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**Toward a Theatre of Empathy: Violence in the Plays of
Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Kane, and Marina Carr**

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by

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Dissertation

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Dedication

For the survivors.

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Toward a Theatre of Empathy: Violence in the Plays of Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Kane, and Marina Carr

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The University of Texas at Austin, 2017

Supervisor: David Kornhaber

“How and why do we represent violence onstage? This question perennially resurfaces for theatre practitioners and scholars alike. The choices that production teams make when staging violence reflect those teams’ ideological investments and affect spectators’ reception of a given performance. Various Western theatrical forms, from Greek tragedy to Jacobean revenge drama to Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty, adhere to specific conventions that telegraph the intent and desired impact of their attendant traditions’ representations of violence. In more recent years, as contemporary playwrights have engaged with these traditions, they have adapted or revised their predecessors’ methods of representing violence. This dissertation examines representations of violence in works by three such playwrights: Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Kane, and Marina Carr. These three dramatists—all women and all active on the London stage in the final two decades of the twentieth century—stage violence unflinchingly yet thoughtfully, in ways that merit contemplation of the dramaturgical purposes and implications of such representations.

Extant criticism discusses how Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr each stage violence, but rarely do scholars discuss the three playwrights together. Placing Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr in conversation, this dissertation argues, reveals common dramaturgical goals that

underpin their representations of violence. Each playwright adapts classical source material for contemporary purposes, and in doing so, calls attention to systemic social problems that enable the violence their plays depict. Though the playwrights' methods of staging violence are unique, they all aim to enable spectator recognition of those systemic social issues through their representations of violence. Moreover, that recognition, as well as the processes of spectatorship that facilitate it, allows spectators to develop empathy for those harmed by systemic injustice—including victims of violence. Reading these playwrights' works through theories of gender, spectatorship, and empathy, this dissertation articulates a theatrical practice designed to unsettle spectators, yet to do so within a controlled environment that allows for reflection on the circumstances that produce that unsettlement. These processes of unsettlement and reflection create space for the development of an empathy born from the recognition of difference.

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Introduction

How and why do we represent violence onstage? This question perennially resurfaces for theatre practitioners and scholars alike. The choices that production teams make when staging violence reflect those teams' ideological investments and affect spectators' reception of a given performance. Every theatrical representation of violence thus delivers a unique message to its audience. And in a world dominated by screens of various kinds, theatre's reliance on live bodies heightens the potency of those messages. Indeed, theatre offers uniquely fertile ground for the study of violence. As Lucy Nevitt notes, theatre "provides us with space, focus and stimuli for a concentrated consideration of the subject" (9). This controlled environment centered upon human presence establishes theatre as "a collaborative act of imagination in which theatre-makers and their audiences can explore possibilities and fantasies as well as reconsidering known realities" (Nevitt 6). Studying violence in the theatre thus necessarily involves contemplation of not just play texts, but performative choices and audience experiences as well.

In Western theatre history, certain artistic traditions and schools of thought have developed their own parameters for representing violence. From Greek tragedy to Jacobean revenge drama to Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty, artists often adhere to specific conventions that telegraph the intent and desired impact of their attendant traditions' representations of violence. In recent years, as contemporary playwrights have engaged with these longstanding traditions, they have adapted or revised their predecessors' methods of representing violence. This dissertation examines representations of violence in works by three such contemporary playwrights: Timberlake Wertenbaker, Sarah Kane, and Marina Carr. These three dramatists—all women and all active on the London stage in

the final two decades of the twentieth century—stage violence unflinchingly yet thoughtfully, in ways that merit contemplation of the dramaturgical purposes and implications of such representations.

Extant criticism discusses how Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr each stage violence, but rarely do scholars discuss the three playwrights together. Placing Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr in conversation, this dissertation argues, reveals common dramaturgical goals that underpin their representations of violence. Each playwright adapts classical source material for contemporary purposes, and in doing so, calls attention to systemic social problems that enable the violence their plays depict. Though the playwrights' methods of staging violence are unique, they all aim to enable spectator recognition of those systemic social issues through their representations of violence. Moreover, that recognition, as well as the processes of spectatorship that facilitate it, allows spectators to develop empathy for those harmed by systemic injustice—including victims of violence. Reading these playwrights' representations of violence through theories of gender, spectatorship, and empathy, this dissertation articulates a theatrical practice designed to unsettle spectators, yet to do so within a controlled environment that allows for reflection on the circumstances that produce that unsettlement. These processes of unsettlement and reflection create space for the development of an empathy born from the recognition of difference.

Sexual Difference and Mimesis

As this dissertation focuses exclusively on female playwrights, I must articulate where the project stands on issues of sex and gender. Beneath my argument is an implication that female playwrights harbor different investments than their male counterparts, especially when it comes to representing violence. While I do not want to overgeneralize or propose the dramaturgical equivalent of *écriture féminine*, I do want to

explore how differences between the ways men and women perceive the world can affect the creative process. The notion of difference, of course, brings to mind the work of Luce Irigaray, whose concept of sexual difference is a controversial topic within feminist discourse. Irigaray's work has drawn criticism for its perceived essentialism, or its supposed articulation of inherent differences between women and men. Yet as subsequent thinkers have shown, and as I hope to demonstrate here, Irigarayan notions of difference are more complex than the charge of essentialism implies and provide a useful framework for thinking about the common dramaturgical aims of Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr. In other words, while it would be overly reductive to propose an inherently female dramaturgy, thinking about what might shape certain women's worldviews helps us think through the issues of spectatorship these particular female playwrights engage.

Irigaray may be a controversial figure, but as Elin Diamond reminds us, she has lately been "shedding her essentialist skin" (x). Her concept of sexual difference is less about drawing hard distinctions between men and women and more about acknowledging the fundamental alterity of another human, in particular "the one who differs from me sexually" (Irigaray, *Ethics* 13). Irigaray's central claim is that much of history and culture has been written by men, which in turn has led to the creation of "a sexed world" that contains "no neuter" (*Ethics* 121). Such a world effectively erases women's perspective from philosophical and artistic discourse, an erasure Irigaray finds problematic. "Woman ought to be able to find herself, among other things, through the images of herself already deposited in history and the conditions of production of the work of man," she writes, "and not on the basis of his work, his genealogy" (*Ethics* 10). That is, the work women create might forge its own genealogy based on interpretations of their own experience, rather than filtering that experience through any kind of male subjectivity.

If such language still sounds vaguely essentialist in nature, it is perhaps a matter of our own cultural situation. Indeed, Irigaray's continental European outlook differs conceptually from Anglo-American feminist discourse. As Rachel Jones reminds us, "the sex/gender distinction which has been so important to Anglo-American feminist debates does not map neatly onto direct French equivalents" (5). Claims of essentialism, Jones argues, stem from thinking that misguidedly maps the sex/gender division onto Irigaray's thought and so misinterprets her work as related to rigid notions of biological sex rather than to "women's bodily existence as female, as well as the social and cultural significances of that bodily mode of being" (5). Instead, Irigaray's concept of sexual difference "is neither grounded in nature nor imposed by culture, but articulates both nature and culture, and the relations between them" (Jones 6). It is this complex notion of difference that guides my articulation of the modes of spectatorship this dissertation examines.

The impact of sexual difference upon the production and interpretation of art has grown traction among recent feminist scholarship. If Irigaray's concept of sexual difference accounts for both nature and culture, thereby aiming to delineate the female embodied experience as distinct from its male counterpart, then it follows that art produced by women reflects a perspective distinct from that of art produced by men. This difference in turn necessitates a criticism that takes it into account. As Hilary Robinson contends, a central "challenge for feminist discourses around the production and reading of art is to find means to articulate the difference of artists who are women" (3). Again, this line of analysis is not an attempt to prescribe a set of principles or characteristics for "female art," but rather to acknowledge that art made by women reflects the subjectivity of its creators, just as does art made by men. Irigaray's theory of sexual difference, Robinson notes, "can be used in ways that help us understand new, or other, or different legibilities of artworks, ways of understanding that allow women (as artists and viewers of art) to recognise their

subjectivity as women” (18). This mode of scholarship can be applied to theatre, and is therefore useful for determining how female playwrights’ dramaturgies can reflect their subjectivities, not to mention make those subjectivities clear to their audiences.

Irigaray has already entered the theatrical sphere through her engagement with the concept of mimesis. In a theatrical context, mimesis implies imitation or representation—broadly speaking, the portrayal of characters by actors. Thinking about theatrical mimesis traces back to Plato, who in the *Republic* expresses his skepticism of the practice due to its purported lack of truth. Aristotle elaborates on mimesis in the *Poetics*, where he argues that mimesis is necessary in dramatic tragedy in order to facilitate catharsis, the purgation of emotions such as pity and fear. Given that the playwrights in this dissertation all place themselves in dialogue with classical tragedy through their adaptations, it is also useful to examine how mimesis figures into that dialogue. Hence my consideration of Irigaray’s thinking about mimesis and its extant application to theatre studies. If we recall Irigaray’s claim that humans inhabit a “sexed world” with “no neuter,” then we understand that the theatre—and by extension the mimesis—of classical Western society is the product of a male consciousness. Irigaray punctures the Greek thinkers’ belief in a universal or objective Truth, reminding us that such “universals” are not universal at all because they fail to account for difference. A mimetic model attuned to sexual difference, then, recognizes the inherent instability of representation. As Diamond points out, it is, in effect, “a ‘mimetic system’ that completely belies the concept of origin or model” (xi). In this system, Irigaray asserts, a woman can “play with mimesis” in order “to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing her to be simply reduced to it” (*This Sex* 76). Ultimately, once one realizes that the so-called “truth” venerated by Plato and Aristotle is a construct, one opens oneself to new mimetic possibilities.

Irigaray's difference-oriented mimetic system has sparked much productive thought among feminist theatre scholars. Diamond remains chief among these thinkers; her *Unmaking Mimesis* synthesizes Irigarayan feminism and Brechtian materialism to articulate both a "feminist mimesis" (xvi) and a "materialist approach" to feminist theatre criticism (xiv). I will return to Diamond's engagement with Brecht later in this introduction; for now, I want to focus on her application of Irigaray. Diamond's model of feminist mimesis, built on an Irigarayan foundation, understands "the relation to the real as productive, not referential, geared to change, not to reproducing the same" (xvi). A feminist mimesis, then, accepts difference as its organizing principle. It understands that "truth" is a fiction because different consciousnesses accept different ideas as true. This emphasis on difference obviously takes sexual difference as its starting point, but it can be expanded to consider the numerous forms of difference that a classical male perspective leaves out. In other words, a feminist mimesis reminds us that any kind of worldview shaped by the socially dominant force—men, white people, heterosexuals, white heterosexual men, etc.—is not a universal worldview. It reminds us that universality is an impossible concept, and that we must remember that impossibility when we encounter mimesis in the theatre.

Diamond's articulation of a feminist mimesis is central to this dissertation due to its emphasis on multiple subjectivities. Not only does this emphasis enable the creation of theatre attuned to this difference; it also, by extension, facilitates spectatorship that recognizes difference. This spectatorial recognition is distinct from the recognition of difference Aristotle outlines in the *Poetics*—that is, a recognition that the characters onstage do not exist in the real world—though that Aristotelian notion still comes into play. Rather, a feminist mimesis also calls spectators' attention to differences in lived experience, not just between actor and character, but between spectator and character, character and character, or spectator and spectator. Moreover, by calling attention to these

differences, a feminist mimesis contains the potential to illuminate the ways in which a society treats certain humans based on those differences. In other words, if a classical, patriarchal mimesis allows spectators to witness representation of “reality,” a feminist mimesis urges spectators to understand how that representation is constructed. Such an understanding involves recognition of social systems designed to valorize the dominant subjectivity and to erase or suppress alternative lived experiences. This recognition in turn leads the spectator to ponder the fairness of such systems and to contemplate potential responses when confronted with inequity. A feminist mimesis, then, raises questions about the ethics of spectatorship.

Ethics of Spectatorship

This dissertation joins a burgeoning conversation about the ethics of spectatorship, particularly ethics of spectatorship in an age where awareness of oppression and systemic injustice continues to rise. In attempting to articulate how the playwrights I study here advocate for an ethics of spectatorship attuned to difference, I engage with the work of several scholars attuned to notions of spectatorship and ethics, including Helena Grehan, Emma Willis, and Michele Aaron. Each of these thinkers contemplates how an other-centered ethics along the lines of that proposed by Emanuel Levinas can generate productive modes of spectatorship from a sense of ethical obligation to respond compassionately. As Grehan reminds us, Levinas’ ethics are founded on the notion that “when the other calls us we have no option but to respond” (6). This fundamental sense of obligation, Grehan posits, can help theatre scholars “try to understand and describe the responses of theatre spectators and also to think about what spectators might do with their responses once they leave the theatre” (6). Willis argues that Levinas “provides an important ethical backdrop against which issues of responsibility generally, and theatrical

responsiveness in particular, are examined” (14). Writing about film, but nonetheless from a perspective useful for theatre scholarship, Aaron locates Levinas’ utility in his ability to reveal how spectatorship is “intrinsically ethical” and “depends on our intersubjective alignment with the prospective suffering of others” (112). All of these perspectives, then, assume a sense of responsibility for other human lives, and theorize modes of spectatorship that cultivate that sense of responsibility.

Central to an ethics of spectatorship rooted in responsibility is the idea that spectatorship itself is not a passive position. Rather, it requires active engagement with the material encountered, especially when that material is violent or otherwise disturbing in nature. Aaron highlights the “contractual nature” of spectatorship, wherein the spectator “accept[s] an illusion as a form of reality” (91). This contract can lead to a process of “disavowal” in which the spectator chooses to accept the “substitution of the spectacle for the real, thereby disavowing the absence of reality”; this process becomes a “defense mechanism” that “allows one to indulge in fantasy without suffering the consequences” (92). Aaron emphasizes the spectator’s choice to participate in this process of disavowal in order to “challenge the spectator’s removal and innocence with regard to the spectacle, and argue instead not simply for the spectator’s complicity in its creation and endurance, but for the spectator’s complicity in its often disturbing content” (92). Understanding this complicity, Aaron contends, is paramount for developing an ethics of spectatorship rooted in response and responsibility. If the spectator can choose—with assistance from what she is watching—to resist this process of disavowal, she can begin to examine her own complicity in a system that sanctions the same kind of disturbing content in reality that she sees represented in art.

Of course, resisting disavowal means choosing to be affected by the material one sees. Such a choice renders the spectator vulnerable to profound emotional and even

physical discomfort. Because it springs from a sense of obligation to other humans, this discomfort forms the foundation of an ethics of spectatorship that privileges responsibility. Obviously, every spectator registers this discomfort in different ways, but its general effect is one of anti-complacency. Grehan calls the discomfort “radical unsettlement,” meaning “an experience of disruption and interruption in which the anodyne is challenged” (22). A key type of radical unsettlement, Grehan contends, is “ambivalence,” a term she uses not in the typical sense of equivocation but rather in the sense of questioning “what to do with the responsibility produced by and in response to the work” (22). Grehan posits that this ambivalence “keeps spectators engaged with the other, with the work, and with responsibility and therefore in an ethical process, long after they have left the performance space” (22). As a form of radical unsettlement, ambivalence leads spectators to contemplate their relationship(s) to the actions depicted onstage, rather than to passively accept those actions. In practicing such contemplation, a spectator can become more aware of the social structures behind those relationships and can develop a sense of accountability for his or her complicity in the systems those structures uphold. In other words, in developing such awareness, the spectator becomes “open to the call of the other outside the theatre” (Grehan 35).

If these notions of increased spectatorial social awareness recall Bertolt Brecht’s renowned concept of Epic Theatre, it is no accident. So much politically motivated theatre and theatre scholarship owes a debt to Brecht’s ideas, which articulate theatrical strategies for cultivating politically engaged spectators. The aim underlying these strategies is the production of the *Verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect, a theatrical process through which “the incidents represented appear strange to the public” (Brecht, “Alienation Effects” 91). Brecht built his theory of the alienation effect upon practices he observed in Chinese actors. In the Chinese theatre on which Brecht bases his model, the actor

“expresses his awareness of being watched,” “observes himself,” “separates mime...from gesture,” and ultimately makes a constant effort “to appear strange and even surprising to the audience” (“Alienation Effects” 92). In adapting this objective for his Epic Theatre, Brecht and his actors developed specific techniques designed to facilitate alienation as a means of spectator consciousness-raising. These techniques include the “not...but,” in which an actor, in addition to “what he is actually doing,” will also “at all essential points discover, specify, imply what he is not doing” (Brecht, “Short Description” 137). As a result of the “not...but,” the audience becomes aware that “every sentence and every gesture signifies a decision” (*Ibid.*). Another strategy, historicization, “concentrates entirely on whatever in [a] perfectly everyday event is remarkable, particular and demanding inquiry” (Brecht, “Alienation Effects” 97). In other words, instead of focusing on the universally relatable aspects of a particular event, a production that employs historicization prioritizes the sociohistorical conditions that enabled that event. In his attempts to illuminate social injustices through staging techniques that raise spectator consciousness, Brecht becomes one of the first contemporary Western theatre practitioners to advocate for an ethics of spectatorship based on critical thinking and active inquiry rather than passive escapism.

While Brecht’s dramaturgy grows from Marxist rather than feminist roots, his ideas inform feminist theatre scholarship as well. To think through how Brecht can inform an ethics of spectatorship that results from a feminist mimesis, I return to Diamond, who theorizes a form of feminist criticism from the concepts described above. For Brecht and for Diamond, these techniques, all of which ask spectators to think critically about the social systems a play dramatizes, coalesce in the *gestus*, which Diamond describes as “a gesture, a word, an action, a tableau, by which, separately or in a series, the social attitudes encoded in the playtext become visible to the spectator” (52). Based on the *gestus*, Diamond proposes a method called “gestic feminist criticism,” the practice of which

“would ‘alienate’ or foreground those moments in a playtext when social attitudes about gender and sexuality conceal or disrupt patriarchal ideology” (54). This form of criticism also involves a “feminist rereading of the *gestus*” that considers how such moments offer “theoretical insight into sex-gender complexities, not only in the play’s ‘fable,’ but in the culture which the play, at the moment of reception, is dialogically reflecting and shaping” (53-54). Diamond’s feminist adoption of Brecht thus makes space for a spectatorship attuned to social systems both as they are represented in the play and also as they affect its dramaturgy. Such spectatorship can produce the “radical unsettlement” or “ambivalence” Grehan describes via the *gestus*’ revelation of systemic injustice.

