Komporaly mentions, even though Ancient Greek theatre has always been present one way or another on international stages, "it has experienced an unprecedented uptake in recent years" in the English-speaking world (2017, 13) thanks to a wide variety of revivals, translations and adaptations that include, of course, *Iphigenia in Splott*. Owen's reinvention of the classical myth premiered in Cardiff in 2015, a year that, for dramatist Dan Rebellato, was "the year of the Greeks" (2015, para

1 Owen's affirmation that he "naively" hoped that the play would "send […] people out into the streets" (Bano 2016, para. 25) reinforces the strong association of theatre and political action that characterises this trend of political drama.

3).[2] For Rebellato, the turn towards classical Athens is explained by austerity politics as Greek tragedies express the archetypal conflict of "human beings against the Gods, and against destiny and against their own fundamental weaknesses" (2015, para 5). These plays "remain political" and mirror the world of austerity economics, "a world of intense, friendless cruelty" (para 6-7). As Rebellato argues, if Euripides himself had been tasked to write a tragedy about the suffering of Greece under the policies of austerity in the year 2015, he would have specifically rewritten *Iphigenia in Aulis*, replacing the insanity of the Gods with the arbitrary, implacable and brutal decisions of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (2015, para 7).[3] Of course, Euripides did not rewrite the tragedy of Iphigenia, but Gary Owen did. While Owen did not explicitly denounce the cruelty of the European troika—the decision-making group comprising the European Commission (EC), the European Central Bank (ECB), and the IMF—that had so recently brought Greece to its knees, he did adapt *Iphigenia in Aulis* to tell a very similar story. The plot description that was used to promote *Iphigenia in Splott* can still be read today on the website of the Sherman Theatre:

> Stumbling down Clifton Street at 11:30 am drunk, Effie is the kind of girl you'd avoid eye contact with, silently passing judgement. We think we know her, but we don't know the half of it. Effie's life spirals through a mess of drink, drugs and drama every night, and a hangover worse than death the next day—till one night gives her the chance to be something more. Effie will break your heart.
> Inspired by the enduring Greek myth, Iphigenia in Splott drives home the high price people pay for society's shortcomings. (2015, n.p.)

2 As Rebellato points out, in 2015 alone, the Almeida opened Robert Icke's retelling of Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, following up with the *The Bacchae*, *Medea*, a reworked *Lysistrata*, and a one-off performance of Homer's *Iliad*, which was also adapted by Mike Pearson for the National Theatre of Wales. Also, there was a re-working of *Medea* at The Gate, following a faux-classical *Idomoneus*; the classical tragedy *A View from the Bridge* in the West End, *Oresteias* at Shakespeare's Globe and Home Manchester, and possibly at the National Theatre of Scotland. Finally, the Unicorn also had a 'Greek season' in 2015, with retellings of the myth of the Minotaur and Odysseus (2015, para 3).

3 To better understand the symbolic identification between the arbitrary gods of mythology and international institutions such as the IMF, Harvey's explanation about the undemocratic practices of the neoliberal state are particularly eloquent: "To guard against their greatest fears—fascism, communism, socialism, authoritarian populism, and even majority rule—the neoliberals have to put strong limits on democratic governance, relying instead upon undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (such as the Federal Reserve or the IMF) to make key decisions" (2005, 69).

Iphigenia in Splott was promoted as an adaptation, a reinvented version of a classical Greek myth that tells the story of a young girl enduring the sacrifices demanded by the policies of austerity in Britain after the economic crisis of 2008. The play rewrites myth to articulate a social and political complaint. It retells an ancient tale to challenge today's dominant discourses and denounce the actual social and personal damage resulting from such political and socioeconomic discourses and policies. The result of this process of adaptation is the story of Effie, told in her own angry, inappropriate and upsetting words. It is a first-person, self-mythologising protest that seeks to elevate and dignify through the reinvention of myth—or rather, in this case, through the debunking of myth—the sacrifices endured by those who have suffered and are still suffering the cuts and losses that guarantee the growth and profit of others. Owen's adaptation is overtly political, but quite significantly, so too is the myth of Iphigenia. Despite the efforts to recontextualise Effie's tragic fate, Owen's alterations of the foundations of Euripides's text is not too abrupt. It continues—perhaps exacerbates—the ongoing transformation process that accompanies the evolution of myth across a never-ending string of literary representations.

Euripides's *Iphigenia in Aulis* was first produced posthumously at the Great Dionysian festival in 405 BCE, and most scholars today agree that it is likely that the Greek tragedian left the play unfinished, and that the text was completed by his son, who staged it one year after the author's death. It is also commonly accepted that, at some point, perhaps at the end of antiquity, the last pages of the play were lost and probably rewritten by someone else (Grene and Lattimore 2013, 87). As is well known in terms of the plot, the play enacts what Grene and Lattimore call "one of the most harrowing episodes in the tragic vicissitudes of the house of Pelopids, the royal dynasty of Argos" (2013, 88) through its dramatization of the myth of terrible cruelty:

> When the Greek armies under the command of Agamemnon gathered at Aulis in order to sail against Troy, they were held up by adverse winds. The Greek seer Calchas declared that they would be able to sail only if Iphigenia were sacrificed to Artemis; and Agamemnon, after some hesitation, agreed. The maiden was put to death by her father in front of the whole Greek army—though, according to some versions, at the very last moment the goddess miraculously rescued her and substituted a deer. (2013, 88)

From the critical standpoint of myth-criticism—which is concerned with how myths are both perpetuated and inevitably transformed over time—it is crucial to understand that Euripides's play itself constitutes an instance of mythical adaptation: it re-enacts a story that Homer had previously narrated, and that

Hesiod and Aeschylus, among others, had already poeticised. In rewriting the story, Euripides makes a series of dramatic and aesthetic choices that effectively give a particular shape to the well-known myth. He chooses a specific focus and concentrates on a single episode: the sacrifice of Iphigenia, which is dramatised, as Grene and Lattimore explain, "with a distinctive mixture of psychological intensity, pathos, irony, and astonishing reversals" (2013, 89). In this regard, it is worth noting that Euripides follows the tradition of the "'surviving' Iphigenia" (Hulton 1962, 364)—a tradition that, as Hulton explained, generated "a mass of legend" but is not the one that is most prominent in drama (1962, 364). This argument, of course, disregards the claim that, as argued by Grene and Lattimore, "the play, as presented in 405 BCE, probably ended at line 1531 with Iphigenia leaving the stage for her death and the chorus acclaiming her decision" (2013, 89), and instead accepts as canonical the ending of the manuscript in which a messenger recounts the girl's miraculous rescue when a doe is sacrificed in her stead on Artemis's altar. Nevertheless, whether the 'original' play follows, or not, the current of the 'surviving Iphigenia,' Hulton's explanation recognises divergent traditions in the dramaturgy enacting the myth, which allows for the argument that the dramatic performance of the myth constitutes—even in the Greek sources—a case of adaptation and reinterpretation. This notion is fundamental to critically explore how the myth, in the shape of drama, has been adjusted to specific contexts throughout the centuries. Following the previously established notion that the practice of dramatic adaption has proved particularly fertile for the connection of theatre and politics, looking at the Greek source through the lens of mythical reinterpretation might contribute to a more solid understanding of the myth of Iphigenia from an eminently political standpoint, which in turn can help to assess its present relevance in the context of contemporary British political drama.

In this regard, Sorum's argument concerning mythical adaption in Euripides is very eloquent. She supports her study of *Iphigenia in Aulis* with the notion that Greek tragedies "exploit the tension that arises between the myth and the dramatisation of the particular moment," which, she points out, is crystalised in Euripidean drama through the tension between an accepted version of myth and the dramatic fiction itself, which becomes somehow self-conscious in it "literary" nature (1992, 529). In *Iphigenia in Aulis*, the weight of myth is undeniable, as Euripides's text, in its merging of the epic and the tragic, combines two mythological traditions: the stories of the Trojan War and those of the House of Agamemnon. As Sorum explains, "[the] combination of the two stories makes explicit both the past and future of the dramatic fiction" (1992, 530). The audience knows what came before, and what will inevitably happen later. However, as previously suggested, "the stage action of the drama […] focuses only on the moment in which Agamemnon must choose whether or not to proceed with the sacrifice of

his daughter. This moment seems critical, for the choice will determine whether or not the expedition will sail, the war will take place, and Agamemnon will return to a hostile home" (Sorum 1992, 530). The play, again and again, emphasises moments of choice. Characters change their minds so frequently that, as is well known, Aristotle criticised the play's alleged inconsistency in his *Poetics* with the argument that "the girl who beseeches is in no way like her later self" (quoted in Moorwood 2001, 607). The significance of Iphigenia's change of mind will be addressed later on, as part of the discussion about the political intricacies of Gary Owen's adaption. However, at this point, it seems crucial to follow Sorum's argument that, "when Iphigenia begs her father to spare her, it is the mythological and poetic reality that she must seek to change as well as her father's mind" (1992, 538-9). Her "beseeching" then, to quote Aristotle, establishes the possibility of an alternative story, of the dramatic fiction becoming "antimythical" (Sorum 1992, 536). However, Iphigenia's final embracing of death reconciles dramatic fiction and mythical tradition (1992, 542), as also happens when Effie changes her mind at the end of *Iphigenia in Splott*. Both texts raise the possibility of a different version of the story, of modifying mythical tradition through the action of dramatic fiction. In doing so, both Euripides's and Owen's plays in effect reshape the myth; but far from simply rejecting tradition, both texts adopt and exploit it to denounce the inherently violent ethics which, in the myth, objectify and condemn the most vulnerable among us.

It is indeed noteworthy that, while *Iphigenia in Aulis* does not seem to have been one of Euripides's most popular plays during antiquity, it has proven to be one of his most successful in the contemporary world (Grene and Lattimore 2013, 90). As explained by Greene and Lattimore, it was first translated into English by Lady Jane Lumley in 1558, and there have been many relevant theatrical versions from the 17th century onwards, including plays by Racine, Schiller, Hauptmann, Rexroth, and even Lorca, who drafted but never finished a piece (2013, 91). In addition to dramatic renderings, over the centuries, the sacrifice of Iphigenia has also drawn the attention of painters, composers, and filmmakers, among others.[4] To better contextualise Gary Owen's adaption, however, one must consider the play's continued vitality onstage in the 21st century in the Anglophone context, recent years having seen contemporary

4 Some relevant examples listed by Grene and Lattimore (2013, 90-91) are paintings by Domenichino (1609), Giovanni Battista Tiepolo and his son Giovanni Domenico Tiepolo, Jan Steen (1671), Jacques-Louis David (1819), Mark Rothko (1942) and Paul Delvaux (1968). They also mention operas by Domenico Scarlatti (1713), Christoph Willibald Gluck (1774) and Luigi Cherubini (1782), along with many 20th-century versions like Isadora Duncan's ballet (1905), H.D.'s choral songs (1915), Zbigniew Herbert's poem (1957) and Michael Cocayannis's film (1977).

rewritings of Euripides's classic as inspiring and thought-provoking as Neil LaBute's short play *Iphigenia in Orem* (2000), Caridad Svich's multimedia play *Iphigenia Crash Land Falls on the Neon Shell That Was Once Her Heart (a rave fable)* (2004) and Charles L. Mee's *Iphigenia 2.0* (2007) (Grene and Lattimore 2013, 91). For Grene and Lattimore, the continued vivacity and energy of Iphigenia's story in contemporary drama is explained by the fact that "as long as audiences continue to be fascinated by the violence of men against women, the bloodthirstiness of war, and the conflict between moral nobility and sordid utilitarianism, *Iphigenia in Aulis* will surely remain popular" (2013, 91). This certainly sounds plausible, but Owen's 2015 *Iphigenia in Splott* does not seem to be specifically about the violence of men against women, even though it is a man who victimises Effie; or about the bloodthirstiness of war, even though dead and amputee soldiers, victims of the war in Afghanistan, appear in the play. Neither does the play seem overly concerned with moral nobility, even though Effie, self-defined as a "stupid slag" and a "nasty skank" (Owen 2015, 1), proves to be very noble in her final act of self-sacrifice. Perhaps more evidently, Owen's play is about the sordid utilitarianism that objectifies individuals for the sake of a supposed common good that, like the ancient myth that forces the hand of dramatic fiction, legitimises violence against the weakest and most defenceless.

3. Ferocious Tragedy: The Pathos of Effie's Complaint

Effie's monologue begins as she directly confronts the audience, addressing the spectators unapologetically and rather disdainfully. She accuses them of just "sitting back, taking it easy" as they wait for her to impress and amaze them (2015, 1). She crudely corrects their expectations: "You have got it back to front, arse about it, and your up side / Is definitely down" (1). She immediately explains what she means, revealing the fact that the audience's misconceptions run deeper than one may initially suspect: "See I know what you think / When you see me pissed first thing wandering around. You think – / Stupid slag. Nasty skank. / But guess what? Tonight / You all are here to give thanks / To me" (1). Her words aim to shock the spectators, to warn them, to agitate them as she challenges their prejudices: "Yeah I know it's a shock. / But you lot, every single one / You're in my debt. / And tonight – boys and girls, ladies and gents – / I've come to collect" (2015, 1).

Effie's attitude resounds with the echoes of what Sierz termed 'in-yer-face theatre,' which he described as "any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message" (2014, Ch. 1). 'In-yer-face' plays can do this in varied ways: they may use shock tactics, an unexpected tone or structure; they can be extremely experimental or smash taboos; but in every case,

this kind of theatre creates discomfort, gets under the skin, attacks the audience's prejudices and forces them to confront feelings and ideas that are painful and unpleasant (2014, Ch. 1). *Iphigenia in Splott* meets these criteria squarely and, even though Sierz's book predates Owen's play, in a previous study, the critic had pointedly defined Owen's English-language work as "an example of British new writing, all verbal acrobatics and in-yer-face ferocity" (2011, 158). Of course, 'in-yer-face' drama sprang up as a trend in contemporary British theatre in the 90s when "a host of plays by young writers used explicit and directly confrontational material to explore the way we live and feel" (Sierz 2014: Ch. 1). Owen's play was written and performed almost two decades later, and, as previously argued, it is best inscribed within the movement of political drama that surged in Britain after the 2008 recession. Nonetheless, the essential fury and combativeness of 'in-yer-face' theatre resonate loudly in Effie's enraged monologue.