Yet the plays this dissertation examines do not just reveal such injustice on a structural level. They stage violent acts that make clear the consequences of systemic injustice. As a result of the physical and emotional discomfort bound up in witnessing violence, these plays amplify that radical unsettlement to a degree that complicates a thoroughly Brechtian approach. Brecht famously regarded emotional detachment as crucial to his project; any form of spectatorial identification with characters onstage, any adoption of their emotions, was anathema to critical thinking. “[T]he greater the grip on the audience’s nerves, the less chance there was of its learning,” Brecht writes (“Experimental Theatre” 132). Indeed, Brecht spent much of his career in pursuit of what he called “non-aristotelian drama,” or “a type of drama not depending on empathy, mimesis” (“The Film” 50). I want to address, and ultimately challenge, Brecht’s derision of empathy as an uncritical process. In fact, I want to argue for empathy as integral to the ethics of spectatorship Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr aim to facilitate.

Empathy’s role in recognizing and combating injustice is a topic of much discussion, one with ramifications for spectatorship and theatre studies. Lindsey B. Cummings’ recent book, *Empathy as Dialogue in Theatre and Performance*, offers a

productive foundation upon which this dissertation builds. Cummings points out that Brecht's definition of empathy is "somewhat idiosyncratic" in that it involves "the emotions of the character [being] projected into the spectator" rather than vice versa (29). Cummings also rightly notes Brecht's alignment with a prevailing current in Western thought—articulated in Germany in Karl Scheffler's 1908 treatise *Die Frau und Die Kunst*—that "empathy, naturalism, and imitation" were hallmarks of women's art and that empathy is therefore "a feminizing position in which the spectator is penetrated by the affect of the stage" (29). What Cummings' commentary makes clear, and what thinkers like Irigaray and Diamond reinforce, is that these pejoratively-tinged characterizations of empathy spring from male consciousnesses. In Brecht's mind, empathy springs from "emotional identification without thought" (Cummings 29). Empathy, for Brecht, is a process of passive replication, a process that replaces critical thinking with the (not coincidentally, feminine) process of uncritical feeling. Yet for someone whose embodied experience—whose sexual difference, even—renders her vulnerable to discrimination and even violence, empathy and thought are not mutually exclusive, nor is empathy a matter of strict identification or shared feelings. As Cummings writes, "[w]e must expand our notion of empathy beyond the comfortable identification of similarities to encompass potentially uncomfortable, estranging recognitions" (27-28). If we expand our definition of empathy beyond emotional identification, we create space for radical unsettlement—itself a form of alienation, but one not divorced from emotion—as an empathetic process in theatre spectatorship. Cummings envisions empathy as a form of dialogue, "an imaginative and affective process through which we attempt to understand others, which does not rely on analogy or identification" (30). This form of empathy not only is "entirely compatible with Brecht's theories" (Cummings 30); it also shifts empathy's focus to the act of attempting to understand rather than fixating on emotional alignment. It is this process of attempting

that undergirds my conception of the empathy at the core of Wertenbaker's, Kane's, and Carr's dramaturgies.

An Empathetic Ethics

Articulating an empathetic ethics of spectatorship requires an even closer look at the concept of empathy itself, as empathy is a much-discussed topic with multiple definitions. Synthesizing approaches to empathy across fields like philosophy, cognitive science, and various branches of psychology, C. Daniel Batson calls attention to the diverse applications of the term, noting that it "is currently applied to more than a half-dozen phenomena" (3). Batson lists eight different concepts that the word "empathy" commonly connotes:

1. "Knowing Another Person's Internal State, Including His or Her Thoughts and Feelings" (4)
2. "Adopting the Posture or Matching the Neural Responses of an Observed Other" (4)
3. "Coming to Feel as Another Person Feels" (5)
4. "Intuiting or Projecting Oneself into Another's Situation" (6)
5. "Imagining How Another Is Thinking and Feeling" (7)
6. "Imagining How One Would Think and Feel in the Other's Place" (6)
7. "Feeling Distress at Witnessing Another Person's Suffering" (7)
8. "Feeling For Another Person Who Is Suffering" (8)

Each of these concepts involve a relationship between a self and an other, as well as various attempts to create alignment between how that self and other are feeling. More specifically, however, those applications constitute attempts to answer one (or both) of two questions: first, "How can one know what another person is thinking and feeling?", and second, "What leads one person to respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another?" (Batson 3). By pondering one or both of these questions, scholars of empathy continue their quests to broaden understanding of human relations.

In thinking about empathy as it relates to theatrical spectatorship, I want to propose an alternative method of considering these two questions. Batson points out that more often

than not, thinkers “seek to answer the first question without concern to answer the second, or vice versa” (3). My approach to an empathetic ethics of spectatorship, however, turns on the notion that we must answer the first question before answering the second. Furthermore, I want to suggest that the baseline answer to the first question is that one simply cannot know another person’s thoughts and feelings. This fundamental inability to understand another’s perspective stems from any number of forms of alterity: sexual or gender difference, the separateness of individual bodies and their mental/emotional constitutions, subject positions across spectrums of privilege and oppression, and others. Rather than attempting to collapse difference by striving to understand another’s position, then, empathetic efforts would do well to acknowledge that difference. Doing so would shift the focus from deciphering another’s feelings to validating another’s lived experience.

Such a model of empathy adopts difference, rather than commonality, as its organizing principle. It owes this emphasis on difference to the thought of feminist thinkers like Irigaray and other-centered ethicists like Levinas. What these theorists have shown, and what subsequent generations of thinkers have confirmed, is that acknowledgement of difference is an integral component of compassionate response. We cannot fully understand the Other; therefore, we must respond to the Other’s call. I do not mean to imply that one’s physical, mental, or emotional responses cannot mirror another person’s. What I do want to make clear, however, is that empathy ought to start from a fundamental understanding that it is impossible to feel exactly how another person feels, simply due to the nature of human bodies. In order to “respond with sensitivity and care to the suffering of another,” then, we must accept our own inability to know what another is thinking or feeling. The conception of empathy this dissertation addresses thus integrates concepts 7 and 8 from Batson’s list above. The playwrights whose works I analyze each advance a

dramaturgy designed to enable spectator empathy through the experience of witnessing and feeling for others who suffer.

Discussions of empathy necessarily include discussions of why empathy matters. This dissertation is no exception, as my ultimate goal is to argue for the necessity of spectatorial modes designed to generate empathy for victims of violence—whether physical, emotional, or structural. Such modes of spectatorship are necessary because they contain the potential to enable empathetic response outside the theatre. As Batson notes, working toward understanding empathy, particularly via the “question of what leads us to respond with sensitive care to another’s suffering,” helps those “seeking to understand and promote prosocial action” (4). Scholars and practitioners with this aim can apply their understanding of empathy to analyze types of “action by one person that effectively addresses the need of another” (4). Empathy, then, becomes “motivation to relieve the suffering of the person for whom empathy is felt” (4). In Batson’s formulation, empathy matters because it can lead to change.

Batson’s conception suggests that empathy promotes action. This formulation implies that empathy is a static state, a precursor to a dynamic response—an implication that is reflected in Susan Sontag’s argument that compassion “needs to be translated into action, or it withers” (101). While it is true that empathy does not always lead to activism, I want to challenge the idea that empathy is entirely divorced from action. Instead, I argue that empathy is action. If we follow my definition of empathy—the definition based on difference—then we understand that responding empathetically to a person’s suffering necessarily involves action through the validation of the sufferer’s lived experience. When a witness to suffering chooses to believe the extent of that suffering and accept the weight of its effect on the sufferer, that choice is itself an empathetic response. In my empathetic

model, the witness understands that she cannot fully relieve the suffering of another human, and that the act of witnessing involves her own suffering, albeit on a different level.

This form of empathy matters, then, because it validates a plurality of experiences. It also places the focus on the suffering rather than on the relief of it. I do not mean to imply that empathy glorifies victimhood or promotes self-victimization. Rather, I mean that this model of empathy understands that in many cases and for many people, suffering is an ongoing process that is not easily relieved—especially true if one belongs to a historically subjugated group, such as women or minorities. Ultimately, then, if we follow a model of empathy rooted in recognizing rather than easing suffering, we build a foundation for systemic change because we are more inclined to recognize the systems that cause such suffering. In other words, we train ourselves to see patterns in the differences between us.

Having established the model of empathy that undergirds this project, I want to explore in more detail how theatre, and the theatre in this dissertation in particular, can foster an ethics of spectatorship rooted in that empathy. To do so, I take as my guiding principle the following statement from Grehan:

In a world of increasing individualism, where speed trumps time, it is essential to eke out a space in which spectators can experience the often confounding issues of our time, in a way that affords both the issues, and the spectators, the complexity they require or, in some circumstances, demand. It is at the theatre that we can find this space and that we can, in response to the ideas generated, consider how it is that aesthetic, ethical and political issues resonate with and affect us. (1)

Theatre provides us such a space not simply because it places us in a room with other live bodies acting out complex situations. It provides us such a space because difference—especially in the case of the theatre in this dissertation—is such an essential part of its operations. Recognition of this difference in turn provides an arena for cultivating the form of empathy I propose above. Audiences at these productions know that actors are not

characters, and that characters are not real people, yet they are encouraged to become invested in the suffering before them anyway. But beyond that, audiences are encouraged to recognize the systems that treat difference pejoratively rather than productively. Once a spectator understands the machinations of such a system and sees that system's violent effects within the (relatively) controlled environment of the theatre, that spectator becomes better able to recognize such systems and their effects outside the auditorium. In other words, if we witness a feminist mimesis in action, and feel empathy for certain characters represented not in spite of but because of those characters' inherent difference from ourselves, we are primed to recognize the arbitrary and constructed nature of "truth" outside the theatre, the systems that rise to power because of those constructs, and the harm that arises from those systems' insensitivity to difference. Each playwright evinces this empathy and recognition through different means, but their common goal involves facilitating a unique mode of spectatorship that unsettles viewers and inspires reflection.

Critical Approach and Chapter Outlines

To illustrate how Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr forge their particular modes of spectatorship, I afford each playwright a chapter in which I examine two of her plays and their potential effects on theatre audiences. The two plays I have selected for each chapter both represent violence in ways that engage with existing literary and dramatic traditions and encourage spectator contemplation of the context surrounding that violence. When viewed in conversation, these plays reveal their writers' distinct approaches to representing violence as they aim to raise awareness of systemic injustice and facilitate empathetic spectatorship. The differences among the playwrights' techniques necessitate a telescopic methodological approach. Overall, as this introduction indicates, this dissertation turns on theories of sexual difference, ethics of spectatorship, and empathy to articulate its subjects'

goals. Yet since the playwrights' dramaturgies are so unique, each chapter includes additional scaffolding centered upon what I consider the driving force behind the playwright's representations of violence. My readings of the plays are informed by theories germane to that concept and are set against the backdrop of this dissertation's unifying theoretical framework. In each chapter, I use these nesting critical frameworks to anchor my analysis of how the staging of these representations of violence can (and how certain productions' representations of violence did) affect their audiences on intellectual, emotional, and even physical levels. Ultimately, this dissertation intervenes in the field of feminist spectatorship studies, positioning the facilitation of spectator empathy as a central aim of dramaturgies attuned to how marginalized identities navigate dominant ideologies.

All three playwrights wrote contemporaneously during the late twentieth century, but I have arranged my chapters chronologically according to the dates of the plays I analyze. As such, my first chapter focuses on two plays by Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) and *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988). Both of these plays dramatize patriarchal societies that normalize violence against women and even encourage women to harm each other in the pursuit of power. Wertenbaker's goal involves representing these plays' violence in ways that illuminate the systemic underpinnings of that violence—the patriarchal mechanisms that drive characters' behavior. In doing so, she reveals the absurdity of a system that demands that women behave like men in order to gain power (as in *Mary Traverse*) and/or prioritizes male gratification with little regard for female lived experience (as in *Nightingale*). Wertenbaker thus critiques the destructiveness of social systems that attempt to erase or disregard difference.

To advance this critique, Wertenbaker centers the act of witnessing in her dramaturgy, particularly when she represents acts of violence. Both plays dramatize moments wherein characters witness violence as it occurs before them onstage; these

moments make Wertenbaker's theatrical spectators aware of their own positions as witnesses—and, particularly in the case of *Nightingale*, as playgoers. In alerting her audience to their witnessing role, Wertenbaker joins the Brechtian tradition articulated above, wherein performative tactics remind audiences of their presence at a play. As such, I read *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* through theories of witnessing and through the Brechtian-feminist lens Diamond advances. In keeping with Brechtian dramaturgy, each play deploys a *gestus*—a particular device that crystallizes the play's thematic objectives—that intersects with its representations of violence. In *Mary Traverse*, the *gestus* involves characters narrating the (often violent) events they witness, calling the theatrical audience's attention to the process of witnessing and spectatorship that unfold both onstage and in the theatre itself. In *Nightingale*, Wertenbaker focuses even more intently on theatrical spectatorship, using moments of metatheatricality—two choruses and two plays-within-the-play—in gestic fashion to remind her audience of their presence at a theatrical event. Through these variations on the Brechtian *gestus*, Wertenbaker asks her audience to remember their spectatorial position and, in turn, to contemplate the ethics of witnessing violence from that position. As such, Wertenbaker poses a challenge to thinkers like Sontag, who question the value of witnessing representations of suffering, and aligns herself with those like Karen Malpede, who recognize dramatizing witnessing as a critical element of representing violence and trauma. Moreover, Wertenbaker's emphasis on the validation of experience as integral to the witnessing process reclaims space for empathy in conversations about Brechtian dramaturgy.¹

My next chapter addresses the work of the late Sarah Kane, who shares Wertenbaker's interest in adapting and reimagining established texts and genres, but does

¹ My definition of empathy differs from Brecht's, as Cummings helped me demonstrate earlier in this introduction; nonetheless, Brecht's reputation for disdaining empathy has grown large enough to necessitate corrective interventions.

so via a thoroughly different dramaturgy. Whereas Wertenbaker maintains emphasis on seeing violence, Kane insists that her audience experience a measure of that violence themselves. The plays I read in this chapter, *Blasted* (1995) and *Phaedra's Love* (1996), subject their audiences to harrowing scenes involving rape, cannibalism, dismemberment, and murder. Both plays comment on humans' desensitization in a media-saturated world, *Blasted* by bringing war in Eastern Europe crashing through a hotel room in Leeds, and *Phaedra's Love* through the characterization of Hippolytus as an emotionally numb, TV-obsessed loafer. In the context of feminist spectatorship, Kane may seem somewhat out of place, as unlike Wertenbaker and Carr, she resisted classification as a feminist dramatist. Yet her dramaturgy does call attention to systemic injustice and is designed with spectator empathy in mind. By immersing her audience in suffering, Kane enables spectators to feel a fraction of the pain her characters endure and to contemplate the origins of that pain.

Kane's objective of an experiential theatre centers her audience's emotional responses. As a result, I draw from affect theory to analyze how Kane's dramaturgy elicits emotional reactions from spectators. Reading *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* in light of the work of such thinkers as Sarah Ahmed and Sianne Ngai, I articulate how Kane aims to resensitize her audiences to the effects of violence. She does so primarily by subjecting spectators to a theatrical experience that one might describe as traumatic, both for its physical and emotional resonances. While audience members are not harmed physically, they do experience what I call emotional violence, a form of psychological abuse that Kane dramatizes in concert with physical violence to demonstrate the ubiquity and normalization of violence in the cultures she stages. Kane's emphasis on emotional violence, and on her audience's experience of it, recalls models of empathy that emphasize humans' capacity for co-feeling. As they watch Kane's plays, spectators feel the same effects Kane's characters feel when subjected to violence. This emphasis on spectators' bodies and

emotions places Kane in conversation with the Aristotelian model of catharsis, which aims to arouse negative emotions among spectators, but then purge those emotions in a gesture of release. Though Kane draws from classical tragedy in both *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, she overturns her source material's emphasis on catharsis, inhibiting the release of negative emotions through her affective dramaturgy. This perpetuation of spectator suffering, I contend, is where Kane locates her audiences' potential for empathy. By feeling a portion of what Kane's characters feel during (and hopefully long after) the performance, Kane's audiences realize that real-world suffering—especially for marginalized individuals—is an ongoing process that does not resolve neatly when the play ends. Just as Wertenbaker reclaimed space for empathy in Brechtian dramaturgy, Kane crafts a contemporary model of tragedy where empathy assumes increased agency.

My third chapter revolves around the Irish playwright Marina Carr, who despite her different nationality has also enjoyed popularity on the London stage. Carr's plays address Irish-centric concerns, but they also appeal to broad audiences through their dynamic storytelling and memorable characters. Moreover, like Wertenbaker and Kane, Carr reimagines classical tragedy in contemporary settings, staging the violence once concealed from the audience in order to advance timely social critique. The two plays I examine in this chapter, *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998) and *Ariel* (2000) each address present-day issues through this lens of adaptation. *Bog* reimagines Euripides' *Medea* in the context of a clash between an Irish Traveler woman and her ex-lover's Gaelic family. *Ariel*, loosely based on Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis* and taking cues from Sophocles' *Electra*, weaves these classical narratives into the lives of a contemporary Irish political family. In both plays, Carr represents violence onstage in order to confront her audiences with the consequences of social structures that enable that violence through various forms of discrimination—against marginalized ethnic groups, against women, or against both—and through

obsession with power. Carr's dramaturgy also draws clear connections between these consequences and past actions, challenging classical tragic tropes of inevitable punishment for disobeying divine forces.

To mount her case against tragic inevitability, Carr highlights connections between past actions and present outcomes. Carr's organizing dramaturgical principle, the analogue to Wertenbaker's witnessing and Kane's suffering, is haunting. By revealing how past events and lives haunt her characters' present experiences, Carr dramatizes how violent social systems perpetuate themselves over time. Carr's emphasis on haunting lends her plays naturally to an analysis based on theories of the spectral. As such, I draw from studies of haunting as it relates to both violence and theatre in my analysis of *Bog* and *Ariel*. Gabriele Schwab's notion of "haunting legacies," the pervasive effects of intergenerational violence, and Marvin Carlson's concept of "ghosting," help me elucidate how Carr uses a medium that relies heavily on memory to reveal how socially- and culturally-situated violence persists across generations. Ultimately, Carr facilitates what I call a hauntological mode of spectatorship, or a spectatorship that draws upon audience members' memories to prompt recognition of the mechanisms underlying cycles of violence. In hauntological spectatorship, empathy for victims of violence is born from this awareness of these cycles' systemic roots. Albeit through different methods of representing violence, Carr continues Wertenbaker's and Kane's projects of accentuating empathy's role in the adaptation and reception of established tragic traditions.

While dramaturgically diverse, the three women in this dissertation pursue a common goal of representing violence in ways that resist classical tragic models and forge innovative modes of spectatorship. Their resistance and innovation is, this dissertation argues, rooted in a desire to cultivate their audiences' empathy for the victims of violence in their places. And part of that cultivation involves developing spectators' awareness of

the systemic underpinnings of that violence. If one of Western theatre's main purposes throughout its history has been to imitate, and therefore to critique, human action, these playwrights enact their critique by dramatizing what happens when empathy is missing. By subjecting audiences to both the violence and the social structures that engender that violence, Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr train spectators to look for the cause—and to feel its effects.

Chapter 1: “Is this what the world looks like?”: Timberlake Wertenbaker’s Theatre of Witnessing

Existing scholarship generally calls attention to two key aspects of Timberlake Wertenbaker’s life and work: first, her difficult-to-categorize identity, and second, her preoccupation with language. The latter is in part a product of the former: the playwright’s childhood years in the Basque country and her experience with linguistic discrimination at the hands of the French helped her recognize the connections between language and power. Though born to American parents, Wertenbaker primarily spoke French and Basque as a child; English did not become her dominant language until she returned to her birthplace of New York as a teenager. Witnessing the French government’s “suppression of the Basque language and culture” instilled in Wertenbaker a “life-long fear of being silenced” (Bush 8). After establishing residence in London in the late 1970s, Wertenbaker translated this fear into a prolific playwriting career, penning numerous works that examine the ramifications of linguistic disenfranchisement and other forms of oppression—including physical violence and gender discrimination.

Wertenbaker’s interest in these subjects sprang in part from a political climate where increasing opportunities for women clashed with the valorization of commercialism and ruthless individualism. The ascent of Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher epitomized this tension, leaving many citizens and social critics questioning whether women could only gain power by embracing capitalistic and patriarchal behavioral standards. In the theatre, Thatcherism prompted a renewed interest in extreme commercialism, causing several London playwrights to raise their voices against the Prime Minister’s agenda in the 1980s. And because the post-censorship theatrical climate had become friendlier toward

women playwrights, Wertebaker's voice joined a chorus that included venerable compatriots like Caryl Churchill and Sarah Daniels. Churchill's *Top Girls* (1982) famously ponders the consequences of women leveraging patriarchal power dynamics for their own gain, while Daniels' *The Devil's Gateway* (1983) positions the Greenham Common Women's Peace Camp as a utopian female-only space existing apart from patriarchal society. Wertebaker's major plays share these dramatic predecessors' focus on the ramifications of female power achieved within and outside patriarchal systems, but they are unique in their explorations of the inherent violence of this pursuit of agency. Whether maneuvering within the system or attempting to escape it, Wertebaker's women endure (and sometimes perpetrate) grave physical and psychological harm. Wertebaker's willingness to represent this violence traces to her preoccupation with the ways in which silencing and witnessing function as disempowering and empowering forces, respectively—forces that can foment or resist violent ideologies.

In this chapter, I connect Wertebaker's linguistic concerns to issues of witnessing and spectatorship as I examine representations of violence in two of her better-known plays, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* (1985) and *The Love of the Nightingale* (1988). Extant studies of these works note their focus on language's role in oppression and on the connections between physical and psychological violence. I aim to add to this conversation by more thoroughly examining how these plays' representations of violence mine the symbiotic relationship between language, silence, and witnessing in order to alert audiences to their complicity in oppressive systems. In these plays, Wertebaker emphasizes how language (a means of power) and the lack or silencing of it (a means of disempowerment) interact with acts of spectatorship, acts which in turn highlight both characters' and the audience's roles as witnesses to violence. In doing so, these plays establish awareness of witnessing as the means through which Wertebaker cultivates an

empathetic ethics of spectatorship. In making spectators aware of their roles as witnesses to violent acts enabled by unjust social systems, Wertenbaker's dramaturgy sparks potential for spectator empathy—and, by extension, resistance to oppression.

I have chosen to focus on these two plays for several reasons. For one, gender figures prominently in both *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale*. Not only do audiences witness the work of a female playwright; they also witness the experiences of multiple female characters who must navigate worlds that cater to men. Moreover, both plays refashion established literary and mythical forms with an eye toward making explicit what those original forms kept implicit. Both plays also contain numerous scenes of graphic violence, frequently violence against women. Both display Wertenbaker's characteristic concern with language as a form of power and a tool of oppression. Most importantly, both make use of dramaturgical devices designed to make audiences conscious of their spectatorship. By marrying these characteristics and aims, the plays call attention to how storytelling and seeing can disrupt and/or reinforce a viewer's complicity in systems of oppression. I regard *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* as two parts of a continuum; *Nightingale* refines and expands upon *Mary Traverse*'s engagement with issues of seeing, witnessing, and spectating. *Mary Traverse* focuses primarily on seeing and witnessing, but includes some instances of spectating in its diegesis. *Nightingale*, in turn, emphasizes spectating through its multiple stagings of plays and performances within the play. Ultimately, examining the two plays in conversation illuminates how Wertenbaker makes spectators aware of their roles as witnesses to violence, and in doing so, maximizes the potential for spectator empathy.

Wertenbaker's most famous play, *Our Country's Good*, shares some of these concerns, but I afford it less attention here due to its dominant position among extant Wertenbaker scholarship and its ultimately divergent aims, particularly its reduced focus

on gender. An adaptation of Thomas Kenneally's novel *The Playmaker*, *Our Country's Good* celebrates theatre through the experiences of Australia's first penal colony and its production of George Farquhar's *The Recruiting Officer*. Though the play does address issues of identity, oppression, and violence, it functions primarily as a vehicle for praising theatre itself. Written in the same year as *The Love of the Nightingale*, *Our Country's Good* offers a bracing tonic amidst the United Kingdom's conservative 1980s climate, an environment rife with uncertainty surrounding government arts subsidies.² The play's popularity perhaps stems from its overall optimism and support of its own medium; yet its success often overshadows the equally strong work Wertenbaker produced during the mid-to-late 1980s. While both *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale* have received considerable attention in their own right, they benefit from additional scrutiny when placed in conversation with each other. *Our Country's Good* may laud the transformative potential of theatre, but *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* investigate audience responsibility in greater depth, exploring how awareness of witnessing can precipitate the validation of victims' experiences. As I examine how these two plays use witnessing violence to cultivate an empathetic spectatorship, I aim to articulate how Wertenbaker subverts and adapts both classical and Brechtian dramaturgy to account for different lived experiences—particularly female ones.³

² For additional information on the tenuous nature of arts subsidies in 1980s England, see Milling 36-41.

³ I will not entirely excise *Our Country's Good* from my analysis, however, as its focus on theatre and performance dovetails with *Nightingale's* concerns in particular—perhaps unsurprising considering Wertenbaker wrote the two plays virtually concurrently. Where applicable, I will note how *Nightingale's* vision of performance and spectatorship relates to and complicates the vision of theatrical performance Wertenbaker advances in *Our Country's Good*. Nonetheless, *Our Country's Good* plays a supporting role in this chapter to allow for a more complete picture of Wertenbaker's investments regarding witnessing, spectatorship, violence, and gender.

Witnessing Violence

As I articulate how Wertenbaker enables empathetic spectatorship through awareness of witnessing, I will supplement my existing methodological approach with theories of witnessing and spectatorship germane to issues of violence and performance. Discussions abound over the ethical ramifications of witnessing and representing violence both fictional and nonfictional. A touchstone of this discourse is Susan Sontag's *Regarding the Pain of Others*, which examines war photography to ponder the value of viewing such suffering. Though Sontag writes about photography, her insights extend to other visual media, including theatre. Sontag notes that war photographs can function as "a means of making 'real' (or 'more real') matters that the privileged and the merely safe might prefer to ignore" (7). The same could be said for theatre that represents violence, as audiences are subject to witnessing harrowing scenarios from which their daily lives usually insulate them. Yet what do viewers gain from that experience? Responding to Virginia Woolf's thesis that war photographs can elicit moral outrage and compassion for victims en route to preventing further conflict, Sontag posits that the response to others' suffering depends on the viewer's subject position. This potential for infinite responses based on infinite subjectivities means that war photographs and other violent media do not solely exist to generate compassion by driving home the true nature of atrocity. Sontag's observation thus serves as a reminder of the complicated nature of spectatorship and the danger of theorizing a unified purpose for or response to the representation of trauma.

Sontag questions the value of consuming media that represents other people's pain. "No moral charge attaches to the representation" of suffering, she claims (41). Aside from "those who could do something to alleviate" the suffering depicted or "those who could learn from it," any other viewers are "voyeurs, whether or not we mean to be" (42). For Sontag, that voyeurism potentially obfuscates any redemptive potential of witnessing

violence. She points to the long tradition of artistic representations of suffering as a possibly desensitizing force that normalizes not only violence and pain, but the consumption of that violence and pain: “Torment, a canonical subject in art, is often represented in painting as a spectacle, something being watched (or ignored) by other people. The implication is: no, it cannot be stopped—and the mingling of inattentive with attentive onlookers underscores this” (42). In Sontag’s formulation, depictions of spectatorship remind the viewer that witnessing the violent event and internalizing its horror are optional. The viewer’s ability to turn away from or otherwise avoid the full impact of the violence minimizes any potential efficacy contained within the act of witnessing.

Theatre, however, can present a challenge to Sontag’s assertions. A theatre such as Wertenbaker’s, which prioritizes witnessing and spectatorship, works diligently to prevent the avoidance Sontag highlights. Though theatrical audience members have the option of averting their eyes from the action onstage, their physical presence in the room with the performers sets their experience apart from that of someone viewing a painting, a photograph, or a video. Unless the spectator leaves the theatre, she cannot fully avoid the representations of violence depicted before her. Theatre’s reliance on physical presence does not eliminate the potential for infinite interpretations of or reactions to the same representation of violence, but it does create opportunities for playwrights and practitioners to shape texts and performances that maximize the potential for effective audience witnessing of that violence. Theories of witnessing violence and trauma in a theatrical context thus grapple with how that violence and trauma should be represented.

Much of the conversation about theatrical witnessing originates from the development of productions that stage true stories of traumatic survival. The goal of staging these stories often involves amplifying marginalized voices and enabling audiences to bear

witness to the lived experiences of the oppressed. Productions in this vein center the somewhat nebulous concept of testimony, which trauma theorist Shoshana Felman links to the process of “bearing witness to a crisis or trauma” (1). Performers or characters who relate their traumatic experiences testify to those experiences and ask the audience to bear witness to their trauma. The term “theatre of witness” gained traction in the latter part of the twentieth century, as the rise of documentary theatre—that is, theatre devised from existing nonfictional material, such as interviews—and other productions dramatizing traumatic events of the recent past made testimony a dramaturgical bedrock. Though distinct from Wertenbaker’s representational drama, these genres’ preoccupations with testifying and witnessing offer a useful lens through which to examine how witnessing and spectatorship operate in Wertenbaker’s representations of violence and trauma.

For those invested in theatrically testifying to trauma, the act of bearing witness is the key step toward fostering spectatorial compassion and civic engagement. For example, Karen Malpede, whose play *The Beekeeper’s Daughter* addresses the rape of Bosnian Muslim women by Serbian soldiers in the 1990s, theorizes a theatre of witness that “provides its audience with the knowledge, the courage, the time, and the community in which to contemplate and affirm its engagement in actual, private and public acts of witness” (135-36). For Malpede, witnessing is a catalyst for social change; a theatre that centers witnessing must therefore take dramaturgical steps to develop its audience’s witnessing skills. Malpede’s theatre of witness relies on an “additional dynamic” where “the audience is able to witness the act of witnessing as it takes place between characters” (132). Witnessing is built into the onstage action to allow for compassionate spectator responses: “The audience sees how witnessing affects all parties to the tale, and their position outside the dialogue allows audience members to move between empathetic identification with the body of the one whose testimony is being offered and the one whose

body is being entered by the testimony” (132). By watching characters witness, spectators become better witnesses themselves. As I will demonstrate below, *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* also build the act of witnessing into their actions. Like Malpede, Wertenbaker asks her audience to contemplate what effective and empathetic witnessing (and, by extension, spectatorship) entails.

Wertenbaker’s focus on witnessing also ties into conversations about the ethics of representing violence, as such representations can affect spectators in diverse ways. As Lucy Nevitt reminds us, “It makes a difference whether we are guided towards abstracted contemplation of suffering and victimhood or pushed to respond to specific wounds on specific bodies through an imaginative process that connects what we see onstage with our sense of our own bodies” (23). In her study of the ethics of spectatorship, Lisa Fitzpatrick notes that a theatre that “evok[es] particular qualities of violence (such as its suddenness and unpredictability)” enables its spectators to “experience intellectual or visceral glimpses of the fear and confusion associated with traumatic violence.” In doing so, this theatre aims to “heighten empathy with victims and to provoke a conscientious engagement with their situations” (59). Fitzpatrick argues that “the vulnerable body acts as a trigger for the spectator’s imagination, heightening the dread of what they might see” (62); that imagination, in turn, plays an important role in witnessing. As Malpede articulates, “[t]he term ‘witnessing imagination’ describes a way of seeing violence which produces acknowledgement of and also resistance to the human cost of violence” (129). A production that dramatizes both vulnerable bodies’ endurance of trauma and other bodies’ witnessing of that trauma relies upon the viewer’s imagination to create an ideal environment for cultivating spectator empathy. Returning to Helena Grehan’s ideal of radical unsettlement, such an environment is ideal because the dramatization of both trauma and witnessing produces ambivalence in spectators who must experience both the

“visceral glimpses” Fitzpatrick notes *and* the impact of trauma upon its survivors’ witnesses.

An ethical representation of violence, then, positions viewers as witnesses to trauma and its testimony and facilitates empathy for victims by radically unsettling the spectator. Building witnessing into the diegesis, as Wertenbaker does, is one method for encouraging spectators to become active witnesses rather than passive observers. Linking this witnessing with onstage violence shifts the focus from the violence itself to the ramifications of that violence for both victims and observers. Rather than making a spectacle of suffering, this dramaturgy asks spectators to contemplate the relationship between violence and witnessing. Witnessing involves opening oneself to experiencing trauma—not on the level the victim of violence has experienced, but a form of trauma nonetheless. Felman and Dori Laub call this event the “crisis of witnessing,” in which the witnessing audience “finds itself entirely at a loss, uprooted and disoriented, and profoundly shaken in its anchoring world views and in its commonly held life-perspectives” (xvi). Though Felman and Laub write primarily about witnessing as it relates to the Holocaust, their assertion that the crisis of witnessing can reveal how “art inscribes (artistically bears witness to) *what we do not yet know of our lived historical relation to events of our times*” (xx) has implications for Wertenbaker’s plays and audiences. Whether one calls it “radical unsettlement” or a “crisis of witnessing,” the sense of profound upheaval a spectator feels upon witnessing Wertenbaker’s representations of trauma holds the potential to unearth uncomfortable truths about the social systems that spectator inhabits.

In dramatizing both the act of witnessing and the crises it produces within her witnessing characters, Wertenbaker enables her audiences to ask what social systems or structures led to the acts of violence her characters endure. This emphasis on social

recognition places Wertenbaker in the Brechtian tradition, and indeed, Brecht remains one of Wertenbaker's profoundest influences. Diamond's formulation of the feminist *gestus* thus becomes helpful for understanding how Wertenbaker highlights the role of witnessing for her spectators. In both *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale*, Wertenbaker uses the technique of *gestus* to call her spectators' attention to their roles as witnesses, a move which in turn facilitates their understanding of the patriarchal systems that precipitate much of the violence in each play. In *Mary Traverse*, the title character often narrates scenes that she witnesses or experiences, emphasizing either her own or other characters' acts of witnessing and enabling Wertenbaker's audience to take stock of their own witnessing position. In *Nightingale*, Wertenbaker's *gestus* involves moments of metatheatricality wherein her audience recognizes their participation in a theatrical event and contemplates the implications of that participation. Because gender and violence are intrinsically linked in these plays, Wertenbaker's feminist gestic dramaturgy enables audience members to recognize how patriarchal systems normalize violence against and silencing of women, and how witnessing can engender resistance to such systems. Becoming witnesses themselves, viewers of *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* come closer to understanding their "lived historical relation," to borrow Felman and Laub's term, to the catastrophic events depicted onstage.

The Grace of Mary Traverse

Wertenbaker had been a playwright for nearly a decade by the time *The Grace of Mary Traverse* premiered in 1985. Having begun writing plays in the mid-1970s while living on the Greek isle of Spetse, where she worked as a French teacher, Wertenbaker relocated to London in 1978 and found her voice as a political writer. This political voice is evident in works like *Case to Answer* (1980), *New Anatomies* (1981), and *Inside Out*

(1982), all of which confront women's struggle for power in patriarchal cultures. As her career began to blossom, Wertenbaker enjoyed residencies at Oxford-based company Shared Experience in 1983 and later at the Royal Court, London's flagship venue for new play production, which ultimately produced *Mary Traverse*. Wertenbaker's first major London production, *Mary Traverse* also launched Janet McTeer, now one of England's premiere stage actors, into the national spotlight through her portrayal of the title character. Like Wertenbaker's previous plays, *Mary Traverse* focuses on feminist issues, but it also evinces a heightened investment in questions of witnessing and spectatorship. One might assert that the play marks Wertenbaker's foray into facilitating empathetic spectatorship through a feminist gestic dramaturgy built on witnessing violence.

Mary Traverse takes place in late-18th century England, where the young, upper-class title character feels confined by her drawing-room existence and seeks knowledge of what lies beyond her home. She begs her servant, Mrs. Temptwell, to show her the outside world. As she journeys through London, Mary's thirst for more knowledge grows, and she ultimately makes a Faustian pact with Mrs. Temptwell: she will live with the servant woman in order to gain more knowledge, but in exchange, she can never return to her father's house. Once bound to Mrs. Temptwell, Mary enters an eye-opening and often dangerous world where she frequently encounters sexuality and violence (sometimes simultaneously) in her attempts to gain experience. As she learns more about the oppressive conditions facing women and working class citizens, Mary seeks ways to overthrow the systems that produce these conditions. Yet her attempts to subvert or dismantle these systems ultimately backfire: in aiming to earn respect and equal treatment from men, she commits violence against women, and in organizing a lower-class rebellion, she allows parliamentarians to sabotage her cause and subsume her efforts into their campaign against

Catholicism. Despite this redirection, Mary's desire for revolution persists, and she eventually leads a brutal riot that results in widespread death and suffering.