Ben Brantley, a critic on the New York Times, wrote in his review of the play that "it's not easy for a theatregoer to be the focus of so much rage and resentment" (2017, n.p.)—a very acute observation that reveals how Owen's adaptation engages the audience. In her analysis of Owen's very well-known play *Ghost City* (2004), Kbłowska-Ławniczak explains that Owen's drama exposes the audience to another's inexpressible suffering, involving both subject and spectators in the recognition of that suffering, and thus "infecting" the audience with "a sense of guilt" that forces them to probe their "susceptibility towards suffering and injustice" (2014, para 7). Such is the discomfort created by Effie's furious tragic monologue. *Iphigenia in Splott* forces the audience to confront human cruelty by recognising in their own indifference just such cruelty. The emotional trouble provoked by the play stems from the audience themselves confronting the truth contained in Effie's tragedy. As the character's initial words make explicit: the audience is there to give thanks. They owe Effie, and, as she warns them, that news, in line with classical 'in-yer-face' theatre, will come as a shock to the spectators (Owen 2015, 1).

Angelaki (2017) argues that "theatres of crisis"—plays produced on the British stage after 2000, especially in the post-recession period after 2010, which denounce how the individualism promoted by neoliberalism has colonised every aspect of human experience (5)—are plays that disturb so they might disrupt "first our expectations, then the dominant social and political narratives of neoliberalism and governmentality" (3). They are plays that, as explained in the previous section of this essay, exist in the space between the aesthetic and the social, connecting arts and politics, and allowing a new form of social performance where adaptation and experimentation coalesce to shock the audience into action or, at least, towards recognition. One way *Iphigenia in Splott* partakes in this trend is through a very specific form of formal and aesthetic experimentation: what critic Lyn Gardner refers to as the play's "dirty poetry" (2016, n.p.).

Effie's monologue is written in verse. It resounds unexpectedly with the flexible rhythms and the anger of slam poetry, a very popular genre—for some "the largest and most influential social/literary arts movement of our age" (Smith and Kraynak 2009, 24)—that, anecdotally, for Harold Bloom was nothing if not "the death of art" (qtuoted in Sommers-Willet 2014, 2). Of course, the term 'slam poetry' refers to a specific kind of poetic event in which the audience's attention is drawn to the presentation of "poetry that's been composed, polished, and rehearsed for the purpose of being performed" (Smith and Kraynak 2009, 3). Very often, in this kind of event slam poets present their work in the context of a competition, but what is most relevant to appreciating the tone and form of Effie's monologue is a consideration of slam poetry's "grudge" (Sommers-Willet 2014, 1), that is, the social protest typically found in such poetry, uttered against dominant culture in the voice of the marginalised. Sommers-Willet points out that in slam poetry, there is a "sense of subalternity" (2014, 3), also found in the broader and more diffused realm of spoken-word poetry,[5] that is patent in the words of Effie. Owen's text is not performance poetry, but it is a piece of drama that reverberates with the cadence of a poetry of protest that shows resistance to dominant public culture, and where the form and rhythm of verse are effectively used to strengthen dramatic pathos:

> And he pulls his jeans down. And his legs
> Are lovely
> But one of them
> Stops.
> At the knee.
> He sits back kick off his jeans and
> His right leg. It's plastic from the knee down.
> He gets to work on the buckles.
> Pulls the plastic free
> And something comes out.
> A stump of flesh, that just ends.
> The skin folds over

5 Fowler explains that contemporary British poets that perform their poetry tend to reject being categorised as 'performance poets,' considering the term 'spoken word poet' to be reductionist (2016, 177). As she notes, 'spoken word poetry' is often a contested category, as it implies a separateness of oral and printed poetry that touches on the issue of literary status, "pointing to a long-standing poetic injustice in Britain whereby influential publishing houses rarely endorse poetry associated with the performance scene" (2016, 177). This lack of parity is of course part of a longer, unresolved argument about what poetry is and who is it for (2016, 177).

To a red, angry ridge,
Black stitch marks where they stuck
The flaps of skin together.
How'd it happen? (Owen 2015, 19-20)

Effie voices her pain in verse and swear words,[6] the rhythm and intensity fluctuating along with her hope and anger. Performance poetry usually rallies the audience around its liberal politics and its support for marginalised groups and identities (Sommers-Willet 2014, 2), but the frantic, aggrieved poetry coming out of Effie's mouth is much less benevolent with the spectators. Echoing with the fury of 'in-yer-face' drama, Effie's monologue provokes alarm and troubles the emotions of the audience. She grabs the audience by the neck as she forces them to listen to her first-person, heart-wrenching account of the death of her premature daughter:

I hear my baby girl cry—
—and I hear her stop
And they take her
The two of them
Bent over this tiny scrap
They've got a mask over her face
They're pounding on her chest
They're pulling needles out of plastic
Trying to stick 'em in her
But she's too small
She's too small […]
They're fighting
They're fighting with everything they got
To keep her with me.
And they fight
And they fight
They fight for so long.
And then
They stop. (Owen 2015, 58-59)

6 A good example of how the cadence of verse mixes with Effie's rough, often-shocking language can be observed in the following lines: "The crowd shifts, / And the gang he's got surrounding him move / And I can see the guy / Head to foot. / And what I see is— / —the fucker's on crutches. / And he sees me see. / He sees me, laugh. / At him, and, at me, / trying to lure him to the dance floor, / When the poor fucker can't walk. / So I walk, for him. / All the posturing and posing gone. / I put my arms round his neck. / I say, / Hello, you. / And I snog his fucking face off" (Owen 2015, 16).

The abruptness of the free verse, the faltering rhythm, the constant repetition of words and structures, and the lack of punctuation evoke the anguish of a woman choking with excruciating, ineffable pain. The audience, addressed directly, is forced to see the violence of the system that guarantees their wellbeing. Confronted with another's suffering, the spectators have no choice but to engage and then to respond with shame and guilt when they realise that Effie is right. Like the mythical Iphigenia, her sacrifice has saved every one of us, and by recognising in her sorrow the violence of our social arrangement, we either take responsibility for her loss, or we partake willingly in the cruelty of the gods that have condemned her.

4. Against Austerity: Resisting the Violence of Myth

As Effie insists from the very beginning of her story, we all know who she is, where she lives, and what part of society she belongs to. She knows that we know, and she knows what we think of her. She admonishes us, saying: "I strut down the street, and your eyes dive for the ground / Face on I'm too much for you to handle" (Owen 2015, 1). Her aggression toward the audience—"I live my life a million miles an hour, do what I like, when I like, and / Oh look, I've got—this[7]—for you, if you can't deal with it" (2015, 2)—mixes with very specific details describing the harsh conditions of life in her neighbourhood: "Nan says, this place used to have everything you need / Shops are gone, bingo hall burned, pubs closed, doctors shut, / STAR centre getting pulled down and more flats thrown up. / She says we used to live. You could live here and live well. / Now they're stacking us up, and we're supposed to just exist" (2).

As Owen himself explains in an interview, the social provision cuts described in the play expressively convey a very specific sense of place. Splott, in Owen's words, is a neighbourhood in Cardiff where people "are struggling and don't have much money, where people are particularly dependent on public services, and in which those public services are being withdrawn" (Bano 2016, para 17). As he clarifies, "almost everything that's mentioned in the play about libraries closing and play centres being shut down are just literal things that are happening in Splot right now" (17). Indeed, as Internet blogger and theatre critic Megan Vaughan writes in a rather critical appraisal of Owen's play, Effie "ha[s] been beaten into a hopeless routine by geography and poverty and, longer ago, by the slow murder of British industry" (2016, para. 3). Deindustrialisation,

7 A footnote in the play explains: "[Effie] finds some cute way to give the audience the finger" (Owen 2015, 2). The physical insult works well as a particularly eloquent metaphor to express how Effie feels about the theatre-goers listening to her story.

along with the withdrawal of the state and their disastrous consequences for the working class adopt a mythical shape in Owen's verse—the play, after all, adapts Euripides and mythologises Effie—but the text's strong sense of place remains untouched in Effie's eerie description of Cardiff's post-industrial landscape. As she walks down busy roads that "have gone quiet for the night," she moves "past the big Tescos, past David Lloyd / To all the massive factories like / Crashed spaceships, the metal mountains, / Train tracks from nowhere, cranes and pipes and chimney stacks" (Owen 2015, 24-25). Movingly, she recognises that the ghostly wasteland is scary, but it retains a touch of magic: "a couple of gypsy ponies find me, / Wander up the verge, bump their big heads against mine, telling me / Keep going, you'll be fine" (2015, 25).

The immediate social and economic contexts of the play are the post-2010 cuts implemented by the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Coalition government as part of their austerity programme, which, while very much in line with the politics of austerity dictated across the European Union by the EC, the ECB and the IMF, represented, in the British context, "an extreme form of Thatcherism […] based on a neoliberal commitment to minimising the state as far as possible" (Rebellato 2015, para. 8). For authors such as Cooper and Whyte, the austerity economics that followed the financial crash of 2008 was precisely this, an opportunity to advance the neoliberal policies that, since the early 1980s, had promoted growth through private investment and deregulating the movement of capital (2017b, 20). The exacerbation of such policies in the recession years—a period that has been termed 'austerity Britain'—resulted, in their opinion, in "a suite of irrevocable reforms to welfare benefits, housing, pensions, higher education, privatisation and so forth" (2017b, 20). Of course, as McKenzie argues, these cuts were particularly drastic in terms of unemployment benefit, disability benefit, income support and housing benefit, which aggravated the desperate situation of families and communities that were already in a very dire situation before the crisis (2015, 10). As Owen himself argues, the most vulnerable are "the ones that face the worst cuts even though they're the least able to take them" (Bano 2016, para. 17)—a dismal circumstance which is particularly desperate in Splott, where people "are very, very dependent on public services—libraries, community centres, Sure Start—and all these things are being threatened" (Owen, quoted in Trueman 2016, para. 3).

Effie is of course a victim of these policies, but it takes a while for the audience to recognise her as such. Unemployed, living off 20p noodles and only getting through the week thanks to a never-ending cycle of hangovers that allow her "an escape from real life" (Owen 2015, 5), Effie very much fits the stereotype of the demonised working-class girl. As Owen Jones has famously argued, the working class in Britain was disarticulated by Thatcher's rampant neoliberalism, being

degraded from a proud, rebellious and syndicated group to a people that was unemployed, dependent and—very expressively depicted in how Effie is presented to the reputable audience—the victim of an integral form of class hatred that has become part of respectable modern British culture (Jones 2011, 6). Perhaps, in terms of the audience of *Iphigenia in Splott*, hatred is too strong a word, but as Effie introduces herself, describing in gruesome detail her daily routine, the character certainly seems off-putting. She irreverently informs the audience: "See the only way I get through the week is a cycle of hangovers / And I'm not talking, bit of a baddy head here. / I'm talking proper, brain-shredding three day bastards" (Owen 2015, 3). Once again, the specificities in her sordid speech effectively ground the text in a very specific time and place: "I'm talking hangovers that start, you're under a table at Chicken Cottage, / You've already chucked so much you're just heaving big empty sick-flavoured burps, till / Some secret trapdoor springs open in your guts / And this thick green gloop shoots out your gob / This sour liquorice juice, pints and pints of it" (2015, 3). The attempt to offend and disgust the audience is deliberate and very well-founded on the spectators' prejudices: Effie feels no shame in admitting that, when she wakes up after a night of heavy drinking and partying, she does so "in a stranger's bed, or a bathroom floor, or police cell" (2015, 3). Yet, a disquieting hint of misery transpires in her words when she admits that her drinking spree sorts out half of her week,

> Because you'll be day one in bed, crying and wishing you were dead,
> Onto the settee for day two, sweating into your duvet, eating twenty pee noodles, watching whatever shit comes on Dave ja vu.
> And on the third day you rise, and put yourself back together; start with a scalding hot bath mid morning to lift the shit from your pores then a ten hour programme of sanding down surfaces, picking, plucking, painting before you're ready to again. (Owen 2015, 4)

Effie fits perfectly with what McKenzie has described as "the myth of the benefit scrounger" so often portrayed in what she calls "poverty porn" narratives (2015, 12). As she explains, it has become a sort of default, and quite a popular opinion, "that those who live on council housing estates in the UK are overly dependent on welfare and state benefits, because of their own 'lifestyle choices,' using taxpayers' hard-earned money seemingly to live the life of 'Riley,' which often includes taking drugs, drinking alcohol and generally having a great time" (2015, 12). At the same time, Burnett refers to TV programmes like "Benefits Street" and "Immigration Street," in which individuals are subjected to ridicule and contempt, becoming, as a result, victims of class hatred precisely because the blame for the economic crisis is placed on the victims (2017, 217). Owen's play,

as argued, begins by feeding into that popular opinion, which is ingrained in its audience's prejudices. It reinforces that bias; it builds up the myth of the scrounger and engages spectators by strengthening a set of preconceptions that reaffirm their middle-class worldview in a way that feels reassuring and comforting. Then, of course, it pulls the rug out from under their comfortable feet when through the story of Effie's tragedy it reveals that, as McKenzie demonstrates, a life of unemployment and benefit claiming "has always meant a life of poverty, insecurity, and precarity" (2015, 13).

Unmaking the myth of the benefit scrounger is a political action, the impact of which should not be underestimated. As Clarke explains, in advanced democratic societies, "the exclusion of a substantial proportion of the population from economic and political power depends on the ability of dominant groups to determine how the less fortunate are perceived and to limit empathy with them" (2013, 325). Such is then the function of the myth. Breaking down the myth entails delegitimising the basis of our modern democratic societies by revealing the violence that supports the comfort of some at the cost of the suffering of others. The effect of the myth is quite evident. It presents unemployment and poverty, as Jones writes, not as flaws within capitalism, but as "the consequences of personal behaviour, individual defects, and even choice" (Jones 2011, 10).[8] This is an essential ideological foundation of the neoliberal state, as Harvey explains:

> While personal and individual freedom in the marketplace is guaranteed, each individual is held responsible and accountable for his or her own actions and well-being. This principle extends into the realms of welfare, education, health care, and even pensions […]. Individual success or failure are interpreted in terms of entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings […] rather than being attributed to any systemic property (such as class exclusions usually attributed to capitalism). (2005, 65-66)

The myth of the scrounger—supposing that Effie is telling the truth when she declares, "I live my life a million miles an hour, do what I like, when I like" (Owen 2015, 2)—certainly reinforces the conviction that personal failure can be

8 This is not only a generalised opinion reinforced by neoliberal dominant discourses and media. It is written policy. When it appeared in the Breakdown Britain report, that is, the document that supported many of the welfare cuts implemented by Iain Duncan-Smith, Conservative Party Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (2010-2016), there existed in Britain five poverty drivers: family breakdown; welfare dependency; educational failure; addiction to drugs and alcohol; and serious personal debt. As McKenzie notes, "all of this squarely puts the problems of society on the individual […]. It is personal failure and 'bad behaviour' that has broken Britain" (2015, 11).

attributed to personal failings. The consequence of this is that the victim—more and more exposed to poverty as the state withdraws from providing health care, education or social services—is often blamed for their own suffering (Harvey 2005, 76). Translated to mythical terms, Iphigenia, since she chooses to die to save her father's boats in the classical version of the story, is the only one to blame for her own tragic fate.