Wertenbaker's choice of an 18th century setting enables audiences to view *Mary Traverse* from enough critical distance that persistent dominant ideologies become visible. Though Wertenbaker bases the play's climactic violence on London's Gordon Riots of 1780, she does not consider *Mary Traverse* a historical play. Rather, she "found the eighteenth century a valid metaphor" and "was concerned to free the people of the play from contemporary perceptions" (*Mary Traverse* 57). The play thus lends itself to readings informed by its own political moment rather than by 18th century concerns. And indeed, critics read *Mary Traverse* primarily in the context of its feminist leanings. Martha Ritchie considers the play in light of 1980s Britain's material conditions for women, which were characterized by "high unemployment, decline in women's wages, service-sector job availability, [and a] post-feminist mind-set" (410). Noting that Mary Traverse shares initials with Margaret Thatcher, Ritchie observes that Mary's rise to power via subsumption into a male-dominated system mirrors the conservative then-Prime Minister's adherence to patriarchal leadership conventions. Ritchie argues that by "revealing the process through which the state incorporates Mary's voice, Wertenbaker makes visible the power structures behind dominant ideology" (410). Sophie Bush builds on Ritchie's foundation to explore how the play critiques female success achieved through patriarchal means. Noting that Wertenbaker's interest in "female corruption" drove the play's composition, Bush argues that, along with other plays from this period in Wertenbaker's career such as *New Anatomies*, *Mary Traverse* "highlights the naivety of the assumption that women would run the world more successfully than men, if they continued to run it along patriarchal lines" (90). Indeed, as Mary Traverse progresses on her journey, her hunger for dominance prompts her to perform according to standards devised by and

reserved for powerful men. Yet the disastrous ending to Mary's quest suggests that progress toward gender equality can happen "only if different systems are embraced, and women are positioned as crucial agents in these processes as their disenfranchisement from current systems makes them better able to recognise the need for change" (Bush 90). The entrenched nature of patriarchy, the play demonstrates, makes female equity within such a system impossible.

Since Mary's quest results in her absorption by the dominant system, the play's investment in ideology provides a related line of critical inquiry. Some scholars read *Mary Traverse* as an engagement with Althusserian interpellation, or the process through which an ideology recruits subjects. Esther Beth Sullivan notes that this interpellation "occurs as individuals invest in belief systems and institutions which are transparently loaded with prejudicial and hierarchizing values (146). Mary's journey, and Wertenbaker's theatre in general, "calls attention to the constant hailing of individuals who find themselves always already identified as subjected subjects" (Sullivan 146). Mary Karen Dahl reads Mary's trajectory as "one young woman's attempt to perfect, then escape and replace, the particular kind of subjectivity society prescribes for her" (150). Ultimately, *Mary Traverse* "holds up ideology to view in an attempt to force spectators to admit ideology's existences and function" and "questions the processes through which men and women may effect changes in existing power structures" (Dahl 151). These processes become particularly clear in the play's violent moments, where Wertenbaker frames the action in such ways as to draw the audience's attention to the power structures that enable that action, and in their representations of witnessing, where spectators observe characters reacting to the violence the dominant system precipitates.

Given these critical foundations, further opportunity exists to examine how *Mary Traverse*'s representations of violence use the act of witnessing to highlight toxic power

structures and generate empathy for victims. In what follows, I read *Mary Traverse*'s key violent moments from a gestic feminist perspective, as well as through theories of witnessing, in order to demonstrate how Wertenbaker establishes witnessing as integral to the development of empathetic spectatorship. In *Mary Traverse*, Wertenbaker deploys a technique where characters, especially Mary, narrate (often violent) scenes that they experience or witness. This dramaturgical device becomes a form of feminist *gestus* wherein audiences, made aware of how witnessing and spectating functions for both characters and themselves, become cognizant of their existence within a system that tacitly endorses violence as a form of entertainment. Having acknowledged this complicity, viewers acquire the potential to recognize that system—and perhaps to respond empathetically to those whom the system hurts—once they exit the theatre.

Seeing and Speaking Violence

Wertenbaker's investment in witnessing is clear from the play's opening scene. Mary's father, Giles, only cares that his daughter becomes a conversationalist who can "make the other person say interesting things" (60). He rejects Mary's interest in attending the theatre on the grounds that "[t]here's no need to see a play to talk about it" (61). Giles' remark is not just a tongue-in-cheek metatheatrical grace note; it highlights audience members' roles as witnesses right from the play's start. Moreover, it reveals how the culture Mary inhabits denies young women the ability to witness. Though Mary asks, "Wouldn't I do better if I saw a little more of the world?" (61), such intuition does not sway Giles' opinion. Unwilling to accept her father's restrictions, Mary persuades a reluctant Mrs. Temptwell to take her into the streets. Having made her concern with witnessing clear, Wertenbaker leads her protagonist and her audience into the intimidating and often violent world of 18th-century London.

Soon after Mary's journey begins, Wertenbaker connects witnessing to violence. Mary and Mrs. Temptwell make their way to Cheapside, London, where they encounter Lord George Gordon, a self-described "man of stunning mediocrity" who wants nothing more than to be noticed (65). As Lord Gordon pontificates and poses, a young woman named Sophie combs the streets looking for her aunt. Mary becomes uncomfortable and wants to leave, but Lord Gordon, angered by the women's non-attention, lashes out and draws his sword upon Mary (68). Sophie intervenes when she realizes Mary is in danger, but Lord Gordon announces that he will "have [her] too" and grabs her (68). Mary escapes and implores Mrs. Temptwell to "[c]all for help," but the servant woman sees no point, believing that Sophie "won't mind" being raped because "[v]irtue, like ancestors, is a luxury of the rich" (69). "Watch and you'll learn something," Mrs. Temptwell instructs Mary. As Lord Gordon rapes Sophie, Mary narrates the scene:

He stands her against the lamp-post, sword gleaming at her neck, she's quiet. Now the sword lifts up her skirts, no words between them, the sword is his voice and his will. He thrusts himself against her, sword in the air. He goes on and on. She has no expression on her face. He shudders. She's still. He turns away from her, tucks the sword away. I couldn't stop looking. (*Pause.*) It's not like the books. (69)

The scene's staging creates multiple witnessing dimensions: the audience not only watches the rape but also watches Mary watching the rape.⁴ As such, the viewer registers both Sophie's trauma at the hands of her rapist and Mary's trauma at the hands of her own voyeurism. These dual layers of witnessing, coupled with Mary's narration, form the play's first moment of feminist *gestus*. The juxtaposition of Sophie's rape with Mary's matter-of-

⁴ Wertenbaker's script is ambiguous about how the rape is staged. The stage directions do not indicate that Lord Gordon and Sophie exit, but they do not describe the rape's blocking either. The text thus provides much freedom for directorial and performer choice. My interpretation assumes that Lord Gordon and Sophie remain onstage, but productions that choose not to show the act maintain the frame of witnessing that informs my analysis.

fact delivery operates quite like a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*—that is, the famous effect through which Brechtian performance shatters the veneer of illusion and allows the spectator to view the scene from a critical distance. As Diamond reminds us, the *Verfremdungseffekt* is designed “to denaturalize and defamiliarize what ideology—and performativity—makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable” (47). That Mary simply stands by while Sophie is raped, coldly dictating what is happening, underscores how a system that valorizes male aggression (distilled in the phallic image of Lord Gordon’s sword) normalizes male-on-female sexual assault. The double horror of witnessing both Sophie’s rape and Mary’s witnessing the rape emphasizes the toxic effects of that normalization.⁵

The scenes twofold forms of witnessing comment upon the ethics of spectatorship and representation. Wertenbaker acknowledges the human voyeuristic impulse through Mary’s admission that she “couldn’t stop looking” (69). In doing so, she both mitigates spectators’ potential shame at their own impulses and asks them to examine those impulses critically nonetheless. Sontag notes the potential perversity in witnessing violent photographs: “There is the satisfaction of being able to look at the image without flinching. There is the pleasure of flinching” (41). Likewise, theatre audiences can derive a similar thrill from watching violence onstage. Yet Wertenbaker’s use of narrative framing demonstrates one method of representing violence that asks spectators to interrogate their own responses. Rather than simply dramatizing a rape and asking her audience to tolerate it, Wertenbaker challenges her audience to contemplate how they might respond in Mary’s

⁵ The term “witnessing,” of course, holds multiple meanings. In this case, I am using “witnessing” in what modern audiences would understand as its legal sense: Mary sees the rape occur. She does not yet witness Sophie’s rape in the sense of validating Sophie’s traumatic experience; doing so would require communication with Sophie about her trauma. Throughout this chapter, I will delineate between types of witnessing when doing so proves germane to my analysis.

position of witness. Would they remain frozen, like Mary, processing the discrepancy between what they have read in “the books” and the reality they see? Would they intervene, even if it meant risking bodily harm? What constitutes an appropriate response to witnessing an act of weaponized sexuality? While different spectators may answer these questions differently—if they are answerable at all—the fact that Wertenbaker’s dramaturgy prompts their asking underscores the efficacy of a dramaturgy centered upon witnessing. Such a dramaturgy constitutes what Michele Aaron calls “self-reflexivity,” a tactic that “questions the spectator’s distance and safety, the irresponsibility and neutrality of looking on” (96). Implicated in the action via Mary’s own performance of witnessing, spectators must contemplate the ethics of watching and responding to Sophie’s rape.

If the representation of Sophie’s rape uses feminist *gestus* to implicate spectators in the action, the rape’s aftermath extends that implication by dramatizing Mary’s response. After Lord Gordon exits, Sophie “comes down toward Mary walking with pain. They look at each other. Then Sophie moves off” (70). The silence that passes between the two women represents both a failure and a crisis of witnessing. Though Sophie intervened earlier when Lord Gordon threatened Mary, Mary does not do the same when the roles were reversed.⁶ After the rape, the stunned Mary is unable to testify to Sophie’s pain, and the traumatized Sophie is unable or unwilling to speak with Mary about her experience. The dynamic between the two women illustrates Malpede’s point that “[e]nduring suffering and causing suffering are part of the witnessing dynamic” (131). Sophie’s rape has clearly affected Mary, whose paralysis in this moment becomes another proxy for Wertenbaker’s audience’s response. Witnessing a live act of simulated sexual violence is no easy task, and

⁶ Sophie’s earlier intervention functions as a form of “not...but,” the Brechtian technique that gives voice to alternative courses of action in order to frame a character’s actions as the result of conscious choices. Showing Sophie’s actions makes clear that Mary could intervene when Lord Gordon accosts Sophie, but chooses not to.

Mary's reaction acknowledges the difficulty inherent to the experiences. Yet the scene also draws clear distinctions between the suffering involved in witnessing trauma and the suffering involved in becoming a victim of physical violence. Once Sophie exits, Mary notices blood on the ground where Sophie once stood (70); this key detail delineates Sophie's experience from Mary's—and from the audience's. Wertenbaker's dramaturgy illustrates both the severity of Sophie's trauma and, through Mary's actions, the difficulty of responding to it. Once again, Wertenbaker invites spectators to ponder how they might react when confronted with such violence, and to contemplate how their responses might differ from Mary's. The difference between Mary's and Sophie's lived experiences did not keep Sophie from responding proactively to Lord Gordon's threat to Mary, but that difference proves too great for Mary: perhaps the insularity of her higher class station renders her incapable of considering the feelings of those with less power. While bearing witness to a rape victim is obviously a tremendously difficult task, Wertenbaker implies—through Mary's silence and Sophie's injury—that it is a task worth undertaking despite its difficulty.

Through its witnessing-of-witnessing structure, Wertenbaker's dramaturgy repurposes Brechtian techniques to facilitate spectator contemplation of response to sexual violence. By making spectators aware of their roles as witnesses via Mary's narration of the rape and response to Sophie, Wertenbaker disrupts the audience's passive consumption of the play's action. This degree of alienation in turn enables audiences to recognize the problematic nature of Mary's actions after she witnesses Sophie's rape. In the ensuing scene, after being refused entry into a coffee house because of her gender, Mary makes her Faustian bargain: she accepts Mrs. Temptwell's condition that she will never return home so that Mrs. Temptwell can lead her to knowledge and power. Even though Mary has witnessed the dire consequences of the patriarchal desire for power—i.e., Sophie's rape—

she still would rather “run the world through [her] fingers as [men] do” rather than work to overturn the system that makes women like Sophie suffer (71). Having facilitated a reflective mode of spectatorship in staging Sophie’s rape and the witnessing thereof, Wertenbaker then turns her newly-reflective spectators’ attention to Mary’s choice to remain complicit in the system that hurt Sophie. The result is, hopefully, a moment of spectatorial clarity: Mary saw how male dominance harmed Sophie, yet self-interestedly pursues that power anyway. The gap between spectators’ and Mary’s perspectives begins to widen, as Wertenbaker’s witnessing-centered dramaturgy has precipitated an other-centered ethics, while Mary’s entrenchment within patriarchy has rendered her worldview self-centered. The play’s subsequent action explores the consequences of Mary’s failure of witnessing and ethical shortfall.

The systemic underpinnings of Sophie’s rape resurface in the staging of Mary’s sexual initiation, which again deploys the feminist *gestus* of Mary’s narration to alert spectators to Mary’s entrenchment in a system that harms women and dismisses victims of trauma. As Mary negotiates her encounter with Mr. Hardlong, the man Mrs. Temptwell has recruited for Mary’s sexual education, she narrates her experience, offering Wertenbaker’s audience access to her thoughts. Mary’s narration elucidates the implicit violence of heterosexual relations in a patriarchal system; her words call attention to the interaction of power and pain. “At first, power,” she notes when she takes Mr. Hardlong’s penis in her hand. “I am the flesh’s alchemist. Texture hardens at my touch, subterranean rivers follow my fingers. I pull back the topsoil, skim the nakedness of matter. All grows in my hand” (77). The scene initially overturns conventional representations of female sexuality, as Mary stands fully-clothed over a naked Mr. Hardlong, objectifying his body in what Bush calls “a reversal of traditional depictions of the ‘male gaze’” (86). Moreover, in a particularly bold piece of staging, a female actor touches a male actor’s genitalia

onstage before a gaggle of spectators. The vulnerability of the male actor's body under the female actor's hands and the audience's gaze runs counter to the profusion of female nudity in the visual arts.

Yet Mary's deflowering also reinforces the sometimes violent nature of sexual encounters between men and women in a society that valorizes male domination and power. "No one warned me about the pain," Mary narrates once Mr. Hardlong penetrates her, noting also that she can "[s]cratch the buttocks in retaliation, convenient handles and at my mercy" (77). Mary's narration here reminds Wertenbaker's audience of the pain often involved in women's loss of virginity (in cases where a penis is involved); moreover, that indication of pain resonates with Sophie's earlier rape. Now a participant in a consensual act rather than a witness to a nonconsensual one, Mary seems to have all but forgotten Sophie's trauma. Wertenbaker, however, uses Mary's narration to ensure her audience remembers. Moreover, the narration also draws attention to the privileging of male pleasure. Once he has finished, Mr. Hardlong ceases to pleasure Mary, leaving her unsatisfied: "You mustn't withdraw your labor," Mary protests, but Mr. Hardlong ignores her pleas (78). Through Mary's narration, Wertenbaker's audience comes to understand the violence—some physical, some psychological—that women can experience in relations with men conditioned to prioritize their own power and pleasure.

In emphasizing Mary's observation of her own experience, the *gestus* of Mary's narration once again primes Wertenbaker's audience to focus on witnessing—and, by extension, to recognize the absence of adequate testimony. As with Sophie's rape, Wertenbaker also stages the aftermath of Mary's sexual encounter, and does so to emphasize the consequences of failure to witness. After Mr. Hardlong has finished with Mary, he demands his payment: gold and relations with Sophie, who now reports to Mrs. Temptwell. This turn of events reveals that Mrs. Temptwell has contracted Sophie, now

pregnant with Lord Gordon's child, into service under false pretenses: "You said I was to work for a lady," Sophie interjects when Mr. Hardlong tries to lead her away (78). Sophie's use as a pawn in the transaction between Mrs. Temptwell and Mr. Hardlong reinforces differences between Sophie and Mary that Mary has helped perpetuate. Instead of testifying to Sophie's trauma, Mary ensures, through her congress that Mr. Hardlong, that Sophie will relive it. That Mary narrates both Sophie's rape and her own first sexual encounter only reinforces the connection between Mary's failure of witnessing and Sophie's continued oppression. In other words, her narration functions as a *gestus* that alerts Wertenbaker's audiences to the consequences of voyeuristic or dispassionate spectatorship. Mary's passive observance of Sophie's rape, and her quasi-journalistic reporting of the scene, raise questions for Wertenbaker's audience about what constitutes effective response to sexual violence. When Mary's narration re-emerges in her scene with Mr. Hardlong, Wertenbaker's audience understands the disastrous consequences of her choice to ignore Sophie and enter the system rather than circumvent it.

Gaming (Within) the System

Having established Mary's narration as *gestus*, Wertenbaker continues to indict the failure of witnessing and implicate spectators in the action as Mary ascends within the patriarchal sphere. After her sexual initiation, Mary's power grows seemingly overnight: she beats several men in a game of piquet before challenging them to a cockfight, which she also ultimately wins. Because an actual cockfight would be difficult to stage, Wertenbaker communicates the fight's events through characters' narration of the action. Beyond the "[s]creams and urgings" from the crowd, Mary and her male competitors provide a play-by-play of the fight. One man points out that Mary's "cock's dead," only for her to reply, "No, look, look. It was a ruse. My cock's risen and stricken Mr.

Hardlong's" (88). Here, the narration helps Wertenbaker's audience understand that Mary, through her "cock," has subjugated Mr. Hardlong via the same violent system that granted Mr. Hardlong power over her. It also highlights both the spectacle of the cockfight and the collateral damage—maimed or killed roosters—inflicted by a system that glorifies violent spectacle as entertainment rather than atrocity. Wertenbaker's audience registers the discrepancy between the cockfight spectacle, and Mary's participation in it, and their own presence at the theatrical event. By filling in details for the theatrical audience's gaze, the characters' narration gives spectators the opportunity to witness (as best they can) the brutality of the cockfight and Mary's full participation in it. Wertenbaker's audience thus contemplates their relationship to the acts of violence onstage, learning the difference between witnessing and agitating.

The cockfight signals a significant shift in Wertenbaker's gestic feminist dramaturgy, as she adds an onstage audience to the equation. The combination of dramatized spectatorship and character narration demands that the theatrical audience evaluate their own responses to the action and compare those responses to those of the onstage audience. Wertenbaker will rely on the onstage audience even more heavily in *Nightingale*, but her use of the technique in *Mary Traverse* heralds her burgeoning interest in the ethical questions facing spectators who witness violent acts. If the cockfight illuminated the level of violence power-hungry acolytes of patriarchy are willing to consume, the event that occurs immediately after the fight highlights the absurdity of those same individuals' reactions to an event that stands outside the patriarchal sphere. After Mary wins the cockfight, she offers her prize money to Mr. Hardlong in hope of further sexual congress, but he refuses; Mary instead gives Sophie the money and orders her to "work for it," after which Sophie performs cunnilingus on Mary before the aghast men

(89). As Sophie pleasures her, Mary narrates the scene, drawing attention to the female anatomy and to the men's revulsion:

What is it, gentlemen, you turn away, you feel disgust? Why don't you look and see what it's like? When you talk of sulphurous pits, deadly darkness, it's your own imagination you see. Look. It's solid, rich, gently shaped, fully coloured. The blood flows there on the way to the heart. It answers tenderness with tenderness, there is no gaping void here, only soft bumps, corners, cool convexities. Ah, Sophie, how sweet you are, I understand why they love you. (89)

The staging of this moment, with some men turning away from Mary and Sophie, replicates the artistic trend Sontag notices wherein representations of suffering also include a "mingling of attentive and inattentive onlookers" (42). Yet the men are not faced with a physically violent act; they are avoiding a sexual encounter between women. Mary's narration of their aversion calls attention to the men's avoidance, and in doing so, highlights the incongruity of their reaction. That the men recoil from this sexual encounter—one in which, it bears noting, Sophie has to pleasure the woman who failed to intervene in her assault⁷—but enthusiastically watch roosters mauling each other telegraphs Wertenbaker's disdain of patriarchy's desire to consume violence uncritically. As such, it prompts Wertenbaker's audience to evaluate how their own responses to the Sophie/Mary encounter compare to their reactions to the cockfight. By juxtaposing these two scenes, both of which amplify the narrative *gestus*' effects through the reactions of the onstage spectators, Wertenbaker demands that the theatrical spectators interrogate their

⁷ This encounter between Mary and Sophie again reinforces the differences between the two women. Mary may command attention from men and lambast their preconceptions, but she does so at Sophie's expense. Sophie chooses to pleasure Mary because she needs the 250 guineas Mary so casually tosses her way in order to survive. Mary, while divorced from her upper-class background, has not had to endure the kind of suffering Sophie has experienced. As a result, Mary remains disconnected from and unable to empathize with Sophie, who must now perform oral sex on the woman who watched her rape but did not intervene. The onstage audience augments the humiliating position in which Sophie finds herself. Mary narrates the men's failure to witness from the midst of a moment that is yet another product of her own failure to witness Sophie's trauma.

impulses to gawk or to turn away. Witnessing violence, her dramaturgy implies, should not be a sport, but rather an occasion for self-reflection.

With the onstage audience in place to supplement the *gestus* of narration, Wertenbaker can demand that her audience fully confront the dominant ideology that has fully consumed Mary. Wertenbaker makes this demand via the play's most incisive gestic moment: the hag race. In this scene, Mary recruits two passing old women to race each other and challenges Mr. Manners, one of the spectators of the cockfight and the scene with Sophie, to a bet of four thousand pounds—all the money she and Mrs. Temptwell carry between them. Here, the combination of character narration and onstage spectatorship reaches its parodic climax. Unlike the cockfight, where narration was necessary to describe action that could not fully be staged, the hag race is easily representable, yet Lord Gordon calls the action like a track announcer: “Mr. Manners’ hag is taking the lead. Miss Mary’s hag having a little trouble” (90). Juxtaposed with the hags’ slow shuffling—the stage directions dictate that the old women run “*extremely slowly*” and travel “*just a few feet*” (900)—Lord Gordon’s announcing highlights the race’s absurd nature. Meanwhile, Mary becomes part of the onstage audience, urging on her hag with little regard for the woman’s health. The fusion of Lord Gordon’s narration and Mary’s spectatorship underscores Mary’s absorption by the patriarchal system. No longer a horrified witness to that system’s harms (*i.e.*, Sophie’s rape), Mary has become an active participant in a system that humiliates and hurts women.

Having established the extent of Mary’s transformation, Wertenbaker turns her sights on her own audience. When her hag loses the race, Mary not only rejects Mrs. Temptwell’s suggestion that crying might prevent Mr. Manners from taking the money—“What? Turn female now?”, she snarls (91)—but also retaliates by whipping the old woman viciously until she falls to the ground (92). At this point, even the men onstage are

aghast, a reaction Wertenbaker highlights through Mary's pivotal question: "Why do you all stare at me?" (92). This question, itself a brief moment of narration, forms the heart of the play; through it, Wertenbaker confronts her audience as well. Why do *we* stare at Mary? What do we gain from witnessing her absorption by the patriarchy and her subsequent violence against women? When framed by the onstage audience, the question suggests that its answer involves more than simple consumption of entertainment or shock at witnessing violence. Instead, Wertenbaker seems to inquire, "How will you, theatre audience, differentiate yourselves from the characters onstage?" In other words, we ought to stare at Mary to maximize our potential for witnessing. If we understand how Mary's desire for power rendered her unable to react compassionately to Sophie's trauma and pushed her down a slippery slope that brought her to her current cruel state, then perhaps we will avoid repeating Mary's grave error.

Ultimately, then, the use of an onstage audience as a target for character narration crystallizes Wertenbaker's Brechtian-feminist dramaturgy. It drives wedges between Mary's, the onstage audience's, and the theatre audience's perspectives and minimizes the potential for identification with Mary as her behavior turns increasingly violent. The onstage audience functions as a form of "not...but" for Wertenbaker's audience, who gauge their responses in relation to characters' reactions. The characters' narration continues its gestic function, highlighting the toxicity of a patriarchal system intolerant of sexual difference from the masculine norm. When deployed in tandem, the two devices prompt spectators to consider the victims' perspectives. That these victims, Sophie and the two hags, are all female and poor—identities subjugated by a patriarchal, capitalistic social system—betrays Wertenbaker's aspiration toward a feminist mimesis. Not only does Wertenbaker use Brechtian techniques to reveal systems of oppression; she also uses them to reveal the experiences of the oppressed. In doing so, she creates space for recognizing

difference (both sexual and social) and establishes the act of witnessing as crucial to that recognition.

The Violence of (Failed) Witnessing

Mary's climactic question to her onstage (and offstage) audience represents the apex of Wertenbaker's feminist repurposing of Brechtian tactics in *Mary Traverse*. Not coincidentally, an intermission follows that scene, facilitating further audience contemplation of the events that just happened and reinforcing the widening gap between their perspectives and Mary's. When the play continues after the interval, Wertenbaker focuses on the consequences of Mary's acquiescence to patriarchal violence. She also poses an alternative to Mary's behavior by focusing more intently on Sophie, who finds her voice in the play's second half. No longer does Wertenbaker provide an onstage audience; the theatre audience becomes the primary witness of the action, which grows increasingly chaotic as the Gordon riots, fomented by Mary's collusion with members of Parliament, build to a fever pitch. Moments of narration emerge as characters describe what they have seen in the riot, but those descriptions refer to offstage events. *Mary Traverse*'s post-intermission staging is thus a shadow of its pre-intermission fusion of narration and witnessing. Wertenbaker has eliminated the frame of onstage spectatorship in a move that challenges her audience to practice the same reflection as they did prior to intermission, only without that frame's additional guidance. As such, Wertenbaker prepares her audience to reflect critically on the violence they witness outside the theatre, where no onstage audiences exist to influence their reactions.

Wertenbaker does provide a model for witnessing, however, in the character of Sophie, whose strengthening voice relates directly to her ability to witness. Having been freed from Mary's and Mrs. Temptwell's servitude, Sophie has kindled a relationship with

a young activist, Jack. Though at first she can only reply “Yes” or “No” to Jack’s questions, her answers indicate that her voice, once silenced by her oppressors, is returning (101). Moreover, that Sophie has entered a relationship founded on witnessing and giving voice to a partner’s experience reveals key differences between her and Mary, whose pursuit of power and pleasure has limited her ability to love. The discrepancy between Mary and Sophie becomes even more apparent during a visit between the two women, during which Sophie reveals a traumatic past. When Mary asks Sophie how she felt when Lord Gordon assaulted her, Sophie responds, “I don’t know. I can’t remember. Sometimes I can’t feel I’m there. It could be someone else. And I’m walking in the fields. So I don’t mind much. My brother used to touch me. He was strong and I learned to make it not me. I was somewhere else” (105). In recalling her past sexual abuse and the dissociation she feels as a result, Sophie gives voice to her own trauma. Her articulation of her own narrative enables Wertenbaker’s audience to witness the trauma to which she testifies. Mary, on the other hand, fails at witnessing, callously responding “I’m not sorry then” once Sophie reveals the dissociations’ effects (105). With this compassionless reply, Mary reinscribes the failure to witness that tarnished her first interaction with Sophie and enabled her corruption by the dominant ideology.

Sophie’s witnessing potential, communicated through her relationship with Jack and her testimony to her own trauma, stands in stark contrast with the disastrous results of Mary’s failure to witness. When Mary agrees to help Jack and Sophie fight for the abolition of poverty, she does so not because she wants justice for those of lower economic station, but because she “only wants power,” as Mrs. Temptwell astutely observes (107). Mary volunteers to “speak for” the inarticulate Jack, but makes no effort to listen to his concerns (109); she talks her way into the Houses of Parliament, only for politicians, sensing a revolutionary threat, to twist her words into a campaign against popery rather than poverty.

Having never examined her privilege, Mary does not fully grasp the subject matter of which she speaks and cannot recover the original mission. The result is a devastating riot that leads to the death of Jack and many others. Yet as the violence mounts and chaos engulfs the stage, Mary can only boast about what she sees as her words' revolutionary effects: "Thousands and I've roused them...I'm drunk with what I've done" (118-19). Mary's comments confirm that for her, personal achievement trumps witnessing and overturning oppression. Her attempt to navigate her social system has produced an unhealthy focus on power that forecloses any potential for good. While her fellow revolutionaries bear witness to the destruction that surrounds them, Mary's gloating renders her so myopic that she hardly registers the violence. The contrast between Mary's and others' reactions makes Mary's failure to witness painfully clear. By failing to speak about the violence her language has ultimately engendered, Mary fails to acknowledge the consequences of her quest for power. Not only does she refuse to speak of the violence that surrounds her, she also refuses to see it. Her self-centeredness underscores how the failure to witness constitutes its own form of violence.

Despite *Mary Traverse*'s movement away from simultaneous narration and onstage spectatorship in its second half, one moment among the riots stands out for its connections to the play's earlier gestic features. In this moment, Mrs. Temptwell staggers onstage in a state of shock and recounts to Mary the brutality she has experienced. The action grinds to a halt, and the noise of the riot fades. Speaking "*quietly and coldly*" to Mary, Mrs. Temptwell describes a scene of abject horror:

It was dark, only a few thousand of us left. Prisoners, enthusiasts, those who couldn't free themselves from the throe of the crowd. We heard 'to Holborn'. We moved, step by step, pushed, pushing. Torches were at the front. We heard there was gin inside the houses, gin to refresh the poor mob. We rushed in, we fell in, pressed against the houses, torches high. I was

pushed, I dropped, on my knees, drank the liquid, warm, then burning, looked up to see all coated in flames, fire rippling along the gin, houses, people, clothes, all burning. / (Pause.) / Bodies pushed each other into the burning river, slid, still trying to drink, lapped at the fire. Women, children, tearing off their clothes, people laughed. Laughed. A man next to me found a girl, rolled her into the fire, pulled up her skirts. A wall crumbled over them. (120-21)

Though Mrs. Temptwell's narration recounts offstage events, her language evokes the most violent scenes Wertenbaker's audience has yet had to picture. In its imaginative demands on the theatre audience, the monologue issues a challenge: can spectators picture the violence, even without onstage action corresponding to the narration, and bear adequate witness to Mrs. Temptwell's trauma? To guide viewers through this challenge, Wertenbaker makes Mary a one-woman onstage audience, as Mrs. Temptwell speaks directly to her. Yet instead of acknowledging the trauma described, Mary reverts to denial, repeatedly begging Mrs. Temptwell to stop and claiming that her account is "not true. It didn't happen" (121). Like her earlier silence during Sophie's rape and her callous dismissal of Sophie's childhood sexual abuse, Mary's spectacular failure of witnessing here shows Wertenbaker's audience how not to react when confronted with trauma. The intensity of Mrs. Temptwell's descriptions, coupled with Mary's inappropriate response, prompts members of Wertenbaker's audience to reflect upon how they might respond in a position similar to Mary's.

Whether through overt narration and onstage spectatorship or quiet description of offstage violence, *Mary Traverse* draws from Brechtian models to spark audience awareness of the consequences of failed witnessing. Moreover, in illustrating these consequences, the play interrogates how pervasive social systems such as capitalism and patriarchy actively discourage witnessing because it falls outside their emphasis on the pursuit of dominance and power. The play's conclusion imagines an alternative to such systems, one based on compassionate witnessing. "If you just looked, from near," Sophie

advises Mary, whose tendency to “think at a distance” Sophie finds ineffective (125). Through Sophie's evolution, the play offers an alternative strategy to the techniques Mary uses to gain power in a wealth-obsessed, male-dominated world. Most significantly, Sophie's worldview has developed *after* she has gained experience through acts of witnessing. Having endured rape, sex trafficking, unplanned pregnancy, the death of her child, a violent uprising, and the execution of her lover, Sophie has experienced and witnessed more than her share of trauma, much of which results directly or indirectly from the actions of Mary and Mrs. Temptwell—who, for their part, remain embittered and resentful of their actions' outcomes. The contrast between Sophie's hopeful demeanor and the other women's bitterness solidifies the distinction Wertenbaker's dramaturgy has helped her audience recognize: that granting credence to the traumatized, rather than suppressing trauma in an effort to gain power, offers the most productive way forward.

Ultimately, *Mary Traverse* marks Wertenbaker's foray into representing violence in such a way that encourages her audience to consider their own positions as witnesses to trauma and to recognize the systemic roots of that trauma. Having primed her audience to think critically about how they witness violence via character narration and onstage spectatorship, Wertenbaker offers an alternative to representations of violence that prioritize spectacle and titillation over contemplation. *Mary Traverse*'s representations of violence, often framed by Mary's or another character's narration and some form of onstage witnessing or spectatorship, are designed to elicit a productive discomfort in the viewer. Through *Mary Traverse*'s dramaturgy, Wertenbaker implies that witnessing violence, understanding what causes it, and validating victims' experiences are integral factors for creating an alternative to the capitalist patriarchy that demeans people like Sophie. The play's final scene confirms such a sentiment, as Sophie emphatically rebukes Giles' intimation that there are “things it is better not to know” or “to forget”: “No. We

must not forget” (129). Sophie’s use of the first person plural invokes both the “we” onstage and the “we” that encompasses the theatre audience. Her inclusive diction suggests that if audiences leave the theatre remembering how the failure to witness led to destruction within the play, then perhaps they will become mindful of how their responses to real-world violence and trauma can affect victims and perpetuate or resist toxic social systems. Wertenbaker’s next play, *Our Country’s Good*, continues her emphasis on witnessing and spectatorship, using a play-within-the-play to illuminate how theatre itself can challenge oppressive regimes, particularly through the community it creates among performers. Yet it is *The Love of the Nightingale*, written around the same time as *Our Country’s Good*, that builds upon *Mary Traverse*’s investment in spectatorship and its potential for cultivating empathy.

The Love of the Nightingale

Premiered by the Royal Shakespeare Company in October 1988, *The Love of the Nightingale* was the final production to inhabit The Other Place, the RSC’s black box theatre devoted to new and experimental work. The play reimagines the Greek myth of Philomela, recorded in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*; in the myth, the Athenian princess Philomela is raped by her sister Procne’s husband Tereus, king of Thrace, who also cuts out his victim’s tongue to prevent her from incriminating him. Philomela spends years weaving a tapestry that illustrates her rape and sends that tapestry to Procne, who exacts revenge by killing she and Tereus’ son Itys and serving Tereus a meal made from Itys’ flesh. Wertenbaker’s play replaces the tapestry with a dumb show of dolls that Philomele (Wertenbaker’s spelling) crafts and displays before Procne and others at Thrace’s Bacchic festival. Wertenbaker also slightly alters the retaliation against Tereus, as Procne and Philomele collaboratively kill Itys, and the play omits the myth’s father-son cannibalism.

Nightingale does preserve the myth's ending, however, in which the gods turn Procne, Philomele, and Tereus into birds. By fleshing out the myth's characters and their relationships, Wertenbaker draws attention to the social structures and power dynamics that produced the myth's tragic consequences. Moreover, the myth's emphasis on vision and belief allows Wertenbaker to craft an adaptation that centers upon acts of witnessing and spectatorship.

Often overshadowed by *Our Country's Good*, which premiered the same year, *Nightingale* received a mixed response from critics. While *Our Country's Good*, which premiered at the Royal Court in September 1988, sparked a litany of praise for its celebration of theatre in a turbulent political time, *Nightingale's* feminist leanings and unflinching depictions of violence against women were less universally legible. As Jane Milling recalls, *Our Country's Good* benefited from a perfect union of subject matter and historical moment: "After a decade of Thatcher's leadership and seismic changes to the way Britain conceived of itself," England embraced the play's idea that the country "should work for a painful, useful self-consciousness and change its structures" and can effect that change through inclusivity in the arts (205). In contrast, *Nightingale's* premiere primarily stoked feelings about its venue, and "in many reviews its content took second place to its status as the last play in the Other Place before it closed" (Milling 206). For instance, the *Financial Times's* Michael Coveney focused on the fact that "good writers have rarely done their best work in" the Other Place (*Nightingale*, in his estimation, upheld that reputation) (31). Moreover, when the play was restaged in London nine months later, many reviews displayed "a level of contested intellectual and emotional engagement that directly channels the tension between the ancient and the contemporary, the spare and the poetical, the violent and the philosophical that define the play's text" (Milling 215). Writing for *The Guardian*, Nicholas De Jongh complained that *Nightingale* "sometimes sounds like an

authentic reworking of one of those unactable Penguin translations of classic Greek texts” (“A violent silence”). Because the play “asked for a new consideration of political and sexual oppression in vividly theatrical terms” (Milling 215), it proved less critic-friendly than the more uplifting *Our Country’s Good*.