And so is Effie, apparently. In Owen's contemporary political adaptation, Iphigenia is placed alone upon the stage. She is the left-behind, isolated individual in a post-industrial city in post-austerity Britain. Like in Euripides's play, Effie faces a choice. When her premature baby dies in an ill-equipped ambulance while they are being transferred to another hospital because there are not enough beds in special care, Effie decides to "make / The fuckers / Pay" (2015, 60). She is guaranteed several hundred thousand pounds in compensation, and she realises what that could mean: "Get me a house. / Get me a car. / Get me by; for years and years" (2015, 61). She is thus promised the new, right kind of aspiration in the neoliberal state, that being, "individual self-enrichment: [the chance] to scramble up the social ladder and become middle class" (Jones 2011, 10). It is a tragic, perverse spin on the myth of the scrounger in the way that it confirms the words of Effie's boyfriend when he tries to convince her to have a baby: "Once you got a kid, you're sorted you get / Child allowance, loads of shit. / Kid's basically a fucking meal ticket" (Owen 2015, 43). Owen's undermining of the popular narrative that dehumanises people on benefits is striking in its cruelty: the harsh conditions of Effie's life are most likely the cause of her going into labour early, and the austerity cuts deny her the standard of healthcare that could have saved her daughter.[9] The audience is forced to face the tragic consequences of Effie's desperate situation, to listen to the agony in her soliloquy, to contemplate the irony of this 'benefit scrounger' getting the chance to sort out her life by collecting several hundred thousand pounds as compensation for the death of her baby girl—the damage done by the state that has abandoned her.

Effie becomes Iphigenia at this moment. As in Euripides's tragedy, she chooses to surrender to myth. She succumbs to the ethical framework that not only permits but encourages and legitimises her sacrifice when she drops the case against the hospital after she speaks with the midwife who was alone on her shift and thus could not assist her the night her baby was born. The midwife

9 According to data from Eurostat and the 'Inequalities in Child Health' report published in 2013 by the BMA Board of Science, Mack explains: "The UK infant (0 to 1 years) mortality rate, at around four deaths per 1000 births in 2014, is higher than all but two of the nineteen Euro area member states. About half of these deaths are linked to short gestation and low birth weight, both of which are highly associated with deprivation" (2017, 89).

laments that she could not have saved Effie's child even if she had been able to assist her, because what Effie's premature daughter needed was "to be born in hospital. In a special care unit. / Where we'd've had the facilities, to look after her" (Owen 2015, 62). But Effie's baby was born in an ambulance because, as the midwife explains, "we didn't have a special care bed left. / We don't have as many special care beds as we used to / Cos of all these cuts" (2015, 62). Then, she presents Effie with a terrible choice: "If we pay you, we'll have to cut more. / And more old people will die before they should. / More young people will never get a chance to live. / And more mums, just like you, will lose—" (2015, 62).

For the play's director Rachel O'Riordan, the NHS's whole ethos is that "the fit and able can support and look after those who aren't fit and able" (Cooper 2016, para. 22). The play, however, presents the opposite ethos—the ethos of the myth of Iphigenia, what Habash defines as a specific kind of *nomos*, an ethical context that operates as "an almighty power that legitimates its own violence" (2017, 177). Habash refers to the words of the Chorus in Euripides's play as they comment on the sacrifice of Iphigenia: "Oh, where now has the countenance / of Modesty or Virtue / any strength, / when the blasphemer rules, / and heedless men / thrust Virtue behind them, / when Lawlessness rules law, /and no man competes with his neighbour / to avoid the ill-will of the gods?" (Grene and Lattimore 2013, 1089-1097). If the law, that is, if the ethical context—myth, the will of the gods—is ruled by lawlessness, then it becomes true that, as Judith Butler wrote in her commentary on Antigone, "doing the right thing according to established law is precisely what must be suspended in order to dissolve a body of established law that is unjust" (quoted in Habash 2017, 180). From this alone may follow the subjectification of an individual that has been commodified.

Effie, like Iphigenia, decides to sacrifice herself for the greater good. She simultaneously takes on Agamemnon's role, losing her daughter for the sake of the community. Her tragedy bears the weight of the myth of austerity, "a kind of smash and grab politics […] supported by a deeply moral and ideological set of principles […] a narrative that is apparently more plausible and more complex than class domination; a narrative that brings us all together around a common sense: we maxed out our credit card; we are all in this together; and we all stand to gain after the dust has cleared" (Copper and White 2017, 22). But there is nothing to gain for Effie. Like the version of Iphigenia recreated in Euripides's text, Effie abruptly changes her mind about retribution in a second act of sacrifice in favour of her ethical context: "I don't, make anyone pay. / Because there are years and years ahead of me / That were gonna be filled with loving her, / And getting loved back" (Owen, 2015, 64). The weight of her sorrow is somehow lifted by her trust in the myth that has demanded the sacrifice, through her belief that, in truth, we are all in this together. She admits that she thinks about committing suicide, about taking

"that broken brick road to the sea / Not a mile away" (2015, 64). But she keeps going, sustained by the knowledge that her loss has saved our boats:

> I took this pain,
> And saved every one of you, from suffering the same.
> Your baby gets sick, she gets well
> Because of me. Your mum gets ill
> She gets healed, because of me and still:
> You see me, pissed first thing wandering home
> And all you think is, stupid slag. Nasty skank.
> When what you should be thinking is,
> Christ Effie, thanks. You took the cut, for all of us. (2015, 64)

For Cooper and Whyte, "the purpose of the violence of austerity is not simply to stabilise the economic system in the aftermath of the financial crisis but to stabilise it in a particular form that enables the rich to sustain opportunities for wealth generation" (2017b, 15). In the realm of mythical adaptation, the politics of austerity guarantee that the Greek kings will get to sail their boats, fight and eventually win their war—but their prosperity relies on the suffering of the most vulnerable, who support the weight of ensuring the success of a society from which they have been marginalised. The myths of austerity naturalise the violence within our communities. The myth of Iphigenia allows us to recognise the cruelty of a world where the fate of some is in the hands of arbitrarily and whimsical divinities. Owen's adaptation of Euripides's play corroborates Rebellato's assessment that the cruelty of myth is the same, whether the gods sit in Brussels or Parnassus, Frankfurt or Olympus (2015, para 10).

5. Conclusions

After the analysis conducted so far, the question remains as to whether Effie's final sacrifice in renouncing her right to claim damages is an act of free choice or an unwilling defeat in the face of the inevitability of a myth that, as in Euripides's play, determines the past and future of her story. Habash argues that, in Euripides's play, "Iphigenia decides to die after her begging fails to convince her father (1211–52), after Agamemnon reasserts the need for the sacrifice (1255–75), and after Achilles does not succeed in his attempt to rescue her and is violently rejected by the Greek army for his effort (1345–70)" (2017, 171). She chooses to die after she is told that she must die; that is, "her will is dictated from the outside" (2017, 172). She becomes an active subject in the making of a choice, but that choice is "performed in the name of a nomos

that does not problematise the violence against her body and her death. She is immediately 'sucked' into social normativity" (2017, 173). She is also sucked into the dynamics of a myth that trumps dramatic fiction: she must die, for the boats must sail and Troy must fall. Myth goes on, unperturbed.

Effie is also "sucked" into the dynamics of myth when she makes her final sacrifice because myth is the ethical framework that legitimises her suffering. Myth is the greater good. Myth is austerity economics. Myth is the inevitable "ill-will" of the gods, against which Effie futilely attempts to rebel. Upon revisiting the play, it is heart-breaking to notice how Effie interprets the events leading up to her unexpected pregnancy as "fate" (Owen 2015, 18), as her finally finding "what [she is] for" (2015, 26). The moment in Owen's adaption when "nasty skank" Effie becomes the "savior of Greece" (Grene and Lattimore 2013, 1383) is the moment that denounces the impossibility of a different story. At the end of the play, Effie wanders home, past "the pubs that shut, the library they closed, / The swimming pool got knocked down, / The bingo hall they burned / So they could turn it into flat" (Owen, 2015, 64). She contemplates the many losses that the myth of austerity has imposed on her community, realising that there are "more and more people packed in this little plot of land, / While they cut everything we need to make a life" (2015, 64). In her final words, as she denounces the fact that "it's always places like this / And people like us who have to take it, / When the time for cutting comes" (2015, 65), and poses a question for the audience: "And I wonder: just how long / Are we gonna have to take it for? / And I wonder – / What is gonna happen /When we can't take it any more? (2015, 65).

Some critics have deemed these last words "the start of a revolution" (Hayton 2015, para. 4), prompting the left-wing oriented, middle-class theatre audience to feel fear rather than empathy towards Effie. However, there is also the possibility of understanding the ending of Effie's monologue as an honest question. There is also the possibility of openly wondering what would happen when the most vulnerable cannot take it any longer. Perhaps, then, the story could change, the boats not sail, and Greece not be saved. Myth could be rewritten, and the ethical context rebuilt. For if the myth is remade, the social structures it sustains will predictably fall. From this perspective, in consequence, a myth-critical appraisal of *Iphigenia in Splott* is particularly enriching. Owen's play is an overtly political adaptation of a classical tragedy, very much in line with dominant trends in Britain's contemporary theatre of crisis. But it adds to dramatic adaption an exercise in mythical revision that bridges mythopoeia and political activism. The play construes its protagonist upon the dehumanising myths of neoliberal policies—such as the myth of the benefit scrounger—only to debunk these myths when Effie transforms from foulmouthed chav to mythical princess Iphigenia. Then, Owen dramatises the futile struggle of Iphigenia against

the broader mythical paradigm that sustains the ethos of contemporary Britain. For Cooper and Whyte, to fight austerity means to ensure that "its violence is not normalised or taken for granted as a legitimate political strategy" (2017b, 25). *Iphigenia in Splott*, on the other hand, does precisely that. It unmakes the austerity narrative of the recession period, offering as an alternative an attempted struggle, an outspoken recognition of the illicit violence of a myth that the play refuses to accept in its legitimation of unjust politics.

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Section 4.
Activating Community:
From Satire to Location

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An Exploration into the Satiric Significance of Abuse in Selected Nigerian Drama

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Abstract:

A general survey of the contemporary Nigerian theatre and drama reveals that several contemporary Nigerian dramatists have harnessed the art of abuse—invectives—as a device for conveying meanings in their works and achieving their satiric goals. These dramatists create characters that engage abuse to articulate the thematic concerns of their drama, accentuate the conflicts in them, and establish the socio-cultural and political setting of their drama. Although extant works on satiric plays have focused on the use of language, and other satiric devices such as grotesque, irony, burlesque, innuendo, sarcasm, among others (Adeoti 1994; Adenigbo & Alugbin 2020; Mireku-Gyimah 2013; Nyamekye & Debrah 2016), sufficient scholarly attention has not been given to the art of abuse as a trope in Nigerian drama. The article explores the artistic significance of abuse and its forms in selected works of two contemporary Nigerian dramatists: Femi Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath* (2002) and Ola Rotimi's *Who is a Patriot?* (2006). These two plays are selected because they manifest ample deployment of the art of abuse and engage various sociopolitical issues. Hence, the article discusses how the art of abuse in these plays projects and addresses such sociopolitical realities as oppression, exploitation, resistance, self-interest versus national interest, and capitalism, among others. The article engages the principles of superiority theory of humour as espoused by Henri Bergson (2003) for textual analysis. It contends and concludes that abuse, as an inherent part of social and human interactions, has been an effective tool in satirising ills in individuals and society at large.

Keywords: art of abuse; satire; humour; Nigerian drama

1. Introduction

Abuse has been described as "a variant of language use whose province covers diverse situations of human interactions ranging from insultive (*sic*) quarrels, correction and reproach for misdeeds" (Adejumo 2014, 226). It is a verbal face-off between two parties for the purpose of deriding each other for their offensive acts or for their moral or physical weaknesses. Abuse—Èébú in Yoruba—as Adejumo (2013, 45) observes, functions especially in quarrel situations, "as a form of verbal combat where the parties involved exchange hot aggressive and insulting words."

Abuse is synonymous to insult and invective (Faleti 2014, 18; Feinberg 1985, 218); hence, it shall be used as such—i.e. interchangeably—in this article. Roller describes invective as a "vituperative mockery or other verbal abuse, couched in explicitly or implicitly moral terms, directed by the satirist against a target" (2012, 299). Roller's definition of invective does not only depict the similarity between abuse and invective, but also defines it in relation to satire. Abuse as a satiric element and as the satirist's tool of mockery, is usually aimed at denouncing, condemning or vilifying the personality and conduct of certain targets, mostly to ridicule them by exploring their personality traits, behaviours or physical features explicitly or implicitly. Its aim is to humiliate the target through the open declaration of faults. And in achieving this purpose, invective aims to arouse laughter and contempt against its addressee, thus becoming an indispensable rhetorical tool of satire.

Like Adejumo (2014, 266) observes, the "various annual festivals of cleansing" in many African communities have provided avenues for the society to "express anger against" and berate "individuals who have infringed on the community's code of conducts". Traditional festivals in Nigeria such as *Gèlèdé/Èfè, Èdi, Òpélú, Opéé Péé, Ẹ́rù Òro* or *Pàkókó*, *Egúngún Pidánpidán* or *Alárìnjó* have constituted themselves as agents of invective satires. For instance, on the Èdi Festival day in Ile-Ife and its environs, the "Èdi choral group" (*Ikó* Èdi), on ascertaining the deviant acts of the victims in the community, goes straight to their houses and sings abusive songs to expose and ridicule them. This is with the intent to exposing the 'secret' acts of the targets to achieve deterrence (Oke 2018, 29). Again, according to Faleti (2014, 22) "the various non-professional groups of house-wife singers (àwon *obìnrin-ilé*), the men's group or club singers (Àwon *egbé olórin* – called *Wáágá* in Ogbomoso; Àgbáùnréré in Oyo and *Bàrúwá* in Ibadan), and the satiric *Etíyerí* singers which flourished soon after the Second World War provided the needed conducive environment which favoured the prolific use of gibes."