Despite the lukewarm response from theatrical critics, *Nightingale* has generated a fair amount of scholarly discussion. This scholarship generally emphasizes the play’s concerns with language, gender, adaptation, and power. Sophie Bush considers the play a consciousness-raising effort to illustrate how oppressed voices must “find original routes out of oppression” (98), perhaps even through a form of language that “specifically benefits the suppressed (117). Bush sees *Nightingale* as a logical progression of Wertenbaker’s career in that it carries the concepts *Mary Traverse* explored “beyond gendered contexts” (98). David Ian Rabey views the play as “the culmination of Wertenbaker’s questionings of the terms and conditions of using language, making moral judgments and being human” and an indictment of how “prescriptive imperialistic definition attempts to restrict and elicit responses which accord only with its own ideological terms” (527). Joe Winston analyzes the play in the context of “the Phaedra syndrome,” Albert Gerard’s term for how literary treatment of the Phaedra character “relates to the moral and intellectual climate of their times” (510); Winston contends that Wertenbaker “deprivileges the dominant discourse of the Phaedra syndrome by having it interanimate with a relatively unknown myth” (511). The result is “a play in which more questions are posed than answers given and which has at its moral centre the dialogical interplay of two myths, the one voiced from within a tradition of male discourse, the other chosen to interrogate that myth in the different voice of a woman” (518). Jennifer A. Wagner reads *Nightingale* as an example of formal parody, arguing that, “through its slightly distorted mirroring of an ancient myth of sexual violence and of an ancient dramatic form as well, the play explores the responsibility an audience

has for the real existence of the kind of sexual violence the ancient myth portrays” (229). Each of these readings, especially Wagner’s, proves productive for this chapter’s aims. In the analysis that follows, I will examine how *Nightingale*’s representations of violence use metatheatricality to facilitate the reflective mode of spectatorship Wertenbaker encourages through narration and onstage audiences in *Mary Traverse*.

Nightingale thus marks a return to the focus on spectatorship Wertenbaker displayed in *Mary Traverse*. Rather than celebrating theatrical production’s redemptive and resistive power, as does *Our Country’s Good*, *Nightingale* focuses on the potential and pitfalls of theatrical spectatorship with regard to witnessing and processing trauma. Returning her dramaturgical emphasis to the implications of spectatorship, Wertenbaker asks her audience to consider their positions within the realm of theatre. That is, whereas *Mary Traverse* asks spectators to contemplate how they might witness violence, *Nightingale* demands that they ponder the implications of witnessing violence *in the theatre*. Wertenbaker’s concern with the ethics of theatrical spectatorship is reflected in her use of metatheatricality throughout *Nightingale*. The play’s metatheatrical flourishes function gestically, much like the instances of character narration and onstage spectatorship in *Mary Traverse*. In *Nightingale*, however, audience members are made aware that they are watching a *play*, specifically. Wertenbaker engenders this awareness through three primary metatheatrical elements: the use of male and female choruses, the performance of *Phaedra* within the play, and the dumb-show through which Philomele reveals the nature of her assault. These devices consistently remind the audience of its presence at a theatrical event, and their relationship to the play’s representations of violence prompts audience members to contemplate their positions as consumers of violent art. That this art adapts classical source material to render violence against women especially visible suggests that Wertenbaker’s project also involves interrogating how theatre represents violence against

women, and how theatre audiences witness that violence. *Nightingale* thus advances its gestic feminist dramaturgy through metatheatricality that heightens audience members' recognition of their social positions and the social positions of the characters onstage.

Like *The Grace of Mary Traverse*, *The Love of the Nightingale* uses moments where the audience becomes aware of its spectatorial role to communicate its message. But whereas *Mary Traverse* relies primarily on character narration to achieve this effect, *Nightingale* uses the medium of theatre itself. Not only do audience members become aware that they are watching, as they did in *Mary Traverse*; they become aware that they are watching *a play*. Wertenbaker encourages this awareness through three primary metatheatrical elements: the use of male and female choruses, the characters' visit to the Athenian theatre's production of *Phaedre*, and the dumb-show through which Philomele reveals her rape. These dramaturgical devices consistently remind the audience of its presence at a theatrical event, and Wertenbaker's characteristic focus on language and witnessing persists throughout. Interspersed and permeated with onstage representations of violence that reverse Greek tragic conventions, these gestic moments paradoxically use a technique ordinarily associated with distancing and defamiliarization to enable empathetic responses to the destructive repercussions of oppressive systems.

"The Playwright Always Speaks Through the Chorus"

True to her classical roots, Wertenbaker employs the device of the chorus in *Nightingale*; it becomes one of Wertenbaker's principal metatheatrical tactics in the play. "The playwright always speaks through the chorus," the Queen of Athens informs Tereus as they watch a production of *Phaedre* early in the play (11). Wertenbaker indeed lives up to the Queen's line. Through *Nightingale*'s two choruses, one male, one female, Wertenbaker illuminates the insidious nature of the power structures that enable physical

violence. Her primary tactic for making these power structures visible involves “highlighting the also-conventional passivity of a theater audience by presenting a Chorus sometimes comically incapable of doing anything but watch the evil” (Wagner 237). Aligning a passive audience with a passive chorus evokes productive discomfort wherein theatrical spectators may recognize their role as witnesses to and consumers of violence. The choruses—especially the male chorus—resemble the onstage audiences of *Mary Traverse* in that Wertenbaker’s audience takes stock of how their reactions compare to those of the characters before them.

The two choruses exhibit clear differences; moreover, Wertenbaker’s division of chorus members by gender suggest that the chorus’ characterizations relate to the playwright’s feminist concerns. Bush observes that the male chorus lacks a sense of “clear identity, either individually or as a group” (108), while the female chorus “is made up of five individually named women, with definable character differences” (111). As the play unfolds, Wertenbaker “distances herself further” from the male chorus, and the female chorus takes on a more prominent role (Bush 111). To be clear, Wertenbaker does not condemn the male chorus or laud the female chorus, but each entity’s arc reflects Wertenbaker’s investment in exploring how gender affects witnessing in a patriarchal culture. As such, the choruses’ actions illuminate the ways in which a society that prizes male dominance, demands female submission, encourages violent combat, and silences dissenters shapes disparate witnessing abilities and experiences for men and women. Moreover, the choruses’ metatheatrical function encourages Wertenbaker’s audience to consider how the social systems they inhabit influence their practice of spectatorship.

For its part, the male chorus reveals how, in the world of the play, ideals of masculinity actively discourage witnessing, compassion, or any kind of intervention that risks disrupting the status quo. When *Nightingale* opens, a male chorus member sets the

scene with one word: “War” (1). The soldiers who then enter goad each other with gendered insults, one branding his rival a “son of a woman,” the other threatening to “slice” his counterpart’s “drooping genitalia” (1). The chorus member’s one-word declaration draws a clear connection between the soldiers’ sparring and the state-sanctioned violence the soldiers carry out. Furthermore, the gendered nature of the soldiers’ insults reveals how, in this society, womanhood is regarded pejoratively and emasculation is wielded as a threat. By framing the play’s action in this manner, the male chorus signals to Wertenbaker’s audience that *Nightingale* will explore the gendered underpinnings of war and other forms of violence.

As the play progresses, the male chorus’ actions (or lack thereof) and related commentary enable Wertenbaker’s audience to contemplate their own spectatorial positions. Male chorus members often double as guards and soldiers; through their fluid movement into and out of the play’s diegesis, Wertenbaker suggests that the men could intervene in the action if desired. This implication is particularly apparent during Philomele’s journey to Thrace, during which the male chorus observes how Tereus “burns” with desire for Philomele and ponders whether to inform the young woman of the threat Tereus poses to her (14). In the end, however, the chorus members prioritize their ostensible dramaturgical function over protecting the vulnerable woman: “We are here only to observe, journalists of an antique world, putting horror into words, unable to stop the events we will soon record” (14). The men’s inaction demonstrates that their fealty to convention trumps any impulse to prevent violence⁸; that they convince themselves not to protect a woman reveals their lack of concern for a person whose lived experience differs

⁸ As the play goes on, the male chorus’ willful passivity increases as its presence dwindles; the men’s dialogue becomes clipped affirmations of their refusal to intervene. “We saw nothing,” they state as they carry away the body of the captain Tereus murdered for his purported advances toward Philomele (27). “We said nothing,” they note after Tereus lies to Procne that Philomele has drowned (33).

from theirs on account of a social system that valorizes male aggression. Meanwhile, as they watch the male chorus choose not to intervene, Wertenbaker's audience recognizes their own passive position, and hopefully distinguishes between the chorus' willful passivity and their mandatory confinement to the theatre seats. That distinction in turn fosters awareness of the potential for intervention in the world outside the theatre. Though the male chorus failed to intervene and enabled Philomele's rape, Wertenbaker implies, the theatrical audience does not have to remain passive in their own lives, especially after witnessing the consequences of the male chorus' choice. The scene's thrust turns on metatheatricality: Wertenbaker reshapes the convention of choric commentary as rationalization of inaction. The theatre audience is reminded of their presence at a play, and also grasps the dangerous nature of the chorus' rationalization once the ensuing trauma is embodied before them. Through this twofold impact, Wertenbaker's dramaturgy demonstrates how framing a representation of violence with attention to its causes and reception centers victims' vulnerability and engenders productive and reflective spectatorship.

While the male chorus communicates Wertenbaker's aims through its rationalizing commentary, the female chorus reveals communication as an essential component of witnessing. Composed of five Thracian attendants to Procne, the female chorus speaks primarily in images and metaphors that the Athenian Procne, who values description and objectivity, finds difficult to understand. Wagner observes that the female chorus and Procne harbor "conflicting conceptions of what language is supposed to communicate, or even capable of communicating" (240). This divide drives a wedge between the two cultures, one that impedes their ability to bear witness to each other's experiences. Whereas the male chorus chooses non-intervention out of loyalty to dramatic and patriarchal convention, the female chorus chooses silence out of communicative discrepancy. Though

the women sense danger in Procne's idea to send for Philomele, they cannot articulate it in a way Procne will understand: "There are no words for forebodings," Helen remarks (8). "Best to say nothing," June proclaims, assuming Procne "won't listen" (8). And indeed, when the women do try to warn Procne, she becomes frustrated and commands them to "[b]e silent" (21). Procne cannot bear witness to the female chorus' metaphors, and the female chorus cannot bear witness to Procne's literalism. As a result, they distance themselves from each other rather than working to understand their differences, and their fractured relationship leads to disastrous consequences.

The female chorus' relationship to Procne highlights an important distinction between them and their male counterparts: as Procne's waiting women, the female chorus spends much of its time onstage within the diegesis. It only turns its attention to the theatrical audience toward the end of the play, when Procne and Philomele kill Itys. Through its involvement in the staging of Itys' killing, the female chorus achieves its principal metatheatrical function. Wertenbaker originally keeps the killing offstage and represents it via a soldier peering through a window—a soldier who then claims he "didn't see anything. It didn't happen" when pressed by a comrade (45). Yet in the play's only temporal disruption, Wertenbaker stages the killing twice; the second time, the female chorus entreats the audience to witness "what the soldiers did not see," after which the killing is represented onstage (46). Once again, Wertenbaker adapts the choric convention to emphasize metatheatricality and cultivate reflective spectatorship. Not only does the female chorus speak to Wertenbaker's audience, demanding that they witness violence; it also manipulates time onstage, highlighting the audience's presence at a play where the playwright, actors, and production team control what the audience sees. The female chorus' presentation of Itys' killing thus illuminates how staging violence involves artistic and representational choices that can impact how an audience receives and processes the action.

In the case of Itys' murder, the dramaturgy reflects choices that highlight how gender may affect one's relationship to witnessing. Whereas the male chorus denies seeing the murder and preserves classical tragic convention by keeping it offstage, the female chorus overturns that convention, insisting on the murder's onstage representation. The female chorus thus forces Wertenbaker's audience to confront the direct result of Philomele's abuse and silencing. The women's framing of the murder also betrays an awareness of the interconnectedness of numerous violent acts. Before showing the killing, the women ask a litany of questions:

Iris: We can ask: why did Medea kill her children?

June: Why do countries make war?

Helen: Why are races exterminated?

Hero: Why do white people cut off the words of blacks?

Iris: Why do people disappear? The ultimate silence.

Echo: Not even death recorded.

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

Iris: What makes the torturer smile? (45)

Through these questions, the chorus members imply that these disparate acts of violence may share common roots. As such, the women require Wertenbaker's audience, not only to witness the particularly brutal act of infanticide, but also to contemplate the origins of violence. That Wertenbaker assigns this responsibility to the *female* chorus suggests that, perhaps due to their lived experience in a society often hostile toward their gender, the women understand violence differently than do the men, who often perpetuate that violence uncritically. The female chorus' questions, coupled with their marshaling of the onstage infanticide, create space for Wertenbaker's audience to reflect upon the import of witnessing violence and considering its causes. And as the women refer to the contemporary locale of "car parks" and use the first-person plural to frame their questions, they implicate spectators in the action, rendering "aesthetic distance impossible to

maintain” (Wagner 250). This combination of implication and metatheatricality better prepares Wertenbaker’s audience to apprehend how witnessing theatrical representations of violence contextualized by such dramaturgical framing proves productive for recognizing the mechanisms of systemic oppression.

An Evening at the Theatre

Wertenbaker’s use of choruses is but one of her metatheatrical techniques in *Nightingale*. She also stages plays within the play in order to remind her audience of their presence at the theatre. The first of these plays is a production of Seneca’s *Phaedra*, which Tereus attends with Procne’s family in Athens, where he has come to retrieve Philomele for Procne. Confounded by Procne’s request, King Pandion hopes the production will help him “come to a decision” about whether to allow Philomele to join her sister (7). Meanwhile, Tereus, an inexperienced theatergoer, learns from the king and queen about the edification a play can offer, and his reception of the play lays the groundwork for his later behavior toward Philomele. As Tereus and the Athenians watch the performance, Wertenbaker’s audience watches her characters’ reactions to the play-within-the-play. The scene thus demonstrates both how theatrical representation can affect spectators’ worldviews and how spectators’ existing worldviews can affect their reception of productions.

Throughout the scene, characters’ remarks make Wertenbaker’s audience aware of their participation in a theatrical event. Besides the Queen’s statement, mentioned above, that the “playwright always speaks through the chorus” (11), King Pandion imparts to Tereus that “plays help [him] think” and notes the potential for audience identification with what happens onstage: “You catch a phrase, recognize a character” (7). When Tereus expresses dismay at Phaedra’s attraction to Hippolytus, the king explains, “That’s what

makes it a tragedy. When you love the right person it's a comedy," foreshadowing the tragic events that will later occur in Wertenbaker's play (10). With these constant reminders of their own spectatorship, Wertenbaker's audience is primed to focus on how Tereus and the Athenian royal family relate to the *Phaedra* performance. Milling notes that the scene's "emphasis rests on the group discussion and the revelations about individuals for the audience watching the show" (215). Indeed, as Wertenbaker's audience watches Tereus watching the play, they apprehend the ways in which the royal family feeds Tereus ideas that he will later use to justify his rape of Philomele. Tereus' reactions and the royal family's commentary reveal the subjective nature of audience response, the potential for misinterpretation, and the danger of uncritical viewing.

Thanks to Wertenbaker's metatheatrical dramaturgy, *Nightingale's* audience members recognize their need to take stock of their own responses to the play and to think critically about the theatre they consume. Wagner argues that the scene "suggests that we frame our response to the ancient tragedy's action against the response of *Nightingale's* characters." In doing so, we "are asked to align not only the two plots, but also the two audiences, of which we ourselves are one" and "to measure our doubt or concurrence with the on-stage audience's notion of what a play is 'supposed to do for' its audience." *Nightingale's* metatheatricality, then, is a meditation on the purpose of theatre; in the context of the play's violence, that purpose involves making audiences aware of their witnessing roles in order to interrogate ingrained social narratives. Because they have witnessed Tereus' and the royal family's reception of *Phaedra*, Wertenbaker's audience can easily recognize the toxic thinking that leads to Philomele's rape when the gruesome moment arrives. Having heard King Pandion's remark that he is "like Hippolytus" (9), Tereus aligns himself with that character—one who proclaims his "hate, hate and hate" for women—and opines that *Phaedra* could "keep silent" about her love for her stepson (11).

Philomele, on the other hand, sympathizes with Phaedra, explaining to Tereus that “love is a god and you cannot control him” (10). Knowing Philomele’s fate, Wertenbaker’s audience grasps the effect of Philomele’s words—words Tereus will later use to justify raping her. “They convinced me, your words,” Tereus informs Philomele (29); yet having witnessed the *Phaedra* play themselves, Wertenbaker’s audience understands how Tereus has twisted those words. Wertenbaker’s framing of the play-within-the-play enables her audience to grasp the consequences of willful misunderstanding. Recognizing Tereus’ manipulation, Wertenbaker’s audience comes to understand Philomele’s suffering as preventable, and apprehends that watching theatre facilitated such an understanding.

Such enhanced awareness of the mechanisms underpinning Philomele’s rape, attributable to Wertenbaker’s deployment of a play-within-the-play, also shapes the audience’s reception of *Nightingale*’s representation of the assault. Just as Wertenbaker’s audience compares their reactions to those of the characters onstage during the *Phaedra* performance, so do they compare the representations of violence in *Phaedra*, a classical tragedy, with those in *Nightingale*, a contemporary adaptation. Wertenbaker’s choices speak to *Nightingale*’s emphasis on witnessing the full extent of trauma—not just the violent act itself, but its aftermath. Fitzpatrick notes that “[t]rauma’s resistance to mimetic representation means that it is often the originary violence that is represented onstage” (59), yet Wertenbaker’s handling of Philomele’s rape demonstrates that sensitive representation of trauma is indeed possible. As in classical tragedy, the violence takes place offstage; just as the Athenian audience hears Phaedra’s screams, so does Wertenbaker’s audience hear Philomele’s screams (30). Yet Wertenbaker stages the ensuing events in painstaking detail, devoting an entire scene to Niobe’s bathing of Philomele, who sits with “her legs spread out around a basin” and proclaims that she “want[s] to die” while Niobe instructs her to perform continued servitude to Tereus (33). The scene powerfully communicates both the

overwhelming impact of sexual trauma and the frequent failure of others to recognize that impact. Niobe's advice to Philomele recalls Malpede's observation that "[s]ometimes characters, while intending to help, inflict hurt" (131). Niobe wants to promote Philomele's survival, but her suggestion that Philomele suppress her pain intensifies the young woman's trauma. As with the *Phaedra* performance, Wertenbaker's audience compares their own responses to that of the onstage witness. Having learned to reflect critically upon onstage acts of witnessing, thanks to Wertenbaker's use of metatheatricality, *Nightingale's* audience can understand the inadequacy of Niobe's response given the severity of Philomele's trauma. Wertenbaker builds on this understanding of the need for empathetic witnessing in *Nightingale's* next play-within-the-play.