Instances of invective satires are also found in the enactments of the Yoruba *Alarinjo* theatre, Tiv *Kwagh-hir* puppetry theatre, *Yankamanci* Hausa comedy

show in Nigeria, and *Halo* among the Anlo Ewes in Ghana, among many other indigenous traditional African theatrical performances. *Halo*, for instance, is a sociomusical drama[1] that involves performance elements such as "songs of insult, dance, drumming, mime, poetry, spoken forms, costume, and a variety of visual icons" (Avorgbedor 1994, 84). During the performance, the rivalry groups mutually exchange abuse before a group of audience members to expose their moral and socio-cultural deficiencies, with the sole aim of holding the target accountable for their wrong-doing and to correct societal ills. It is on this theatrical mode—*Halo,* "a traditional African theatre of entertainment through mutual insult"—that Ola Rotimi modelled his play, *Man Talk, Woman Talk* (2006), a seriocomic play[2] (Rotimi 2006, 52).

In many situations where there is mutual exchange of abuse, like in *Halo and Gèlèdé/Èfè*, there are often three *personae* in the participant framework that constitutes its triadic structure. Faleti (2014, 17) identifies these participants as the "abuser", "the audience that witnesses the drama", and "the subject being insulted" (the abused). The abuser, in most cases, is the 'satirist' who engages abuse as a verbal rod to condemn anomalies in the target. The 'abused' is the target of the abuse, while the 'audience' is the entity on whom the ridiculous effect of the abuse rests. It can be contended that a drama that employs abuse is incomplete without any of these entities because when verbal duel takes place between only the abuser and the abused, it may not be effective as when the audience is involved. Pagliai (2009, 63) recognises this structure in her definition of abuse "as a genre of argumentative language that entails exchanges between two persons, parties, or characters that challenge each other to a performative display of verbal skillfulness in front of an audience."

Given the sociological and cultural attachment of abuse or invectives, dramatists have explored it in their works, as it forms a bulk of the interactional expressions of people in their day-to-day life. And since works of art—particularly drama—are set to represent the society and project social interaction in a realistic manner, Nigerian dramatists such as Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, J. P. Clark-Bekederemo, Femi Osofisan and Ahmed Yerima, among others, have explored

1 Avorgbedor (1994) describes 'sociomusical drama' (that is *Haló*) as a musical-dramatic performance that involves exchange of insulting songs between two rivalry groups in the public. It was an art popular among the Anlo-Ewe, from ca. 1912 until its official proscription in 1960 because of its social consequences, that is, the spectacular, the unusual, the precarious, havoc, danger, or challenge that is associated with it. The name has its etymology in *ha* + *ló* (song + proverb).

2 A "seriocomic play," as Ola Rotimi (2006) subtitles his plays, *Man Talk, Woman Talk* (2006), is a portmanteau word for a play that is partly serious and partly comic, a mixture of serious and comic elements.

this art in their plays. It is also a handy tool in home videos. Hence, in this article we shall explore the significance of the art of abuse in addressing sociopolitical realities such as oppression, exploitation, resistance, self-interest versus national interest, and capitalism, among others in Femi Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath* (2002) and Ola Rotimi's *Who is a Patriot?* (2006).

2. Satire, the Art of Abuse and the Concept of Humour

Satire as a literary genre has its root in the Latin word *satura* which means primarily "full", and then comes to mean "a mixture full of different things" (Schlegel 2005, 4). According to Abrams (1999, 275), satire is a "literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation." Inherent in satire are elements such as "variety, down-to-earth unsophistication, coarseness, an improvisatory tone, humor, mimicry, echoes of the speaking voice, abusive gibing, and a general feeling, real or assumed, of devil-may-care nonchalance" (Highet 1962, 233). Accordingly, two things are essential to satire as pointed out by Frye (2000, 224): "one is wit or humor founded on fantasy or a sense of the grotesque or absurd, the other is an object of attack." This 'object of attack' could be an individual, group, institution, behaviour, trait or any form of deviance.

Hence, the main purpose of satire is to correct personal, moral, political and social ills. The satirists achieve this purpose either by humorous attacks on the target(s) or by serious scorn and hatred. This is the view of Highet when he states that "there are two main conceptions of the purpose of satire and two different types of satirists" (1962: 235). These two satirists are described by Highet thus:

> One likes most people, but thinks they are rather blind and foolish. He tells the truth with a smile, so that he will not repel them but cure them of that ignorance which is their worst fault. Such is Horace. The other type hates most people, or despises them. He believes rascality is triumphant in his world; or he says, with Swift, that though he loves individuals he detests mankind. His aim therefore is not to cure but to wound, to punch, to destroy. Such is Juvenal. (235)

The Juvenalian satirists are considered as misanthropic, pessimistic, and tragedian satirists while the Horatian satirists are regarded as optimistic, and some sort of comedian satirists. Satire can also be classified according to the themes they deal with. From the earliest times—at least since the plays of Aristophanes—the primary concerns of satire have been politics, religion, and sexual misdemeanours; hence, political satire and social satire such as religious satire, satire of manners, sometimes also called comedy of manners.

The techniques of satire include irony, sarcasm, invective (abuse), innuendo, burlesque, parody, ridiculous, exaggeration, wit, and humour among others. The list is not exhaustive; Adeoti (1994, 66) adds that "besides, scattered across the dialogue of a satirical drama are other techniques like hyperbole, meiosis, metaphor, innuendo, repetition, proverbs, apothegm, epigram, symbolism and so on." Thus, satire is not a direct and forthright expression of criticism or dislike; rather it uses these devices to express its criticism and dislike.

Invective, being the focus of this article, is a denunciatory, abusive or vituperative expression, either in spoken or written form. Adeoti (1994, 65) describes it as "a direct fulmination or verbal attack whose effect may be mild or severe." It involves the use of statements that are derogatory, offensive, scurrilous, defaming, hurtful, disgraceful, slandering, vilifying, irreverent, humiliating, scornful, disdainful, sarcastic, ironic, degrading, depreciative, stultifying, mocking, disparaging, jeering and scoffing, among others. Invective in literature is closely associated with satire, lampoon and caricature. Many writers have employed invective for a variety of purposes; the commonest is to express dislike, disgust, contempt and hatred for certain unwholesome phenomenon in the society. Dramatists use invective as an effective weapon to vilify a specific failing or moral weakness in a particular person, and occasionally a group of people.

Consequently, abuse (or invective) is a vital device for achieving desired humour and comic effects in satiric works. According to Neu (2008, 216), "insults can be done with good humor." Hence, when one carefully considers the employment of abuse in satire, one would find that abuse is a device for arousing contemptuous laughter, for giving the audience some kind of pleasure and for providing merriment for the audience, thereby releasing their repressed tensions. One would also realise that abuse is a device through which incongruity can be generated as a language style in a work of art; and also a tool for making the target (object of attack) ridiculous, thereby gaining some sense of superiority over them through laughter.

Though the term "humour" is not easily defined, it has always been described in association with laughter. Attardo (1994, 10) notes that: "[T]he assumption behind this identification of humor and laughter is that what makes people laugh is humorous, and hence the property is incorrectly seen as symmetrical—what is funny makes you laugh and what makes you laugh is funny. This leads to the identification of a mental phenomenon (humor) with a complex neuropsychological manifestation (laughter)."

Bergson (2003, 53), who views laughter as social phenomenon and whose work on laughter has greatly influenced the popularity of the superiority theory of humour, describes laughter as a response to social issues. Since laughter can be a form of derision, Morreall (1982, 5), who shares the same view with

Bergson, opines that because people do not like to be laughed at, laughter serves as a social corrective to get wrongdoers back into line. Hence, laughter performs certain communicative functions. One of these is the effect that the speaker or writer wishes to achieve directly by inserting humorous contents or texts in his/her discourse.

Attardo (1994, 323) groups the effects of humour on the communicative process into four classes: "social management, decommitment, mediation, and defunctionalization." The most intriguing of these functions is social management function. It must be rightly established that satiric humour aims at correcting certain social misdemeanour, conveying social norms, and repairing damaged aspects of the society, among others. As Mathewson (1920, 7) suggests, "[I] t is the function of laughter to keep society safe and sane and to restrain each individual from shutting himself up in his own peculiar ivory tower."

Highet observes that a story or a play which only produces feelings of pure hatred and revulsion without a trace of scornful amusement or regretful contempt is not a satire (1962, 150). Consequently, abuse as satirists' weapon is purposely deployed to mock, giving its ludicrous and humorous modes of employment. Some of these modes are through sarcasm, epigrammatic interjections, wit, exaggeration, incongruity and irony, among other such techniques. Accordingly, Frye observes that abuse "is an established datum of literature that we like hearing people cursed and are bored with hearing them praised, and almost any denunciation, if vigorous enough, is followed by a reader with the kind of pleasure that soon breaks into a smile" (2000, 225). It follows that Frye is simply relating the humorousness of invectives as satiric element, or at best as satiric genre. Schlegel affirms that "invective thus provides a source of merriment for its audience, as long as the audience is not the object of its attacks" (2005, 78). And in achieving this purpose, invective "aims to arouse laughter and contempt against its target", thus becoming an indispensable rhetorical tool of satire (Roller 2012, 283). Similar to these submissions, Applauso equally posits that invective aims to give pleasure to the listener, because "the practice of blaming and insulting individuals occurred through hyperbolic and malevolent caricatures in which wit and humor were used in poetic invective to foster ridicule" (2010, 18). These devices give a perception of abuse as humour technique which will further be contextualised in this article.

3. Abuse as a Tool of Oppressive Dominance and Resistance in Femi Osofisan's *Altine's Wrath*

Altine's Wrath (2002) is one of Osofisan's social satires that focuses on issues prevalent in contemporary society—oppression, corruption, injustice, among others. Set in Northern Nigeria, Osofisan presents a photographic picture of

corrupt public officeholders through Mr. Lawal Jatau, who is a typical Permanent Secretary in a government ministry. Lawal is a 'ten-percenter'[3] and 'land-grabber'[4] as well as a male chauvinist and 'oppressor'. Through his position, Lawal leads a corrupt lifestyle by gratifying himself with ten percent kickbacks from contractors, and taking over the land of the poor masses and usurping the compensations meant for them.

Lawal oppresses Altine, his wife who endures emotional, physical and domestic violence through his inhuman treatment, 'which results in her dumbness'. Their marriage was arranged by their parents when they were young. Lawal uses Altine as the perfect conduit for his illegal wealth. He creates a new bank account that only Altine can access with her thumbprint so as to erase any trace of his corrupt actions. Altine is relegated to the position of a house help by making her serve his mistress, Mariam, even in her own house.

Ironically, Altine has only been playing dumb. She begins to speak at a provocation by Lawal, during one of his illegal dealings with Alhaji Maikudi. This surprises Mariam and Alhaji. She vents her wrath by recalling all the humiliation she has suffered from Lawal and his mistress. In the end, Altine responds to the poisoned banana, a gift left by Baba Audu and Mallam Onene on their visit with Dr Aina, Lawal's old friend, who come to plead for compensation for their acquired land. She is, however, revived by Baba Audu and Mallam Onene on their second visit.

In the play, Osofisan demonstrates the place of abuse in achieving oppressive dominance by people in vantage positions on their subjects. This is evident in the relationship between Lawal and Altine, his subjugated wife, Ahmed, his houseboy, Malam Onene and Baba Audu, local farmers whose lands are acquired. One of the four categories of invectives identified by Feinberg (1985, 222) is "symbolic dominance claims", others being "name-callings," "ritual accusations," and "expressions of scorn for what is deemed precious". This class of insults, Feinberg notes, aims at establishing and exploiting the inferior status of the addressee relative to that of the speaker.

Lawal engages this kind of abuse to subject Altine and make her totally insignificant. This is done by infringing upon her self-esteem, thus rendering

3 A 'ten-percenter' is a derogatory term for someone, who in spite of being paid their official remuneration for the service they render, still demands ten per cent of the money awarded for a contract from a contractor who is ready to pay. Lawal Jatau, who is a Permanent Secretary in a government ministry, engages in this act, which is considered corrupt.

4 A 'land-grabber' is a person, who takes possession of land belonging to other person(s) fraudulently, unfairly or illegally. Lawal unduly acquires the land belonging to Baba Audu and Mallam Onene, local farmers, for the so-called new layout by his Ministry; the compensation for the land had been paid but Lawal refuses to release it to them.

her emotionally discomfited. One attitude that Osofisan inculcates in Altine to sustain her subservient pretense in order to elevate Lawal's ego and build up his follies to a ridiculous height that we see at the end is her habit with banana eating. This happens to be the first point of weakness that Lawal sees in Altine and abuses. Lawal wants Altine to attend to his visiting mistress, Mariam and so summons her. When Altine appears with a banana as usual, this provokes Lawal's rain of abuse on her: "[…] she's been cursed with it! Bananas! Always eating bananas!", and as if banana is a curse indeed or excrement, Mariam also expresses her disgust for Altine: "Disgusting" (5). This happens because of Altine's 'status and dumbness'. Apparently, Lawal has reduced her to nothingness and has placed her in the hands of his common mistress. This explains why Mariam can also exert herself on Altine.

Again, Lawal employs name-calling; he calls Altine monkey: "Monkeys, even monkeys have more self-respect!" (5). This is an ironic way of calling her an animal. Hence, irony—a rhetoric device of indirection—is employed here to debase Altine. Apparently, bananas are synonymous to monkeys. And so, such extended metaphor is employed by Osofisan to portray the oppressive disposition of Lawal. Lawal exploits her lowly state and her 'illiteracy' to misuse and violate her. This is a realist depiction, as it is a common behaviour of many people in a vantage position, and especially some abusive and cheating husbands like Lawal.

Lawal's employment of abuse evinces his attitudes and irritation for Altine as the case may be. For instance, when Lawal asks the eponymous character, Altine, to go and hang his visiting mistress's coat and get some food for her, the latter (Altine) simply stands and stares at Mariam. This irritates Lawal and Mariam to abuse her:

> LAWAL: Why are you staring like an idiot? The least you can do is say good evening to her! […] I say greet her, you dumb female goat! Down! On your knees! […]
> MARIAM: […] … Ah, an animal! (6)

In another instance, Lawal engages abuse when narrating the incident that leads to Altine's dumbness to Mariam. He says: "There is nothing in that head of hers, except sawdust! Sawdust, yes! I've never met anyone as dim-witted as this woman you're looking at. A complete dumb clot!" (8). This is supposed to be a narration of Altine's dumbness but the speaker inserts some insulting elements in the speech. Lawal's irritation for Altine is equally seen in the manner he abuses and maltreats her when she mistakenly breaks the plate. He says to her: "You stupid imbecile! You broke that expensive plate! Why are you so clumsy, eh?" (9). These invectives show Lawal's intolerability for Altine for anything she does,

because he sees her as an illiterate and subaltern, someone who lacks power for liberation—her parents are dead and has no one to ask after her.

Arguably, Lawal's achievements and social status inform his oppressive behaviours which manifest in the maltreatment of his wife and domestic staff, and ultimately his use of insulting language on them. Osofisan seems to be making a point on how many 'masters' treat their domestic workers and he appears to be making a demand for a change of attitudes. It is a common occurrence to see people like Lawal, using derogatory words on their subjects. For instance, when Ahmed is trying to inform Lawal that he has a visitor different from someone he is expecting, which is Alhaji, the only utterance that comes out of his mouth is abuse, couched on Ahmed's grandfather. He does not allow him to express himself, rather he says "It's what, you idiot? Your grandfather's ghost? Will you speak up!" (10). Even, after Ahmed eventually finds expression that the person gives him a card to give to him, Lawal's response to Ahmed is nothing but a subjugating one: "Then bring it, you ass!" (11). Were Ahmed a person of his calibre, he would not have addressed him in that manner.

'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.'[5] Given Lawal's ill-attained social status and ill-gotten wealth, he becomes so self-conceited that he finds it difficult to respect anybody, not even his old school mate, now Dr. Aina. Apart from Ahmed, Lawal also speaks contemptuously to other people of low estate, as depicted in Malam Onene and Baba Audu on whose behalf Dr. Aina comes pleading for compensation for their land that Lawal's ministry acquired, and whose compensation he usurps. He disdains them and would not allow them to sit in his presence, "not on my chairs!" He remarks discourteously: "The poor people always have a long catalogue of complaints. They are the only ones who suffer" (15). This implicit insult is a manifestation of Lawal's egocentric social status and privilege over the poor. Osofisan finds these behaviours and expressions archetypical of people in advantageous positions, especially in their relationship with the disadvantageous like Malam Onene and Baba Audu. So the expressions find employment in narcissists like Lawal.

Lawal engages abuse to subject the less-privileged even when they make attempts to voice out their concerns. He suppresses them, calling them "You wretches! You dare say such things in my house! Insulting your superiors like that!" (17). By implication, Lawal exerts his superiority over Malam Onene and Baba Audu and that is why he would not allow them to speak. Rather, he engages

5 This is an observation that a person's sense of morality lessens as his or her power increases; it is a statement made by John Emerich Edward Dalberg-Action, a British historian of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

insults to silence them and threatens to "get them locked up!" For Lawal, abuse becomes a weapon of oppression and a repressive apparatus.

Dr. Aina is apt at identifying the cause of Altine's dumbness as Lawal himself. Thus, she calls the audience attention to some male egoistic and patriarchal psyche which makes men to "think marriage is the modern version of Slave Trade" (13). This is actually Lawal's understanding and disposition. To Lawal, "Women here don't dare raise their voice when men are speaking!" and that also manifests in his encounter with Dr. Aina, his old school mate and even his 'crush' in secondary school—he demonstrates the same 'symbolic dominance claims'. He discounts her as less important than women that get into his bed.

To Lawal's self-conceitedness and oppressive personality, one can argue, Osofisan, in the spirit of Juvenal, deals a hard blow through a shrewd resistance from Altine, and of course Dr. Aina and Onene's confrontations. For instance, Osofisan uses Onene to confront Lawal, insulting him and other corrupt government officeholders like him. He says to Lawal when he tries to use government as a cover-up for his heinous activities: "Nonsense! Which government? Is it not those rogues in those offices?" (17). By implications, Onene calls Lawal and his likes "rogues" which they really are as exemplified in the play. Dr. Aina equally challenges him: "The poor people, how many of their lands have you stolen? How many driven into the streets, to asylums? How many deaths weigh on your conscience, Mr. Fire and Thunder?" (19). Osofisan's voice and invectives against such individuals in the society is seemingly found in Dr. Aina's rhetorical expressions. The questions raised in the implicit abuse beg for answers from Lawal and his cohorts in the society. The perlocutionary effect of the abuse is seen in Lawal's reaction as contained in the acting instructions in parenthesis: *"Choking. Long pause. When he talks, his voice is very cold"* (19). Osofisan seems to be saying that sometimes, it takes courage to confront oppression, injustice, corruption and lawlessness in our society.

Osofisan's restoration of 'voice' to Altine is a technique he uses to effect resistance. Hence, 'voice' is used as a symbol of resistance and liberation. Immediately, Altine finds her voice, she frees herself from oppression, servitude and exploitation. She commands Mariam: "Quiet, you! Keep your mouth shut when I'm talking", and to Lawal, "I'm leaving the road clear now for you and your harlot"—the expression which has a devastating effect on Mariam: "*[Stung]* Who…who is harlot?" (30). The abuse equally debases Maraim of her egoistic dispositions that we see earlier on. Again, Altine resists Lawal's touch—something which Lawal does at will before, even to maltreat her: "Don't dare put that your filthy hand on me again!" (31). Apparently, Lawal's hands are filthy and Altines makes him to realise that.

From the foregoing, it is obvious that the loud statement that Osofisan is making about Lawal's use of abuse to establish his oppressive dominance

claims over his subjects is to allow him and his likes in the society to live in a fool paradise. Osofisan seems to build Lawal like that so that his fall can be catastrophic as it is at the end. That becomes a strong statement for the disillusioned oppressors in the society; someday, reality will dawn on them. Significantly, Osofisan engages the art of abuse in his plays to project his characters as well as to punctuate his thematic preoccupations.

4. Abuse and the Quest for Social Re-Orientation in Ola Rotimi's *Who Is a Patriot?*

Who Is a Patriot? (2006) is a social satire that is situated around an imaginary social problem—a robust rock blocking a national highway. Engaging epic theatre form, Rotimi focuses on the need to re-orientate Nigerians on the practical definition of patriotism and true nationalism. Rotimi assumes the position of a 'writer-teacher' who engages the teaching aid of drama to educate Nigerians on what is expected of them to build a united nation in spite of its diversity.

The play opens with the narrator perching on top of the rock and sternly asking from the audience "WHO IS A PATRIOT?" (5) The narrator introduces us to archetypes of several professionals and office holders—character types such as politician, lawyer, businessperson, academic, soldier, policeman, journalist and religious leaders among others—in search of a good citizen. The attitude of the Nigerian politicians is portrayed in the character of Politician who sees the problem (the rock) as a means of campaigning and making a name for himself. The capitalist tendency of many Nigerian businesspersons is represented in the character of Cash Madam whose only concern is her own "ten trailers from Cotonou" that will "pass here dis night" (6). The military—Soldier and Policeman—sees the problem as an opportunity to hijack the government: "Naim I tell my Captain. I say make all civilian patapata change one time to soldier, fa… so we all can get discipline—finish!" (7). All that Academic can do is to apportion blames on the Federal Government and the capitalist tendencies of the few rich in the country like Cash Madam and Politician. He cannot offer any 'solution' to the problem at hand. The unnecessarily prolonged procedure of the government in tackling urgent national problem is also emphasised through the character of Director General (DG) of the Ministry in whose jurisdiction the problem falls. When Christian Evangelist (CV) and Muslim Imam (MIM) arrive at the scene, they only quote the Bible and Quran and castigate the perpetrators without a suggestion on how the problem could be solved.

The problem is only solved by the concerted efforts of four boys, West, South, East and Minority who have their ankles tied together. The boys are a symbol of unity, interdependency, and indispensability. When the narrator asks

them to make requests of whatever they want, they refuse to ask for materials and possessions such as money, power, fame, freedom, housing estates, among others. Their request is a united country free of corruption, favoritism, and where there is equity: "We want to feel convinced that this country belongs to all and we mean all. All of us! Finish! No one must feel that he has more right to it than others!" The narrator promises them that "The entire nation is listening. It's up to us to try… We shall try… It is a promise" (22).

Through the use of English Language and Nigerian pidgin English that contains vocabulary items from local languages—which indeed contributes to the play's comic orientation—the playwright employs invectives to condemn and ridicule certain traits among Nigerian citizens who fight only for their selfish interest at the expense of national interest. This is the central concern of the play. For instance, Lawyer ridicules the capitalist disposition of the Nigerian rich few as exemplified in the character of Cash Madam. She is only concerned about her ten trailers from Cotonou that are likely to collide with the rock, lying on the road instead of taking steps to remove it, for the good of all: "Hey! A-ya-yai… You're dead! (*Raising to demonstrate as appropriates*) Ten trailers! Full of flour from Cotonou, abi? The trailer in front: i-gb-u-gam on this rock at night. The remaining nine speeding behind: igbam, igbam into one another in the panic to avoid their crippled leader! Chineke!" (6).

Lawyer employs metaphor, onomatopoeia, visual imagery, hyperbole and apostrophe to abuse and ridicule the capitalist propensity of Cash Madam who is only concerned about her selfish individual interest at the expense of the national interest. To the playwright, a good citizen should be concerned about the well-being of the country. The ironic implication of the invective is that if a disaster befalls the nation, its citizens are not absolved.

Thus, Lawyer uses metaphor to spell her doom when he says "You're dead!" He also employs onomatopoeia to ridicule her selfishness and the imminent and colossal loss that it will bring to her. The use of onomatopoeia expressed in pidgin and the apt use of hyperbole and apostrophe make the abuse more grievous as they paint the picture of the loss in the mind-eyes of Cash Madam.

The psychological effect of the abuse is observable in Cash Madam's reaction. She "raises her arms heavenwards in distress" and eventually collapses in Lawyers' arms (6). This explains the traumatic effect that abuse can have on the target, depending on its grievousness, weight and mode of presentation. In the case of Lawyer, his mode of abuse includes language device, demonstration and body histrionics.

Lawyer and Politician also engage Cash Madam in taunting—a mode of abuse—for more satiric effects:

LAWYER: All the ten trailers… they skid t-r-i-i-i… fall over! The multimillion naira cargoes.
POLITICIAN: I-i-i-i-w-o-sh-a-a-a, I tell you. All over the highway.
LAWYER: Very common.
POLITICIAN: Bags upon bags of Cotonou flour come masha-masha inside rain water! Kai!
LAWYER: Madam. When is your funeral date? (CASH MADAM *collapses in his arms*) Not yet, Cash Madam. Don't die yet!
POLITICIAN: (*Propping her up bodily*) You wan waste your die? (6)

The above is an example of mockery achieved through the use of imageries that appeal to the senses of sight and hearing of the target. The import is to engage her imagination in the likely repercussion of her unpatriotic attitudes. The mockery forces through Cash Madam's mind to make her see and hear her doom ahead, even when it has not really happened. Lawyer traumatises Cash Madam as he asks for her "funeral date." This further emphasises psychological implication of abuse on the abused.

Apart from mockery and taunt, Lawyer also engages metaphor and name-calling to devalue Cash Madam. He calls her "suegbe woman"—a foolish woman—when she resorts to suing the government. Rotimi sees the act of suing the government for an issue that is civic as barbaric and ridiculous; thus, he satirises the businesswoman for such act. Again, the woman is called "Money-miss-road" by Politician for intending to sue the government aimlessly. As a capitalist, her constant aim is exploitation, not only of the masses but also the government. When she is advised to sue the government for "millions and millions of naira", she becomes so excited and goes ahead to strategise and file a case with her Lawyer. The playwright engages the art of abuse to ridicule such an act which is common among many Nigerians.

In a way, the abuse of Cash Madam by Politician and Lawyer portray them as more loyal and committed to the nation's well-being than the woman. This is a superiority tendency by Politician and Lawyer in the play. However, the superiority predisposition of Lawyer and Politician is absurd because there is a contradiction in their characters and their actions. Rotimi presents them as 'pots that call the kettle black.' In a way, the playwright indirectly satirises Lawyer who is also abetting the suing of the government by Cash Madam. More so, political office holders and capitalists like Politician and Cash Madam are abused and called "ochlocrats" and "baboons" by Academic: "When people like you constitute yourselves into consummate syndicate of ochlocrats set to pauperize labour in system that rhapsodizes the sadism in that capitalist dogma of 'monkey work; baboon eat'" (9).

Metaphor is used in the abuse to castigate the exploitative activities of many African political leaders and their "capitalist dogma." The use of antithesis "monkey work; baboon eat" portrays and condemns class disparity and hegemonic structure of many African societies. It condemns "the sadism" (9) that characterises capitalist-labour relationship—the suffering that the labour experience from moneybags like Cash Madam.

The expression 'baboon' is also an indirect abuse cast in metaphor, which Kodah (2012, 7) regards as "symbolic invective." It involves a metaphoric replacement of characters by animals or things. Through this technique, the playwright denies the characters of their human features and replaces them with animal characteristics which consequently make them vulnerable to general ridicule and derision. The psychological effect of the abuse is seen on Politician. He is visibly hurt and responds thus: "My friend, I am not baboon! You hear?" (9). Rotimi portrays political office-holders as represented in the character of Politician and the few rich like Cash Madam as exploiters of masses and 'baboons' who take advantage of the poor and pauperise them.

Academic's disdainful remarks against Politician "Mr Politician, think of the good of the people. I *challenge* you! Be a good *Samaritan* I say!" (10) is an indirect abuse through the use of irony. Although the invective is directed at Politician, it is a call to the politicians in the nation to have the interest of the people at heart and not selfish interest of their own. Cash Madam's consolatory response to Politician against the opprobrious remarks by Academic is equally disparaging: "I no talk? Bukuru people—dem be people?" In essence, she abuses "academics" for their complexity.

There is a comic dimension to the verbal exchanges between Politician and Cash Madam:

POLITICIAN:	He challenged me to be wetin?"
CASH MADAM:	I know?
REPORTER:	To be a 'Good Samaritan'
POLITICIAN:	I see. First, I am to be a baboon. Then a good wetin call it? (10)

The emphasis placed on "baboon" explains its perlocutionary effect on the abused—Politician. This demonstrates the lasting impact that abuse can create in the mind of the abused.