From Spectator to Performer

Wertenbaker's second play-within-the-play, and *Nightingale's* sharpest metatheatrical commentary, is the dumb show through which Philomele reenacts her rape and silencing before Procne and an audience of Thracian women at the city's Bacchic festival. This dumb show is a crucial change from Wertenbaker's source material: in Ovid's version of the myth, Philomele weaves a tapestry that illustrates her assault, while in Wertenbaker's play, she acts out the rape with three giant dolls she has crafted during her five years in seclusion. Bush notes that this revelation via puppets "creates a more theatrical scene" and "subverts both the traditionally male art of performance and the traditionally male arena of the public square" (101). Indeed, by staging a performance in public, Philomele breaks tradition with classical narratives that relegate women to the private sphere and demands that the public witness her experience. Yet the dumb show serves a specific purpose beyond challenging gender roles: it again makes Wertenbaker's audience acutely aware of their role as theatrical spectators. As with the *Phaedra* performance,

Wertenbaker's audience watches both the dumb show and the onstage audience's reactions to it, and uses any discrepancy between their own and the onstage audience's responses to contemplate the purpose and value of witnessing violence and trauma in a theatrical setting.

Unlike *Phaedra*, the dumb show is not a formal production, as Philomele has concocted her plan in secrecy. Yet the Bacchic festival provides the perfect conditions for a theatrical performance: a crowd is already present, having gathered to watch a troupe of acrobats, and surrounds a circular "stage" space. Once the acrobats disperse, Philomele seizes the opportunity and "throws the dolls into the circle." Niobe struggles to restrain Philomele, claiming she is "a mad girl," but the crowd, eager for another performance, "applauds, makes a wider circle and waits in silence" (40). Having captured the crowd's attention, Philomele begins the dumb show. As the stage directions describe:

The rape is re-enacted in a gross and comic way, partly because of Niobe's resistance and attempt to catch Philomele. Philomele does most of the work with both dolls. The crowd laughs. Philomele then stages a very brutal illustration of the cutting of the female doll's tongue. Blood cloth on the floor. The crowd is very silent. Niobe still. Then the servant comes inside the circle, holding the third doll, a queen. At that moment. Procne also appears in the front of the crowd's circle. She has been watching. The Procne doll weeps. The two female dolls embrace. Procne approaches Philomele, looks at her and takes her away. The dolls are picked up by the crowd and they move off, enacting other brutal scenes. (40)

The intricacies of Philomele's performance, along with the scene's dual audiences, place the scene squarely at the intersection of violence, performance, and spectatorship. As such, the dumb show crystallizes Wertenbaker's views on witnessing violence in the theatre.

The dumb show is notable for its reenactment of violence Wertenbaker's audience has already seen: Philomele's silencing. Earlier, in another reversal of classical tragic convention, Tereus cut out Philomele's tongue onstage and left her crouching in a "pool of blood" (36). Philomele's dumb show ensures that Wertenbaker's audience witnesses the

silencing twice. For their second viewing, however, Wertenbaker's audience must witness both a grotesque parody of the actual event and another audience's reaction to that reenactment. Wertenbaker's dramaturgy thus entreats her audience to make multiple connections: between the actual silencing and its reenactment, and between their own responses and those of the onstage audience. As they compare the dumb show to what they already witnessed in the flesh, Wertenbaker's audience must picture Philomele's silencing once again. In asking Wertenbaker's audience to remember the physical assault, the dumb show establishes memory as a critical form of witnessing. One who witnesses violence must also live with the memory of witnessing that violence; while that memory is likely less intense than the trauma the violence's victim feels, it nonetheless affirms the trauma's reality to the witness. By engaging this memoric process, the dumb show demonstrates how theatre and performance can encourage reflection through the commemoration of trauma.

The second comparison Wertenbaker's audience must make, that between their reaction and the onstage audience's, prompts further spectator reflection about the processes of witnessing violence. Within this metatheatrical scene, the Bacchae's laughter at the rape reenactment becomes the *gestus* through which Wertenbaker communicates her message. As Wagner astutely observes, this uncomfortable reaction "forc[es] the theater audience to confront its own kinship to the on-stage audience, who are able to laugh at violence, and to effectively shut their eyes to the real implications or consequences of their gazing upon those events." And though the tongue-cutting reenactment ultimately brings the onstage audience to rapt attention, their witnessing is short-lived, as the onlookers eventually grab Philomele's dolls and "*move off, enacting other brutal scenes*" (40). Meanwhile, Wertenbaker's audience remains confined to their house seats, and "the burden to 'react' to this spectacle becomes our own" (Wagner 245). Assuming the presence of

receptive spectators, the scene has created space for viewers to acknowledge both their discomfort and their existence within a system that normalizes oppression and trivializes violence. When the onstage spectators laugh, Wertenbaker's audience can pass judgment from a critical remove; yet perhaps before passing such judgment, they will have to check their own inclination towards nervous laughter. The potential for divergence and alignment among the two audiences' reactions asks Wertenbaker's spectators to assess their responses to both the dumb show and to Philomele's audience's behavior. This assessment leads to a reflective mindset among Wertenbaker's audience, wherein theatergoers learn from Philomele's dumb show that no observer is immune to problematic responses to sexual violence and other injustices. Rather than treating the dumb show like pure entertainment, as does the onstage audience, Wertenbaker's audience can contemplate the ramifications of witnessing such an event, especially since it is staged by the victim of the violence it depicts. Wertenbaker's metatheatrical staging therefore elicits a reflective mode of spectatorship that focuses upon the victim's experience and the root causes of the trauma rather than on the aesthetics of violence.

Wertenbaker builds upon this reflective spectatorship through her staging of Procne's reaction to Philomele's trauma. In watching Procne witness the dumb show and reunite with Philomele, Wertenbaker's audience weighs their response to Philomele's trauma against Procne's and contemplates the ramifications of Procne's behavior. At first, Procne questions the veracity of Philomele's reenactment: "How can I know that was the truth?", Procne wonders (40). "How do I know you didn't take him to your bed? Why should I believe you?" (41). The latter question resonates with contemporary skepticism of rape allegations fomented by murky legal systems and patriarchal culture that grants more credence to men's words than to women's. Procne asks what many media consumers ask when confronted with an account of sexual assault; perhaps some audience members have

asked such questions themselves. Yet the dramatic irony of the scene complicates Procne's question: Wertenbaker's audience has already witnessed Philomele's trauma and, as a result, may feel frustration at Procne's reluctance. That frustration only escalates when Procne insinuates that Philomele lacks the expected expression for a victim of sexual violence: "There's no shame in your eyes. Why should I believe you?" (41). In the context of the audience's knowledge, Procne's suggestion of shame as a visible, logical by-product of such trauma and her repetition of her hurtful question become especially damaging. Though Procne does eventually believe Philomele, it is only because she peers inside Philomele's maimed mouth, not because she accepts Philomele at her word.⁹ By placing the theatrical audience in a position of knowledge over Procne, Wertenbaker enables spectators to better empathize with Philomele via the memory of witnessing her harrowing experience. That memory helps Wertenbaker's audience recognize the dehumanization involved in questioning a trauma victim's testimony. Through their layers of witnessing, the dumb show and its aftermath demonstrate how theatre can represent violence so as to emphasize the victim's experience and trauma in order to facilitate empathetic spectatorship.

A Reflective Spectatorship

Through their emphases on witnessing and spectatorship, *The Grace of Mary Traverse* and *The Love of the Nightingale* demonstrate Wertenbaker's commitment to

⁹ While Procne's eventual acceptance of Philomele's trauma is a positive development, the fact that her belief rests on visual evidence highlights another problematic conception of witnessing. Any witnessing that demands "ocular proof" before granting credence to a victim's assertion is not witnessing at all, but rather holding that victim's experience hostage to external judgment. When a spectator with this awareness watches Procne withhold belief until she sees Philomele's mutilation, she may cringe knowing that Procne's need for physical evidence perpetuates a system in which that external judgment determines the deployment of justice. The juxtaposition of Wertenbaker's audience's reaction with Procne's, and the frustration this juxtaposition produces, supports a form of witnessing rooted in listening and belief rather than in empiricism and skepticism. Through this listening and belief, a witness can legitimate a trauma victim's experience and create space for the victim to make progress towards healing.

representing violence in a way that encourages reflection over titillation. Concerned with the framing of violent acts rather than simply with the acts themselves, Wertenbaker calls attention to how violence is enabled, perpetuated, received, and survived. The playwright's holistic approach toward representing violence better enables spectators to recognize that violence as the product of social systems built on empowering men and silencing women. From Sophie's rape to Itys' murder, the acts of violence in *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* are traceable in some way to either voluntary or forced female silence. Taking pains to represent the buildup to and aftermath of violence, Wertenbaker socially contextualizes these harmful acts, illuminating the power structures that enable and perpetuate them. Yet showing what happens before and after an outburst of physical violence does not alone guarantee that an audience will recognize systemic oppression. Wertenbaker must cause a substantial shift in the way her audience relates to the action onstage. Spectators must become reflective rather than passive, inquiring what caused the action onstage rather than accepting that it happened.

Wertenbaker effects this shift with help from the Brechtian technique of *gestus*. As I have explored in detail above, *Mary Traverse*'s use of character narration and *Nightingale*'s use of metatheatricity are gestic techniques that call Wertenbaker's audiences' attention to their role as spectators—and, in the case of *Nightingale*, as *theatrical* spectators. When an audience member hears Mary narrate the action onstage, or watches the Athenian royal family watching *Phaedre*, she remembers her own position as a viewer of theatre. When these gestic techniques relate to acts of violence, they provoke audience members to reflect on how the role of theatrical spectator intersects with the role of witness to violence. What can you learn, the dramaturgy asks, from witnessing violence in the theatre staged in this way? After encountering context for the violence, failures of witnessing from several characters, and implication in the action, Wertenbaker's audience

can learn that violence that springs, whether directly or indirectly, from systemic injustice deserves an empathetic response, since the trauma endured by victims of this violence is often entirely preventable but seemingly inexorable within the context of the toxic system.

The recognition that supposedly inevitable violence is actually a product of social circumstances is one way Wertenbaker challenges her source material and reimagines it in a contemporary context. Particularly in *Nightingale*, with its Greek tragic roots, Wertenbaker overturns the notion that “fate” or “the gods” control human action; though characters like Philomele and Tereus attribute certain actions to supposedly uncontrollable gods, Wertenbaker’s spectatorship-focused dramaturgy reveals that Tereus’ brutality and Philomele’s trauma spring from a patriarchal system that teaches male entitlement and victory at all costs, and invalidates or minimizes female experience and trauma. In *Mary Traverse*, an adaptation of the Rake’s Progress narrative, there is less emphasis on fate or divine control given the source material, but by installing a woman as protagonist and assigning witnessing critical function, Wertenbaker illuminates even more starkly how the capitalist patriarchy Mary inhabits inspires disastrous choices that harm women and lower-class individuals in particular. By adapting the source material to highlight the systemic underpinnings of the action and the experiences of those most harmed by the social systems represented, Wertenbaker crafts adaptations that circumvent or reduce feelings of resolution and catharsis among audience members leaving the theatre. This internal discord, and the reflection it produces, is the environment wherein spectator empathy germinates.

Again we return to the intersection of Brechtian dramaturgy and empathy, concepts which may seem mutually exclusive. After all, Brecht devoted much of his career to developing a theatre intent on minimizing or eliminating spectator identification with the characters onstage, thinking such identification anathema to critical thinking. Yet the

dramaturgies of *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* demonstrate that Brechtian techniques and empathy are not entirely at odds. To be fair, the empathy Brecht shuns—that of straightforward emotional identification, or “feeling with” a character—differs from the empathy I am attempting to articulate here. The empathy I discuss is not mere identification with a character, but a process of understanding the root cause of a victim’s suffering and reacting compassionately as a result. Such empathy actually seems to align with Brecht’s goal of prompting an epic theater spectator to respond, “The sufferings of this man appal [sic] me, because they are unnecessary” (“Theatre for Pleasure” 71). Through its emphasis on making spectators aware of their positions as consumers of violence grounded in capitalism and patriarchy, Wertenbaker’s dramaturgy in both *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale* aims for a similar response. Replacing catharsis with reflection and unsettlement, Wertenbaker stokes audience reflection upon the circumstances that led to violence and foment compassion for the characters those circumstances disproportionately harm. What Wertenbaker’s gestic feminist dramaturgy does, ultimately, is reclaim space for empathy in conversations about Brechtian strategies. Empathy becomes the end, rather than the means.

To recover the value of empathy and of empathetic witnessing, Wertenbaker’s dramaturgy activates processes of feminist spectatorship rooted in notions of difference. By “feminist spectatorship,” I do not mean spectatorship reserved exclusively for women or geared toward deducing a supposedly quintessential female experience. Rather, I mean a reflective spectatorship that springs from an understanding of systemic injustice—an understanding engendered by a dramaturgy that calls attention to the ways in which the unjust systems operate. And while this reflective spectatorship does not aim to distill the essence of womanhood or femininity, as no such essence really exists, it does acknowledge the difference between male and female experience in a patriarchal society. Jill Dolan,

perhaps the preeminent theorist of feminist spectatorship, writes that criticism born from such spectatorship “expos[es] the ways in which dominant ideology is naturalized by the performance’s address to the ideal spectator,” who in much of Western culture is white and male (2). Yet Wertenbaker, writing from the embodied experience of being a woman, answers Irigaray’s call for Western culture to develop “other means of expression and communication than those of a culture in the masculine” (*Key Writings* xiii). Through a dramaturgy centered upon witnessing rather than consuming violence, Wertenbaker resists the ideological naturalization Dolan mentions. Spectators of her work can thus reflect on how her stagings of violence and trauma perform that resistance. This reflection necessarily involves contemplation of gender or sexual difference. Wertenbaker affects that contemplation through acts of witnessing that show how lived experience differs for men and women (and even between men and between women) in the patriarchal societies she dramatizes. Though no two audience members are alike, and each spectator will reflect on these differences to varying degrees, Wertenbaker’s dramaturgy better enables both the understanding that these differences exist and the ability to accept a character’s trauma as valid despite the degree of difference between character and spectator. That acceptance despite difference facilitates empathy, as it rests on an imaginative and emotional process wherein one chooses to validate another’s experience.

Wertenbaker’s drama of witnessing thus posits a challenge to assertions like Sontag’s that “watching up close...is still just watching” (117). Sontag disputes the inherent value of viewing violent images, arguing that the images themselves “cannot be more than an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn, to examine the rationalizations for mass sufferings offered by established powers” (117). In Sontag’s estimation, there is no guarantee that viewing representations of violence will result in any kind of productive political action. She questions the idea that witnessing violence is valuable because it holds

the potential to cultivate empathy: any spectatorial compassion these images generate, she argues, “needs to be translated into action, or it withers” (101). Wertenbaker’s plays, however, argue that witnessing violence framed in terms of systemic injustice and sexual or gender difference *is* a form of political action. By dramatizing several instances of the reception of violence, Wertenbaker demonstrates that deficits in witnessing can perpetuate cycles of violence, while empathetic witnessing is a form of resistance. From Mary watching Sophie’s rape and failing to intervene, to the Female Chorus insisting that Wertenbaker’s audience watch Itys’ death, Wertenbaker ensures that her audiences understand the consequences of failing to bear witness. Likewise, from Sophie’s experience-based wisdom to Procne’s ultimate belief in her sister’s trauma, both plays assert that bearing witness in ways that recognize and validate others’ pain offers an alternative to toxic social structures that minimize and belittle trauma. In distinguishing between failures and successes of witnessing, Wertenbaker conditions her audience to bear witness to trauma in ways that prioritize resistance and healing.

Reflecting on Wertenbaker's career, it becomes apparent that *Mary Traverse* and *Nightingale*, not to mention the success of *Our Country's Good*, created a foundation for the ideas that appear in her ensuing work. Her plays from the 1990s and after continue the focus on gender, witnessing, and violence that anchors this chapter's analysis. *The Break of Day* (1995) sets two women's efforts to conceive children against a backdrop of end-of-the-millennium malaise; *After Darwin* (1998) uses a play-within-the-play about Charles Darwin's voyage on the HMS Beagle to explore human relationships in a multicultural Western society; and *Credible Witness* (2001) interrogates concepts of personal and national identity through the relationship between a young Macedonian refugee and the hunger-striking mother who has come to England to find him. Moreover, Wertenbaker's investment in language and her linguistic skill engendered a productive career as a

translator and adaptor of both French and classical plays. As Sara Freeman notes, Wertenbaker's "translational, multilingual and international ethos positions her somewhat differently in the decades of British playwriting" in that she "nurtured from the beginning" the more cosmopolitan, idea-rich lens adopted by playwrights like David Edgar and David Hare in the 1990s (197). Wertenbaker thus registers as a prominent force in late-twentieth century British theatre, one whose unique combination of concerns distilled and heralded similar ideas circulating among her contemporaries and successors. One such successor, the precocious talent Sarah Kane, found a foothold in the sharpening consciousness Wertenbaker helped create, as my next chapter will demonstrate.