The internecine enmity between the civilian and the military is emphasised in the play through the device of abuse. This is represented in the characters of Politician and Cash Madam, and Soldier and Policeman respectively. Rotimi represents this through dialogues and actions of the characters to ridicule the

weaknesses in both systems of government. For instance, Soldier and Policeman criticise democracy as a system of government where indiscipline abounds. For example, when they get to the scene of the rock, they cast several aspersions on the civilians for their acts of indiscipline and highhandedness:

> SOLDIER: You see… you see am? Finish! I mean, how can man who no crase for head, ehn—tell me, brother… How can man who love this country… I say how can he do a crase thing like this? See am?
> POLICEMAN: Nonsense civilians, in short! I swear, dis thing go fit stay here gbagala-a-a like this forever and ever, in short.
> SOLDIER: Enheen now.
> POLICEMAN: Lazy civilians! All bloody civilians, mana! (7)

Rhetorical questions, repetition and name-calling are employed in the above excerpt to raise criticisms against the civilians. Through the use of rhetorical questions, Soldier presents the insanity that characterises civilian administration, whereby citizens are indifferent to the welfare of the nation. The repetition of "crase" emphasises on these acts of indiscipline (crase thing) and their perpetrators (crase head). It expresses their lack of compatriotism to the nation. The repetition of "civilians" seems to show their disregard and indignation against them because of their attitudes to nation's wellbeing. Thus, they call them names such as "nonsense civilians," "lazy civilians" and "bloody civilians." The playwright creates the characters of Soldier and Policeman to abuse the civilians for their acts of indiscipline and lack of commitment to the good of their nation.

The contemptuous remarks by Soldier and Policeman when they sight Politician and Cash Madam coming back to the scene emphasise the hatred that exists between military and civilian. The statement by Soldier: "E be like say bloody civilian dem dey comesef!" and the response by his colleague, Policeman: "Me no wan see dem, I beg… (*Turns in the opposite direction*)" substantiate this (8). However, the failure of the military in its responsibility to entrench discipline in the country is also ridiculed in the dialogue. Soldier who has initially sought his Captain's order to convert all the civilians to soldiers has been made to realise by the Captain that soldiers and police have the responsibility to protect the civilians and to show them how to be disciplined by their acts of discipline. But Policeman calls it "Nonsense discipline!" while Soldier remarks: "Shey na me, Soja, go come dey show bloody civilian di driver discipline of how to commot rock for expressway?" (8). Apparently, Policeman and Soldier do not see it as their responsibility to instill discipline in the citizenry. However, Rotimi re-enlightens the audience that the issue of patriotism does not leave out any citizen, military or civilian.

In another instance, Politician and Cash Madam taunt Reporter because she reminds them of their civic responsibilities to their nation:

REPORTER: But I thought you were both responsible to the challenge which…

POLITICIAN: Challenge, abi? You like challenge. Go become labourer, fa. Oya commot blouse, pull skirt up papa. Den push rock commot road. Oya! *You* be Good emm… Good Samanja!

CASH MADAM: (*Hisses*) yeye girl! (12)

Politician and Cash Madam use taunt in the above excerpt—a form of retaliatory invective—in response to Reporter. Apparently, Politician and Cash Madam are birds of a feather who are not ready to be socially responsible to their nation. Because of their status, they believe it is the responsibility of "labourer"—the masses to do that. That is why they challenge Reporter to "go become labourer." Cash Madam also "hisses" on Reporter to show her displeasure against her (12).

The late response of Director General of the 'Ministry of Works and Emergency Management' to the problem is condemned through abuse. Reporter questions the Director General who claims his ministry "took action in a jiffy" as soon as he learnt of the problem: "In a jiffy, but you're just arriving…" (13). By implication, Reporter's statement, ridicules the lackadaisical attitude of the ministries to an issue that requires urgent attention from the officials. At the root of the problem is bureaucracy and redtapism. For instance, to evacuate the rock, the ministry must list the specifications of the problem, convene a Ministerial Consultative Committee Meeting to deliberate on the report, prepare budget for the 'project' and run adverts for the enactment of the 'project', among others. The playwright carefully highlights and condemns these procedural steps that are involved in solving an urgent national problem like the removal of a rock from the Highway.

Director General also abuses Reporter for the inquisitive nature of her profession: "You Press people can be so inquisitive, I tell you. Investigative Reporting you call it, ehn? (*Chuckles*) Allright. Shoot on. So you don't tell the world that this man refused to cooperate, if you get my meaning" (14). In essence, DG ironically abuses the ethics of her profession.

Foreman derides Nigerian power sector for its epileptic supply of electricity. This is evident in his remark to his workers: "Oya, make una pack up—I beg. Night wan come and NEPA no sabi dis place!" This is a gibe against the Nigerian power sector. Foreman uses irony in this abuse to paint a picture of inefficiency and lack of patriotism in some ministries and departments in Nigeria.

In the same vein, the role of the politicians in religious crises in the nation is x-rayed through the device of abuse in the play. The level of cordiality between Christian Evangelist and Muslim Imam shows that both religions can co-exist peacefully. Hence, both CEV and MIM accuse and abuse the politicians for being responsible for division that exists between them:

REPORTER: […] both of you chatting away and laughing together—just like brothers!
CEV: But we are brothers, young lady!
MIM: The same sons of Adam, lady, and brothers in the same land.
CEV: Patriots too.
The politicians, lady. Blame them for everything to rip us asunder for their own selfish goals!
MIM: But their's will be the disgrace of failure! Inmates of hellfire that they all are! (16)

CEV and MIM abuse the politicians for ripping them apart because of their *selfish interest* at the expense of peaceful co-existence of the nation which they claim they love and have come to lead. MIM curses all agents of disunity and division among them and regards them as "Inmates of hellfire". He uses this form of abuse to castigate and ridicule the politicians so as to effect change.

Abuse is used to castigate Reporter for her inability to open the Quran appropriately. MIM abuses her when he gives her the Quran to read and the latter turns the pages of the Quran left to right, instead of right to left. MIM yanks the Quran off her hands and gibes: "Foolish girl! (*Nudging* CEV) Come, my brother, let's move away from Unbelievers! (*Surlily, to* REPORTER) All that your generation knows best to turn are pages of *Tempo* Magazine!" (17). MIM considers anyone who does not know how to handle the *Quran* "a fool" and "an unbeliever." This, however, is one of the extremities in religious dogma; perhaps the fellow is a Christian. But the implication here is that the lady is an addict of magazines rather than Holy Books. Hence, the abuse is directed at youths who celebrate fashion and mundane things at the expense of religious practices.

Abuse is also employed in the play's denouement. When the boys who roll the 'rock' away from the road are asked by the narrator to make a request of what they want, the adult characters which include Cash Madam, Policeman, Politician and others beckon on them for advice. However, because the boys refuse to heed Policeman's advice of bribery through the tactics of "Wetin una carry," he calls them "Nonsense Boys" (21). Similarly, Cash Madam abuses the boys because they refuse to follow her advice which is to ask for "Money… cash—hard currency." She calls them "crase pikin" (22). Here, Policeman and

Cash Madam employ name-calling to show their indignations towards them. This demonstrates the possibility that abuse can be used on target whose ideology is contrary to that of the abuser. This is mostly to vent spleen on their target.

Evidently from the analysis, Rotimi engages abuse not only to ridicule ills in the society and discount the culprits but also as a mode of correction and enlightenment for positive change in the society. At the end, the playwright allows the audience to make commitment in fulfilling the boys' requests. He commits the audience (the society) to having change of attitude towards their nation as taught by the narrator.

5. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated that abuse, as one of the linguistic codes of human interactions, has some aesthetic values in drama, where it has been frequently employed. The article has shown the place of abuse in the aesthetics of Nigerian drama, acknowledging how some contemporary Nigerian dramatists such as Femi Osofisan and Ola Rotimi, among others have employed the art in their drama for artistic effects, importantly as a device to create and sustain comedy as well as to satirise human foibles and societal inadequacies. In these plays, the playwrights significantly engage invective aesthetics to address some sociopolitical realities such as oppression, exploitation, resistance, self-interest versus national interest, and capitalism, among others. For instance, Osofisan's engages the art of abuse to establish the oppressive dominance of the privileged in the society over their subjects, somewhat to allow them to live in a fool paradise, such as we see in Lawal, whose end is catastrophic. Hence, Osofisan employs the art of abuse in his plays to project his characters as well as to punctuate his thematic preoccupations. Similarly, Rotimi engages abuse not only to ridicule vices in the society and discount their perpetrators, but he also explores it as a mode of correction and enlightenment that effect neo-orientation in them for nation transformation.

This article has mainly focused on the significance of the art of abuse in Nigerian drama. However, it is recommended that other art forms that engage in the use of abuse such as standup comedy, comedy skits and social media comedy such as Mark Angel comedy, Woli Agba, Mr. Macaroni, Broda Shaggi, Taaooma, Remotecomedy etc, and even cartoons/comic strips and home videos could also be explored by future researchers who are interested in the study of the art of abuse. The significance of abuse in other literary genres such as prose fiction and poetry can also be examined. More so, other theoretical frameworks could also be engaged in the study of the art of abuse in any of these art forms.

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Navigating New Approaches for Grassroot Community Theatre in a (Post-)Covid World

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Abstract:

The cultural revolution of 1968 paved the way for many artists to reconsider how and where theatre was made. Community theatre gained currency and one company who became prominent during this cultural shift was Welfare State, later Welfare State International. They were one of the theatre companies who focused not only on a community theatre aesthetic but a grassroot one. I examine the radicality of community theatre and consider the efficacy of the historical approaches to engaging with communities in a (Post-)Covid world. I acknowledge and explore the shifting understanding of communities and assert that a deeper engagement is needed to foster collectivity (Tannahill 2016; Fişek 2019; Weston 2020; Bartley 2021). To reconsider the role that theatre may play in the future, I focus on a grassroot approach to community-led work and posit that location will be a key component to how theatre is made as we emerge from a pandemic.

Keywords: community theatre; grassroots; collectivity; locality

> *The future of theatre is here. It's in our empty buildings, our streets, our parks and our houses. It's about things that matter to us, the stories that represent us and the things we want to talk about – on our terms. We are the message and the medium. We are the artists and the audiences. It starts with us* (White 2020)

1. Introduction

Rhiannon White, one of two artistic directors of Common Wealth Theatre, draws our attention to what theatre could become after the global pandemic. White encourages us to consider our locality and she pushes us to think of ourselves. The simple inclusion of the word *our* suggests an ownership of space being at the heart of theatre – it is about people; it is about the stories we can tell from our own experiences and location. As I write this article, the pandemic continues to disrupt and halt live work, after, from March 2020 all theatres in the UK were forced to close their doors. The fallout of this meant mass unemployment or furloughed staff across the sector. For the first time in decades audiences have not been able to gather to watch live work and theatre companies are being forced to reconsider not only sources of income, but other ways of making and presenting their work.

This article looks towards community theatre and those working with the ideas of locality, collectivity and a grassroot approach. I posit that the three intertwined focusses are key for the direction of travel for theatre in a (Post-)Covid world. I look to these through examining a key shift in history, the post 1968 era, to suggest that this major turning point for artists could hold significance for those working in the sector today.

Firstly, this article addresses a historical understanding of community-based work with a lens into one of the pioneer groups of grassroot work: Welfare State International (hereafter WSI). It is clear how the location of their work became paramount, and I assert that locality is a key component to thinking about creating work today. Reflecting on the work of John McGrath, theatre maker and scholar Baz Kershaw writes how the idea of localism was a central part of his work with 7:84 Theatre and surmises that "[…] authenticating conventions should be drawn from the immediate socio-cultural environment of the performance" (1992, 154). I turn, therefore, to community theatre to rethink how theatre and its artists can find new ways of connecting to audiences through non-mainstream methods, particularly in a more localised, and politicized way that fosters collectivity. WSI decided to move to the Northwest of England in 1982 and settle in a community to make their work. They became part of the fabric of Ulverston and "in order to achieve that at a level which could be read without ambiguity

and with some hope of making a significant impact on the culture of the locality, the company needed to become a local institution […]" (Kershaw, 1997, 203). WSI offer an important historicity to community-based and grassroot work and their pioneering practices paved the way for community artists. The relationship between maker and audience was often blurred and the opportunity for co-authorship and participation in their work was paramount. I turn to WSI to understand how the company used community theatre approaches to connect with and interact with communities and generate work from the ground up.

Secondly, I draw on a more contemporary understanding of community theatre and look to issues such as collectivity and location to examine these within a time when people cannot gather. Writing on theatre, Jordan Tannahill acknowledges that '[…] the theatre presents the world with a working model of cooperation, collectivity, and community' (2016, 37) and on discussing the idea of gathering and collectivity, theatre writer Emine Fişek says that "[…] collectives have been there from the start, as a way to trigger thinking not only around the idea of collectivity but also in the material form of an unwieldy mass of human bodies" (2019, 58).

Thirdly, in light of the above, I examine examples of community theatre today with a particular lens into the radical group Common Wealth Theatre and their lockdown performance *Us, Here Now* (2020) and some reflections on the long-running Women and Theatre and their filmed piece *Women in Lockdown* (2020). I am interested in the relationship between this pioneering company and the contemporary works discussed throughout this article to establish how the future of community theatre might look. It's an examination of influence from past approaches into a rapidly changing present. I assert that this approach is one way to navigate and repair community engagement and participation in a (Post-)Covid environment.

The two contemporary companies have both piloted different approaches to working during the lockdown period whilst remaining within a grassroot structure and therefore offer some radical new methods for working within and for communities. Common Wealth are based between Bradford and Cardiff, UK and Women and Theatre are based out of Birmingham, UK. During the period of the pandemic both companies have been continuing to work with their respective communities. Common Wealth have been looking to their specific locations as a means to collect and tell local stories. For the purposes of this article, I will be looking at the work they have carried out in Cardiff, where they have been considering how location specific stories could be viewed within a physical space. Women and Theatre have been focusing on collecting stories from women living in different areas across Birmingham and exploring how to use a digital platform to present these.

This article, therefore, specifically addresses grassroot community theatre within a UK context to examine some of the practices being undertaken both from a historical standpoint and today. A short article addresses grassroot theatre, defining it as:

> Grass is firmly anchored in the soil. Grassroots theatre derives its content, its subject matter, its message, its 'nourishment'-so to speak-from its own area. It is about things that are of special-and perhaps unique-concern to the people of its region. Unlike wheat and corn, grass is not grown for export. It feeds, beautifies and perhaps revitalizes the soil for future plantings. Nor is grassroots theatre for export. It is intended for a specific audience-the people of the locale or region in which it was developed. It is presented to the people from whose needs, values, tastes, problems, concerns interests it was 'grown' or developed (M. K. 1983, 2).

Whilst touring on a mass scale might not be possible for one time to come, I turn to companies engaged in local grassroots work to think about the future of theatre.

Whilst I appreciate that community theatre takes on other meanings across the globe, for the purposes of this article I remain within a British context, employing Steve Gooch's summation of the term. He explains how community theatre lies "[...] outside, and usually in opposition to, mainstream theatre, it responds to the concerns and serves the needs of the community which it is performed" (Gooch, 1984 in Chambers, 2002, 17). I explore how this understanding might allow a renavigation of grassroot approaches to community theatre making to create live work in a (Post-)Covid world. I am interested here in thinking about the efficacy and the shifting meaning of the term community, examining whether it is too much of a slippery term to revisit, or whether it holds value and legacy in the 21st century.

Further still, this article examines how those working within community theatre have not only survived but explored new and radical approaches to engaging audiences during this shift in theatre ecology. Today, as we stand on the precipice of our own tipping point in history, we must discover how to approach (and continue) live theatre and perhaps rethink how and indeed where it is made and seen. Community theatre of the post-1968 era fell into the alternative/radical theatre scene and artists that engaged in creating this kind of theatre were critically examining the world in which they inhabited. Graham Murdoch outlined that the term radical drama: "sets out to present a critical perspective on the present social order. It aims to lay bare the structures of power and privilege and to show how they permeate everyday life, limiting and curtailing opportunities for self-realisation and social change" (1980, 151). Furthermore, Murdoch explores how "[…] radical drama attempts to link sympathy to struggle. As well as prompting people to reflect critically on the present situation, it aims to encourage them to take action to

change it" (1980, 152). Kershaw remembers his own tour of alternative theatre in the 1970s and early 1980s and writes how some of those companies "[…] were mounting a radical critique of particular social and political policies. Nevertheless, all the companies identified themselves as part of a wider movement: the British 'alternative theatre movement'" (1992, 12). When Gooch first acknowledged the polarisation between the alternative and the mainstream in the 1980s, theatre had gone through a radical transformation and many artists had found new styles and venues in which to perform their work. The opposition he talks about is rooted in a major political shift and the post-pandemic world of theatre will most likely present a similar movement, or indeed a change in perspective. This enforced adjustment, I propose, is an important one for the landscape of theatre, it offers makers and audience the chance to reconsider the stories that are told, how they are told, and who they are told to.

2. Some historical remarks on community theatre

The revolution of 1968 (of which I will draw correlations and differences) saw many artists step away from London-centric theatre and from the established theatre building. Street theatre gained currency, as well as what came to be known as site-specific theatre. As British industry went into decline, many factories closed across the country and artists found disused spaces to become their sites of performance making and showing. Not only did they become sites of performance, but the former use became integral to the stories that emerged.

This period in history saw artists interested in exploring what theatre was beyond walls and how audiences engaged with that work. Theatre is known to reflect on and represent the world and that has once again reached a new tipping point. Steve Gooch remarked on theatre doing just this: "Theatre takes place within the physical and economic conditions of the world around it and is dependent on them for the material resources that make it happen. But theatre is also able to reflect and represent that world within itself" (1984, 17).

When examining the history of alternative/radical theatre, one cannot deny the enduring quality that performance offers, particularly when we look to the history of community theatre. Rhiannon White examines this from the lens of today, stating: "Culture at its best emerges when it needs to, reflecting back to us the world we live in. The best culture grows in the margins and especially grows in tough times, when artists need to speak" (White 2020).

In his manifesto that explored the notion of the alternative and community work, Steve Gooch wrote how "[t]he idea of theatre relating to, and being part of, the community from which it originates is neither new nor strange" (1984, 7). This is further explored by Emine Fişek in her recent account on *Theatre*

& Community: "[…] assemblies, crowds, masses and mobs are not modern phenomena; they are simply represented in new and distinct ways in the modern period" (2019, 58). Community theatre is a "[…] a term which implies the attempt to bring artefact and public closer together" (Gooch 1984, 7) and that has existed for a very long time and should not be seen as anything out of the ordinary.

Community theatre is one way in which to provide theatre to the public in a world where inside gathering may not be possible for some time to come. But it is more than simply a transference from the building to the outside. Kershaw reflects on the shift in theatre in 1968 and describes an event that Catherine Itzin called "one of the classic legendary events in political theatre" (Itzin, 1980b, 20 in Kershaw 1992, 115):

> *Muggins* […] opened at the London Unity Theatre on June 14, 1968, and was performed by actors from CAST and Unity Theatre. Albert Hunt and John Fox […] were brought down from Bradford by Arden and D'Arcy to turn the approach to the theatre into an 'environment'. As well as foyer sideshows, the project finally included street performances, and improvised shows by local children instigated by D'Arcy. Simon Trussler sees it as an extension of Arden's community drama projects. […] the occasion provided a kind of creative crucible, in which great cultural and ideological questions were addressed in the most concrete of terms, as an attempt was made to forge an efficacious relationship between overtly radical performance and the local community. Such ambitions, though, were bound to be shot through with the contradictions of the late 1960s (1992, 115).

The inherent politics involved in this reflection resonates with artists working within community theatre today. Reflecting on her experience of taking a circus to Gaza in 2010 following the Operation Cast Lead, Rhiannon White expresses that: "It taught me the value of culture and the need that we have as humans both to entertain and to be entertained. This was a first-hand experience of the power of play and imagination and of how transformational it can be for people and communities" (2020). Taking theatre and shows to people, and further still working with people to generate the work, not only allows theatre to become less elitist but it establishes relationships, opens a dialogue, and allows people to have a voice.

Community theatre has always been about connecting with and working alongside different groups of people. Much of the work that happened post 1968 attempted to bring theatre to the masses. However, on reflection this came with its own set of problems. There is the issue, as is discussed by Kershaw, about

the danger of stereotyping and grouping people together for the purposes of an audience – he refers particularly to the work of John McGrath's with 7:84 Theatre. It was the case that McGrath employed 'popular' forms of theatrical conventions, such as "[…] concert parties, ceilidhs, the entertainments of contemporary working men's clubs" (1992, 153) for his audiences. McGrath believed that "[…] folklore and the popular arts could form the basis of counter-hegemonic cultural activism" and therefore serve its purpose as "[…] effective forms for use in radical theatre practice" (153). Kershaw, writing some years after the work of McGrath, reflects on this practice and discusses how this grouping of the working classes is a form of appropriation and that the stereotypes of the working classes are used to "[…] reinforce the status-quo" (154). McGrath, a socialist who weaved his political ideals into this theatre, was, as Kershaw outlines, aware of such dangers and acknowledged how working-class entertainments could be "[…] simplistic, racist, sexist, anti-working class, mindless, manipulative, trivial and nauseously ingratiating" (McGrath 1982b, 59-60 in Kershaw 1992, 154). But, as Kershaw goes on to discuss, the history of popular art forms is much more complex and does not simply, as McGrath seemed to assume, belong to the working classes. The attempt to adopt a particular kind of artform and claim that it is for a particular 'community of people' attempts to homogenise that group. Of course, we now acknowledge, appreciate, and celebrate the differences within communities. We can delve into theatre history and see how some theatre was created with the intention of being for particular groups of people, but as Fişek notes when discussing theatre for a gay community for example: "was 'the gay community' a unified entity? Or was it fractured by gender, race and class differences? Could it accommodate members who identified as queer?" (2019, 9). Sarah Weston echoes Fişek's concerns:

> The existence of a project specifically aimed at an identity group surely presupposes some kind of commonality. Accordingly, the uncritical celeb ration of identity is no less problematic with groups of identity than with groups of locality: both are in danger of presenting a homogenous and essentialised account. The question I believe becomes to what extent does the principle of uniting a geographic community ignore or challenge social and cultural differences? (2020, 166).

There is of course still an efficacy of past community work due to its impact on theatre and how it has been experienced. Referring to Kershaw's experience of seeing a community play in Colyford, he describes how: "the staging makes you feel like you are part of something, rather than just looking at it". He describes the community play as a "community forming process, where theatre is created through community" (1983, 115). This is because the fundamental event is not

just the play, "but the opportunity the play provides for the continuing evolution of Colyford as a community" (Kershaw 1983, 115).

Fişek focuses in on efficacy and states how the term "[…] can acquire different meanings depending on the stakes that one associates with the artwork" (2019, 18). She goes onto talk specifically about a 1999 production called *Steelbound,* performed in the working-class and former steel town of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, USA. Touchstone Theatre's aim was to capture the town's memories and use these for a performance, however, Sara Brady, a theatre scholar writing on the performance argued that "[…] although company members had conducted extensive research and interviews with Bethlehem community members, professional theatre-makers had ultimately exercised control over the artistic product". Furthermore, Brady posited that the "[…] aesthetic agendas […] reduced *Steelbound's* political efficacy and undermined its grassroots origins" (2020, 18). This performance was made in America, where the historical practices and understanding of community theatre differ slightly to the UK: "in the United States, the term refers to a strand of amateur theatre […]" (Gooch 1984, in Chambers 2002, 171). However, it is worth acknowledging this production as a process that pushed a particular agenda on a community, rather than working *with* a community.

A company whose approach and ethos were rooted in the grassroot approach was WSI. Their approach, politics, and breadth of understanding when it came to making work within and for specific communities made them trailblazers of community-led work. WSI was set up in 1968 by John Fox and Sue Gill. Fox wrote how they attempted to "[…] find archetypes that are universally shared, and present them in an idiom accessible to a broad audience" (1997, 1). The idea of universality is now contested because it ignores historical and cultural milieu, however, at the time that WSI emerged, artists were really beginning to investigate the notion of a shared human experience[1]. Despite the blanket ethos about a collective human experience that today would be considered reductive and appropriative, WSI wanted to explore what it meant to be human and celebrate humanity through the use of myth, architype and stories.

WSI pioneered large-scale celebratory work across the UK and then globally, becoming Welfare State International in 1979. John Fox, writing on their work, includes their 1972 manifesto that described them as: "An Entertainment, an Alternative, a Way of Life. We make images, invent rituals, devise ceremonies, objectify the unpredictable and enhance atmospheres for particular places, times, situations and people. We are artists concerned with the survival and character of the imagination and the individual with a technologically advanced society" (2002, 3).

1 I am thinking particularly here of Richard Schechner, Peter Brook and Jerzy Grotowski.

WSI engaged in works of varying scale. From audiences into their thousands to more ritualistic ceremonials, such as weddings or naming ceremonies that brought smaller communities together. Their work, regardless of scale, "[…] were part of a ferment of energy and experimentation that exploded from the late-sixties". Whilst many artists were pushing form and style in new avant-garde fashions, WSI were attempting a "[…] revitalising of traditional popular theatre forms" (1997, 6). In the early seventies they were invited by the Mid-Pennine Arts Association to take up residence in Burnley as their theatre fellow. Tony Coult writes how it had always been the aim of John Fox to "[…] work on the assumption that the company should teach people skills necessary to make their own celebrations, skills fast disappearing in a mechanised and de-skilled society" (8). The relationship between the company and the community in Burnley was not without its issues. There was a clash between cultures, with WSI appearing as 'hippies' in the circus-like area in which they set up camp, and the very 'progressive performances' that they put on, something that Fox admits they got wrong. But their years of experimentation, research, and their permanent relocation to Ulverston in the Northwest of England in 1982 permitted deeper relationships to be formed.

Kershaw reflects on the company's trajectory and posits that the move to Ulverston was indeed the most important shift in their work history. Their move to Ulverston allowed the company to embed into the community and draw on its rich history and landscape to inform their practices. This embedded approach allowed the company to foster relationships with the town and its people, and the sense of community was established through the works they created. This decentralisation of theatre was a key component to the radical shifts that occurred post 1968 and many artists were keen to move from the metropolis of London and make theatre elsewhere. I posit that artists today will be asking the questions about location and finding new ways to connect with, and build work with, local communities. Through their commitment, WSI became, as Kershaw states: "an anti-institutional institution" (1997, 202). Being embedded into the community allowed for works of varying scale to be produced and provided the company the time and the space to focus on annual traditions, such as the lantern parades that they successfully started and continue today.

It is worth noting that in 1999, Kershaw recognised that some of the large-scale works they created would be considered as wasteful today due to the sheer number of resources they required. This shift is important to note and in the twenty-one years since Kershaw acknowledged this climate change and environmental concerns have grown exponentially. The work that Sue Gill and John Fox undertake today is rooted in the subjects of ecology and environment. It would not be sustainable or ethical to create a one-off community performance

that would require so many resources, even if, as was the case with much of WSI's work, the materials are recycled. Kershaw also points out that: "The large numbers seem to generate excitement in their own right"; WSI "[…] were particularly influential in 1980s alternative theatre in large part because the scale of their projects almost guaranteed an impact on the community" (1992, 157). In thinking about community projects today and the parameters artists will be faced with, it is worth exploring and acknowledging the celebratory feel that can be established without the physical gathering of large-scale work.

Kershaw outlines the hopes of many artists creating work in the 1970s, stating that: "In attempting to forge new tools for cultural production, alternative theatre ultimately hoped, in concert with other oppositional institutions and formations, to re-fashion society" (1992, 22). If more alternative approaches to engaging with communities are established, then perhaps a post-pandemic society can also be refashioned in some way, one that puts the people at the heart of the questions being asked and the work that is created.

3. Some reflections on contemporary community theatre

Fişek explores the different notions of community and theatre, looking particularly at theorizing the terms from a European and American context. She identifies how the "[…] objectives can range from securing recognition for a community's particular experience to demanding public intervention on a topic of social or political concern to revitalizing the cultural life of a given locality" (2019, 14). Examining the British angle, Fişek refers to Kershaw's argument that places community theatre under the same umbrella as the alternative theatre movement that emerged in the 1970s. Fişek summaries how "references to community emerge in practices labelled popular or folk, grassroots or local, and socially engaged or protest theatre" (2019, 16). Despite the acknowledgement that community theatre exists alongside the more experimental theatre movement, Fişek does identify that today there is a danger in the former idea of 'community', in that it grouped people together and excluded others. She posits that "[…] theatrical community is never a given and that it is best approached as a problematic, or a question" (2019, 6).

Sarah Weston suggests that "theatre is produced through community, and simultaneously, community is formed through theatre: a temporal community that exists during the performance that has the potential to continue to affect the broader community that put the play on" (2020, 170). There is value to considering the idea of the formation of a community and the power of theatre to achieve this, and location allows for this to happen without the problematics of assumed identities or homogenisation. However, the concerns and acknowledgement of

how the idea of community has changed over the last forty or so years is key to address. It would be foolish and ignorant to presume that a singular approach to engaging with and making community work could bring about collectivity. Fişek is also right then when she notes that "[t]he nostalgic idea of community can be used to support and even enhance, rather than undo, certain forms of social hierarchy" (2019, 9). This reinforces the idea that the approach to grassroot work is one that needs careful consideration and methodologies that ensure the participants involved are active agents of the work. Returning to Weston, she discusses the community play and the inherent politics involved. She draws the reader's attention to the Jellicoe approach of creating community theatre.[2] Weston points out the potential problems of this model, outlining that: "[t]he use of a professional artistic team of playwright and director can be read as elitism, where the artist from outside of the community forces their artistic or political vision onto a community" (2020, 164). Looking to other models of community engagement in the theatre making process and assessing how this could be continued and built upon in a (Post-)Covid world is therefore crucial.

It remains imperative to look towards a theatre that is in opposition to the mainstream through a post-pandemic lens, one reason being is that simply looking at the traditional theatre building and the way they are set up, it becomes evident that they are not suitable for social distancing. This is highlighted in a recent *Guardian* newspaper article exploring the future of theatre buildings. John McAslan outlines how the theatres of the West End are "[…] completely outmoded. […] People are four inches taller than when they were built, so the seats are too small, the sight lines are terrible and a huge number of seats are restricted by columns" (Wainwright 2020). Writing for *The Stage,* the theatre critic Lyn Gardner echoes the concerns I outline here: "I have no doubt that the theatre building will survive and, will have a vital role in giving work to artists and space to make shows. But it may be no bad thing if there's a shift in culture and in funding that means when we think of theatre, the mind's eye doesn't automatically think of a building" (2021). Discussing radical theatre, Kershaw acknowledges that "[c]ontemporary live performance, especially outside

2 This model is based on the playwright Ann Jellicoe: "Jellicoe's legacy in both professional and community theatre is significant, and perhaps her most noteworthy contribution was formalising a specific model of community theatre, the community play. Originating in Lyme Regis in 1978, Jellicoe's model has been replicated across the UK and internationally, with many prestigious political playwrights and theatre makers being part of the phenomenon, such as David Edgar, Howard Barker and Arnold Wesker. At the same time, the community play has been criticised in theatre literature and under-discussed in applied and community discourses and practices, despite its continued production and proven longevity" (2020, 161).

theatre buildings, is a wonderfully energetic field to tap into […] because as a profoundly public genre it is inevitably thoroughly contaminated by its wider cultural context" (1999, 7). The pandemic and its aftermath, therefore, invites us to reconsider how and where theatre is made and seen and perhaps broaden theatre's appeal to the wider public.

Sarah Bartley writes on the current austerity that the UK finds itself in and reflects on the notion of the "People's Theatre". She states that: "People's theatre occupy a hybrid position within arts practice that encompasses, both in form and organisational structure, amateur, community, and professional practices" (2021, 171). She goes onto to position this within the 21st century, stating that "[…] this contemporary movement of people's theatres in the UK is defined by a set of spatial, economic, and inclusive practices which […] are underpinned by radical modes of collectivity and grassroot civic participation" (2021, 171).

This recent exploration is key to address as Bartley situates this within a contemporary political landscape and explores what this could mean for, as she puts it, "socially committed performance" (171). Through the lens of The People's Theatre, Bartley posits that: "I illuminate the ways in which this model of performance making offers pathways to utilise collective action to reclaim discourses of resilience as a radical practice of empowerment within community theatre" (172). Collectivity, I posit, is crucial to post-pandemic theatre. We are living in, as Fişek remarks, a "[…] neoliberal culture […] of individual self-sufficiency […]" (2019, 48) and working within communities from the ground-up will challenge the era of individualism. The current discourse surrounding radical and community theatre is therefore a timely issue that has currency with both artists and academics.

Bartley provides a case study on the theatre companies Slung Low, based in Leeds and Brighton's People's Theatre, both from the UK. Bartley reflects on their respective approaches and notes the methodologies of Brighton's People Theatre, focusing on their project *The Open up Arts*. This was an integrated research project that worked "[…] alongside councils, communities, academics, and other arts organisations" (2021, 179). Bartley continues, stating that the "[…] strand of work […] illuminates the layered potential of peoples theatre practice to go far beyond the engagement of community members as participants in a performance and instead casts them as researchers, curators, designers, and producers […]" (179–180). This approach, I would argue, is one that could be adopted in a world that must reconsider its cultural engagement.

There remain many forms and approaches to making community theatre that can be tapped into as we re-emerge from a theatrical lockdown. If people cannot gather in a building for some time to come, perhaps a revisitation of gathering outside for more street theatre, carnivalesque style of theatrical

encounters could become popular again. Of course, mass gatherings do not always mean there is a shared meaning or ideology. It could just be "[…] a fleeting experience of collective proximity […]" (Fişek, 2019, 47). Kershaw spoke how alternative, and community theatre was "[…] predicated on the potential power of the carnivalesque as an element of performance" (1992, 72). John McGrath supported the role of carnivalesque for a twentieth century theatre, expressing how: "[…] it is to this general area of celebratory, public, all-inclusive theatre that we should turn" (1990, 153-154 in Kershaw 1992, 71). Not since the turn of 1968 has there felt a more pertinent time to consider celebration and inclusivity to bring people together, but large-scale gatherings might not be the strongest route to take.

The pandemic has indeed pushed companies to reconsider the routes they take. Pentabus, the UK's leading rural touring company, have made a move to creating digitally focussed performances. Their latest piece includes *Spring's Calling* (2021), a collection of short audio pieces presented online that "focuses on nature, spring, outdoors, reflection, restarting and growth; as the cultural sector looks ahead to returning to live events, re-opening venues and welcoming back audiences" (Pentabus, 2021). A project from 2020 called *Borderlands* invited artists living on the border between England and Wales to create films for an interactive digital map. The resulting films were generated from the artists immersing themselves within the landscape, recalling memories and folk tales of their localities. Frozen Light, a theatre company specializing in creating interactive theatre shows for people with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD), usually rely on making often inaccessible theatre spaces accessible for their audiences. During the pandemic they began reconsidering their direction and created a film called *2065: The Multi-Sensory Movie*. To remain within their aesthetic, Frozen Light sent the audiences an interactive parcel ahead of the screening that was filled with sensory props connected to the story.

Pentabus, despite moving to the digital realm, have remained within a rural locality. Their engagement with the rural areas, particularly Shropshire where they are based, is key to their work. It is interesting how an online engagement can allow for a global reach and exploration and yet community-based companies are still using it to interact with and connect with their own localities. A grassroot approach encourages this engagement, as Sarah Weston posits, community plays "[…] presents the opportunity for simultaneous celebration and resistance" (2020, 164). Here I am reminded of Kershaw's description of a community play as a community forming process and White's reflection on the transformational qualities that theatre can have within communities. Talking about accessibility and theatre, Colette Conroy notes how: "Theatre requires that an audience gathers together to share an experience. For the time of the performance, we

make a community of shared meaning. We are not required to think the same or to respond in the same way, but at the end of the evening we feel that we have experienced something together, across all our differences" (2019, 55). Whilst there may need to a be a deeper and more meaningful relationship nurtured for collectivity in community theatre, Conroy does bring our attention back to the essence of a theatrical encounter – as something shared, together.

4. Common Wealth Theatre and Women and Theatre

Rhiannon White writes how the "Covid-19 pandemic has unmasked deep fractures in society and the arts have not been spared, exposing elitism, racism and classism" (2020). White asks, expressing a need for change: could this "[…] be a time for radical imagination? For transformative ways for culture to be reimagined?" (2020). White also brings our attention to the government relief fund for Wales. She proposes that: 'We could share the £53 million by shifting power into the hands of people, artists, communities, nurturing new artists to take their place to tell the stories they need to tell" (2020). With such questions being asked by artists and projects being undertaken that ensure a meaningful relationship between artist and participant is fostered, community theatre companies are paving the way for how theatre could change. These considerations and relationships that are being established by leading companies will continue to be brought into question and grow as a result. White expresses that "[f]or Common Wealth, we are focusing on how we co-create and co-curate with our community. How do we find ways to reinvent making theatre, collectively, in empty spaces we want to reclaim? It'll involve working with a community sounding board, developing artists and bringing world-class theatre to the council estates of East Cardiff. On the community's terms" (2020).

The two artistic directors of Common Wealth Theatre both decided to live in their respective hometowns – Cardiff and Bradford. Much like WSI – they are rooted in these communities. Their connection to place is as important to them as it is to their participants, thus the sense of grassroots is both authentic and palpable to their work. What Common Wealth and Women and Theatre have in common is that they have been focusing on the immediate area in which they are based. This enables a relationship to be established and perhaps this focus provides a platform for different stories to emerge. These groups rely on the places in which they are situated as a fundamental component to the work that they create, and they draw upon not only the landscapes, or perhaps more fittingly, the cityscapes for their work, but perhaps more crucially, the people that occupy these spaces. Their stories and their responses to the work they create are at their heart.

Common Wealth's work is about engaging smaller communities within a specific location, and they take the time for individual stories to emerge and be celebrated. Their recent piece, *Us Here, Now* (2020) documented people within East Cardiff. A photographer, Jon Pountney, captured people within the areas of St Mellon's, Llanrumney and Trowbridge. The aim of the piece was to challenge perceptions of the areas that have dominated since the 1970s when "[…] journalists […] paid kids to vandalise a block of flats for a photoshoot and how the former Welsh Secretary of State demonised a generation by slating single mums and the future of their children" (Common Wealth Theatre 2021). Through shifting the narrative and documenting people, Common Wealth discovered an array of inspiring stories, humanising the area beyond the reputation unfairly imposed upon it. There was no mass gathering, no carnivalesque atmosphere, instead it was individual shots, displayed together, creating a sense of belonging and collective voices.

Us, Here Now, is a celebration of people, capturing individuals looking strong and proud. It documented their lives through photographs and culminated in an outdoors exhibition displayed within Cardiff and had an accompanying documentary film. The location was key to this piece of work but what was not able to happen, due the pandemic, was a gathering that brought the individuals together. However, the large display of photographs, and the documentary, pushes us to reconsider how events can be shared. Working outside of the theatre building is nothing new to Common Wealth Theatre, it is part of their ethos and they pride themselves on making accessible and political theatre. They have a DIY approach to theatre making that deliberately goes against the elitist theatre that charges inaccessible ticket prices to sit in a grand and traditional theatre. They describe themselves as a political, site-specific group, and they are paving the way for grassroot approaches to making theatre. For them it is about going to the communities that they want to work with and making the work there.

Women and Theatre have created *Women in Lockdown*, a filmed theatre piece that draws on women's experiences of the lockdown in 2020. Although the digital space, at first glance, offers a *locationless* platform, all the stories are derived from women in and around Birmingham and therefore the specificity of the location is crucial to the narratives that are communicated. There is a commonality in that all these women live within the same locality, yet they are unable to meet, and their stories all emerge from their own front rooms. The stories that emerge, albeit with crossovers of experiences, do not rely on a commonality other than the location. The assumption is not that the participants share the same socio-economic background nor that they share the same experiences, other than the pandemic. Through engaging with the location in which they are based they can reach people who have a connection to that place and their story can

become part of the narrative that is communicated through the project. The collaboration, sense of place, ownership and community is embedded into these projects during a global pandemic.

Women and Theatre have their roots firmly in Birmingham and the Black Country. Working outside of the theatre building is also part of their fabric. From watching *Women in Lockdown* and the identities of the women in the film, their sense of place becomes clear - through accents, through some shared experiences, and through the landscapes that emerge. The digital space provides a sense that it could be anywhere, but there is both a *locationless* and a *locationess* to the film. A sense of identity is shaped through the voices speaking because Women and Theatre made the choice to work with and gather stories from women in Birmingham. Therefore, the location is key to the outcome of their work.

The work that Common Wealth and Women and Theatre are doing and have done since they began, is rooted in people, place and the intrinsic link between the two. It is yet to be seen how both groups' grassroot work will develop, but place, and most importantly the people who occupy those places, is at the heart of their work. Considering this, I am particularly interested in Fişek's mention of community theatre's role to revitalize "[…] the cultural life of a given locality" but with the added "[…] demanding public intervention on a topic of social or political concern […]" (2019, 14) because the two are so entwined and cannot, in the stark light of Covid times, be separated. Communities need to be revitalized but they need this revitalization to happen whilst at the same time demanding an intervention. Here is where a radical approach to theatre making could come into play.

5. Conclusion

Theatre artists working within the area of community theatre are experts at finding ways to tell human stories through the locality and fostering relationships with people. Historically, community artists have always responded to the world and found innovative ways of communicating and generating stories with communities of people. As we hear about the inevitable closure of prominent high street stores, it is yet to be known what will become of these spaces, but if history tells us anything, then artists and community groups will find ways to reclaim them.

The case studies I have drawn on through this article are discovering their own ways of not only representing the world but also commenting on it. Both Common Wealth and Women and Theatre have ensured that the work they have continued making during the pandemic remains about the people with whom they are creating with and the places in which they reside. The building has not needed to be a consideration. The grassroot methodology has firmly been part

of the process and the outcome of the work produced. As Gooch reminds us: "Talking about art isn't the same as doing it, and just as theatre may reflect on the world but doesn't act on it, so comments from outside the theatre which reflect on its practice remain mere comment until turned into production" (1984, 18).

The pandemic has pushed much of theatre into the digital realm and yet community artists have carved out methods that still ensure a meaningful relationship is being fostered. Pentabus, Frozen Light and Women and Theatre have used the audio and filmic techniques to consider their direction, and yet all of them have ensured that participants remain the focus of the creation process and/or the experience of the piece. The location for both Pentabus and Women and Theatre, despite the digital platform, remains at the heart of their work and this, in turn, aids the relationship that is built with their audiences and participants.

Common Wealth Theatre, much like WSI, are rooted in their cities in which they grew up in and know. They are determined to make theatre more accessible and bring people in to be at the heart of their own stories. Unlike the others, they do not rely on the digital realm, they are striving to find ways of working physically with people as much as possible.

WSI paved the way for many community artists, offering a different approach to theatre making that put the participant and locality at the heart. Their grassroots approach to generating work offers an important landmark in theatre history, yet the large-scale and carnivalesque performances may not be the way to think about community cohesion.

Companies like Common Wealth Theatre and Women and Theatre, amongst many more, are always finding new ways to connect with people and whilst they acknowledge and draw on the fact that the struggle or experiences are not necessarily shared, the goal often is. We must acknowledge key shifts in our understanding of 'communities', but through this, we can also focus on locality and a grassroots approach to nurture collectivity.

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