Chapter 2: “If there had been more moments like this”:

Sarah Kane’s Theatre of Suffering

If London theatre of the 1980s was shaped by responses to Margaret Thatcher’s problematic policies, the 1990s saw increasingly intense reactions from young playwrights disillusioned with a stagnant artistic culture and with the consensus among older creative generations that no new talent had emerged to usher British theatre into the new millennium. One such young playwright was Sarah Kane, who burst onto the scene in 1995 when her play *Blasted* opened at the Royal Court. The well-documented controversy surrounding *Blasted*’s reception sparked a focus on a type of playwriting that eventually came to be known, in Aleks Sierz’s famous terms, as “in-yer-face” theatre. This form of theatre, which Sierz broadly defines as “any drama that takes the audience by the scruff of the neck and shakes it until it gets the message,” became the “dominant theatrical style” of the 1990s (*In-Yer-Face Theatre* 4). Given the graphic violence of her earlier plays, Kane fits easily into the in-yer-face tradition alongside writers such as Jez Butterworth, Rebecca Prichard, Mark Ravenhill, and Judy Upton. And indeed, her plays brim with the frustration about late-twentieth century ennui and media saturation that characterizes many of her contemporaries’ works. Yet Kane’s plays also engage with other dramatic traditions, and in so doing, escape categorization within a single movement. This chapter therefore considers Kane, not as a figurehead of the In-Yer-Face movement, but in the context of classically-influenced women writers representing violence. Placing Kane in this context, alongside her contemporaries Wertenbaker and Carr, reveals that her plays’ investments in resensitizing audiences to violence extend beyond the graphic physical flourishes for which she is best known.

Though their plays are quite different formally, Kane and Wertenbaker draw from similar traditions and influences in their work. Both writers have strong classical roots and even share an interest in the Phaedra myth: in *The Love of the Nightingale*, as my previous chapter discusses, Wertenbaker uses Seneca's *Phaedra* as a major metatheatrical device to increase audience awareness of their roles as spectators interpreting dramatic action, while in *Phaedra's Love*, Kane provides a late-twentieth century twist on Seneca's tragedy that highlights the ennui and desensitization of the media age. Wertenbaker and Kane also display more recent influences, with *The Grace of Mary Traverse* adapting the Rake's Progress narrative for contemporary social critique and *Blasted* drawing upon Shakespeare and Samuel Beckett in its rendering of power discrepancies and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, both writers are particularly invested in the connections between the structural and the personal—that is, how individual issues reflect systemic problems. As I demonstrate in the previous chapter, Wertenbaker's work often focuses on the damage caused by patriarchal behavioral standards and their distorted ideals of masculinity. Such parameters underscore Mary Traverse's conversion to violent power-hunger and provide Tereus with the toxic reasoning that leads to his rape and continued oppression of Philomele. Kane's line of inquiry is less overtly feminist, but she shares Wertenbaker's interest in weaponized sexuality and its implications. In an interview with Heidi Stephenson and Natasha Langridge, Kane articulated the now-famous central question of *Blasted*: "What does a common rape in Leeds have to do with mass rape as a war weapon in Bosnia?" (131). Kane's question not only highlights issues surrounding sexual assault itself, but also ponders the structural underpinnings linking domestic and military violence. In this chapter, I will examine how Kane's dramaturgy illuminates those structural underpinnings through its representations of multiple types of violence.

Kane's journey to the London stage was a relatively rapid one. Born in 1971 to a teacher mother and journalist father, Kane grew up in Essex, England. She spent her childhood as an Evangelical Christian before distancing herself from her family's beliefs as a young adult. During her years at comprehensive school, she began writing poems and short stories, but did not turn to playwriting until her years at Bristol University, where she pursued a drama degree (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 91). During her time at Bristol, she wrote three short monologues; these constitute her only dramatic work before *Blasted*. After she graduated in 1992, she traveled to Edinburgh, where a production of *Mad* by Jeremy Weller profoundly influenced her theatrical goals. Kane vowed to make theatre similar to Weller's play, and in so doing had "discovered the provocative aesthetic that was to change the face of British theatre in the nineties" (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 92). Later that year, Kane began pursuing an MA in playwriting at Birmingham University; while she felt out-of-place in the academic environment, she did write and workshop the first two scenes of *Blasted*. After leaving Birmingham, Kane relocated to London, where she finished *Blasted* while working as a literary assistant at the Bush theatre. After a staged reading at the Royal Court in 1994, *Blasted* received a full production at the same theatre a year later and vaulted Kane to notoriety at the age of 23.¹⁰

The controversy surrounding *Blasted* cemented violence as a hallmark of Kane's large reputation. Even with the "linguistic turn" of her later work, which eschews graphic material in favor of impressionistic manipulation of language, discussion of violence often follows mention of Kane's name. This emphasis on the sensational elements of her plays springs in part from the tabloid attention she received after *Blasted* premiered. That production inspired some of the most incendiary review headlines in English theatre

¹⁰ For a more extensive biography of Kane, see Sierz, *In-Yer-Face Theatre* 90-93.

history, including Jack Tinker's famous dismissal of the play as a "disgusting feast of filth" in the Daily Mail (5). Adding insult to injury, the Daily Express chose to broadcast that "Rape play girl goes into hiding" in the wake of the *Blasted* controversy, reducing both the play's subject matter and Kane's identity to an attention-grabbing, infantilizing label (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 98). Moreover, Kane's history of depression, coupled with her eventual suicide at the age of 28 in 1999, has directed critical attention toward her more violent work, as if it might contain an explanation for her untimely death. Yet to read Kane's plays as keys to her mental illness or to place such intense focus upon their physical violence underestimates their complexity. As Kane put it, there is "[q]uite a lot" that interpersonal and international violence have in common (Stephenson & Langridge 131). In fact, Kane takes pains to show that those two types of violence share a common denominator of what I call emotional violence—that is, the deliberate infliction of emotional pain by one person on another.

Kane dedicated herself to creating an "experiential" theatre that prioritizes emotional rather than intellectual response (letter to Aleks Sierz, qtd. in Saunders, "Just a Word" 99). Perhaps the moment in which she wrote fomented Kane's interest in this type of dramaturgy: in 1990s England, televised news broadcasts brought grisly images of war in Eastern Europe into countless homes in two-dimensional, compressed form. As a result, the viewing public became desensitized to the graphic violence depicted on their television screens. By placing violence onstage before a live audience, Kane forces viewers to confront vulnerable and damaged bodies in the same physical space as themselves. And viewers' bodies reactions to the often-disturbing circumstances performed onstage are where Kane's drama generates its meaning. As Allyson Campbell reminds us, "Kane sees experience as the key to eliciting change in the spectator" (81). That experience, in Kane's words, "engraves lessons on our hearts through suffering" (Stephenson & Langridge 133).

Suffering thus becomes the avenue through which Kane's plays teach their audiences about interconnected forms of violence.

This chapter aims to provide a holistic assessment of Kane's experiential method of representing violence, highlighting the connections Kane draws between emotional and physical violence. Whereas Wertenbaker's dramaturgy centers the act of witnessing in its mission to reveal oppressive systems, Kane's dramaturgy focuses on producing suffering to make her audiences feel the effects of such systems. This emphasis on spectator feeling is where Kane's work connects to theories of empathy. The audience suffering for which Kane strives recalls the "shared manifold" hypothesis of Italian neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese, who contends that humans can feel with other humans thanks to the presence of mirror neurons, neurons that react identically when a person either performs or observes the performance of a certain action. This neural network results in a "shared manifold" of human experience, a bank of sorts from which humans draw their emotional responses (Gallese 44). Such research proves productive for thinking about spectatorship of visual media. Writing about the film *Slumdog Millionaire* in the context of Gallese's work, Hannah Chapelle Wojciehowski notes how viewers of the film "are likely to experience, in our bodies, albeit in a strongly muted form, what the protagonists are feeling or experiencing on the screen" (132). Wojciehowski's observation holds true for theatre audiences as well; given theatre's reliance on physical presence, these audiences may even experience those feelings in a less muted form thanks to the live bodies in front of them. And with its intense violence, Kane's theatre may magnify those feelings even more. Though Kane's audience knows the violence they see onstage is fictional, the staging of that violence provokes an emotional response in the spectator that draws upon the same mechanisms activated when one witnesses or even experiences actual violence. The liminal space of theatrical spectatorship—i.e., the space between reacting to Kane's

representations of violence and knowing that those representations are fictional—creates an environment where spectators can take stock of their own bodily responses and the dramaturgical circumstances that produced them.

This chapter draws from the above work on empathy and from significant developments in affect theory to establish suffering as an essential aspect of experiencing Kane's representations of violence. Reading Kane's early plays *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* (1996) through theories of negative affect posited by thinkers such as Sarah Ahmed and Sianne Ngai, I will demonstrate how suffering becomes the means through which Kane's audiences come to recognize emotional violence and understand it as the root of other forms of brutality. Following Campbell's methodology of an "affective analysis" of Kane's work (81), this chapter elucidates how Kane creates an experience of suffering that resensitizes media-saturated audiences, not only to physical violence, but to the emotional violence that enables or presages it. By inflicting a form of emotional violence upon her audience, Kane activates the viewer's sensitivity for detecting emotional violence in other scenarios and for recognizing its connection to physical violence. The negative affects audience members feel upon experiencing *Blasted* or *Phaedra's Love* thus heighten viewers' potential to perceive the systemic injustices underlying violent acts and to react compassionately to others' suffering.

Affect and the Experience of Suffering

Kane takes an affective approach to theatre: a central objective of her plays involves inducing unpleasant or even painful emotional states from her audiences. To further understand how affect, and negative affect in particular, operates in Kane's work, we must examine the field of affect theory in greater detail. Humanities-based studies of affect in the last two decades have proliferated along "two dominant vectors" (Gregg and Seigworth

5). The first of these vectors, developed by psychologist Silvan Tomkins, focuses on describing emotional states that humans experience in response to stimuli.¹¹ The second vector stems from the work of Gilles Deleuze, who in exploring Baruch Spinoza's philosophy "locates affect in the midst of things and relations (in immanence) and, then, in the complex assemblages that come to compose bodies and worlds simultaneously" (Gregg and Seigworth 6). These two strains of thought are not mutually exclusive and often overlap or interrelate. Indeed, the theories of affect that most strongly underlie this chapter move fluidly between the two models. For my purposes of reading Kane, I draw from theories of negative affect that concern themselves with the implications of those affects' impact upon bodies, particularly in the context of experiencing media and art.

Before proceeding to specific theories of affect in detail, I want to review the neuroscientific underpinnings of this chapter's engagement with affect theory. Concomitant to the models of affect I explore below, and equally relevant to Kane's dramaturgy, is the theory of embodied simulation, which posits that humans come to understand others' experiences through a process wherein one's body feels the same emotions or sensations of the body one witnesses. Developed by Gallese, one of the discoverers of the mirror neurons described above, this theory stems from those neurons' implications for human behavior and interaction. Gallese argues that mirror neurons and embodied simulation underlie the "shared manifold of intersubjectivity" that allows humans to "recognize other human beings as similar to us" (44-45). The shared manifold in turn enables empathy through its engendering of a co-feeling process that creates a "meaningful link between others and ourselves" (Gallese 42). Gallese's work proves useful

¹¹ Tomkins' successors disagree over the exact number of affects, but nine seems to be the generally accepted number. Those nine affects are divided into positive and negative categories. The positive affects include Interest/Excitement, Enjoyment/Joy, and Surprise/Startle; the negative affects comprise Distress/Anguish, Shame/Humiliation, Anger/Rage, Fear/Terror, Disgust, and Dismissal.

for thinking about Kane's dramaturgy, which relies so heavily on prompting emotional responses from its spectators. In analyzing Kane's experiential theatre in an affective context, it is important to consider the cognitive underpinnings of the negative affects Kane's dramaturgy produces.

While a multitude of thinkers have ascended to prominence in their theorization of affect,¹² I base my analysis upon the work of two theorists whose recent scholarship of negative affect proves especially applicable to thinking about a theatrical experience of suffering designed to facilitate empathy: Sara Ahmed and Sianne Ngai. In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), Ahmed "track[s] how emotions circulate between bodies, examining how they 'stick' as well as move" (4). Ahmed articulates a theory of the "sociality" of emotions; in contrast to the "inside-out" and "outside-in" models which locate emotions either within the individual (see: Tomkins) or among the social environment (see: Deleuze/Spinoza), Ahmed's model of sociality argues that emotions "create the very effect of the surfaces and boundaries that allow us to distinguish an inside and an outside in the first place" (10). This mode of thought leads Ahmed to discuss the ethics of experiencing negative affects that are necessarily contingent upon relationships with other humans—for instance, witnessing another person's pain or performing disgust before a witness. Ahmed's emphasis on the contingency of emotions sheds light on how affect operates in a relational medium such as theatre, where performing bodies and spectating bodies occupy the same physical space and influence each other's experience of emotional states.

Sianne Ngai's work on negative affect also proves useful to this study of Kane's theatre. In *Ugly Feelings* (2005), Ngai conducts "a series of studies in the aesthetics of

¹² Here, I am thinking of a number of foundational theorists like Eve Sedgwick and Lauren Berlant, whose work is less directly applicable to Kane's drama in the context of this chapter but is no less crucial for understanding affect in general.

negative emotions” (1). The “ugly feelings” of Ngai’s title are negative emotional states that produce no catharsis or moral edification—feelings such as anxiety and irritation, among others. These feelings thus stand in direct opposition to Aristotle’s notion of catharsis, in which negative emotions like pity and fear are purged from the spectator during the viewing of tragedy. In her examination of these feelings, Ngai hopes to “expand and transform the category of ‘aesthetic emotions,’ or feelings unique to our encounters with artworks” (6). Creating space for negative aesthetic emotions in this manner counters Aristotle’s proclamation that “inborn in all of us is the instinct to enjoy works of imitation” (60). If Aristotle contends that “we enjoy looking at the most accurate representations of things which in themselves we find painful to see” (61), then Ngai’s formulation of ugly feelings responds that enjoyment is not humans’ sole motivation for viewing art, nor is audience enjoyment the sole goal of artistic representation. While it can be argued that the feelings Kane wants her audience to experience are more intense than the feelings Ngai explores, these feelings do qualify as ugly for a compelling reason: Kane’s theatre of suffering focuses on the experience of negative emotions rather than the purgation of them. Ngai’s theory and Kane’s theatre both dispute Aristotle’s claim that experiencing representations of the repulsive do not produce the same effect as does experiencing the repulsive in real life. While the feelings one might experience due to a representation may be subdued in comparison to the feelings experienced when witnessing reality, those feelings, Ngai and Kane would both argue, still mirror (or even still *are*) real-world experiences and do not arise from a sense of enjoyment. Ngai’s work on ugly feelings helps us see how Kane’s theatre relies on a subversion or frustration of the catharsis one might come to expect from dramatic tragedy.

Of course, the experience of negative affect is different for every spectator. Ahmed’s and Ngai’s theories provide valuable tools for conceptualizing how Kane’s

theatre works upon its audience's emotions, but human subjectivity renders any such conceptualization a guideline rather than a rule. Potential emotional responses to *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* are infinite because no two performances, audiences, or audience members are alike. It is therefore impossible to theorize a definitive affective experience of Kane's drama, as every affective analysis of her work is shaped by the writer's subjective experience of reading and/or watching the plays. This chapter is therefore but one interpretation of the ways in which *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* can cause spectatorial suffering. The affects identified and described below are rooted in my own reception of Kane's plays, and my readings are framed in terms of potential affective responses rather than definitive models. Nonetheless, since Kane herself sees suffering—"the bearing or undergoing of pain, distress, or tribulation," according to the Oxford English Dictionary—as central to her experiential dramaturgy, I operate from the assumption that negative affect drives a preponderance of emotional responses to Kane's plays. As such, I will focus on how *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* enable experiences of such negative affects as anxiety, distress, and disgust for their audiences.

Kane's emphasis on suffering also generates ethical implications for her plays' viewers. As mentioned above, Kane finds the experience of suffering educational; she also believes that it facilitates the development of an awareness through which we can "change our future" (Stephenson & Langridge 133). Kane posits that "sometimes we have to descend into hell imaginatively in order to avoid going there in reality" (Ibid.), implying that the suffering her theatre may produce can also spark reflection that ultimately prevents the acts she stages from occurring in real life. Central to that reflection is a sense of obligation toward others—obligation born from both witnessing brutal acts onstage and from the suffering that such witnessing entails—that facilitates the development of compassion. In this sense, and in the sense that Kane's deployment of suffering is aimed

at preventing further suffering, Kane's ethics relates to that of Emmanuel Levinas, who regards "the just suffering in me for the unjustifiable suffering of the other" as the state that "opens suffering to the ethical perspective of the inter-human" and that constitutes "the very nexus of human subjectivity, to the point of being raised to the level of supreme ethical principle" (80-81). Just as Levinas considers suffering for another's pain a productive and necessary experience, so does Kane consider suffering essential for developing ethical sensitivity.

In the analysis that follows, I will demonstrate how *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* rely upon negative affect generated by representations of violence to cultivate spectatorial compassion through a subversion of Aristotelian notions of catharsis. Though formally and tonally different, the plays share similar investments in the relationship between emotional and physical violence, and they use negative affect to make that relationship palpable to the audience. Feeling is therefore an integral part of understanding *Blasted* or *Phaedra's Love*. Yet for all their conjuring of emotion, and for two plays so strongly influenced by classical and early modern tragedy, neither work provides the outlet for emotional release one might expect. This paradox, wherein spectators are led toward but denied catharsis, is how Kane elicits empathy from her audience. Instead of casting out pity and fear à la Aristotelian models of tragedy, Kane's dramaturgy stirs negative emotions within its spectators, but provides no outlet for the release of those emotions. Without an opportunity for true emotional release, suffering becomes a state of being rather than a passing feeling.

The Early Plays: A Multifaceted Violence

I have chosen *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* as this chapter's focus for several reasons. First, given that this dissertation revolves around representations of violence, it behooves me to focus on Kane's early plays, where violence figures most prominently. Of course, *Cleansed* (1998) is often included in such a category, so one might ask why that

play does not receive as much attention here. Yet the dramaturgy of *Cleansed*, including its representations of violence, departs significantly from its predecessors. As Christine Woodworth points out, “*Cleansed* marked Kane’s movement away from representational, illusionistic practices and a move towards an aesthetic that was marked by heightened theatricality” (16). Indeed, “the torture wreaked on the bodies was highly stylized” in *Cleansed*’s first production, in which stage blood “consisted of a series of red textiles” a la Peter Brook (Woodworth 16). While such stylized violence produces arresting images, it constitutes a break from the original productions of the first two plays, both of which used liquid stage blood. I am not suggesting that verisimilitude automatically produces audience suffering¹³; however, the emphasis on the material conditions of bodily harm in the original productions of *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love*—the representation of blood and entrails—establishes those productions as invested in resensitizing media-saturated audiences to the horrors of physical violence. Woodworth notes that “[a] realistic use of blood in the theatre can sometimes be all the more disturbing than in film or television precisely because of the nature of live performance” (18), and indeed, witnessing and reacting to stage blood plays an integral part in audiences’ experience of Kane’s earliest two plays. *Cleansed*, while certainly violent, has a different objective in its stylization of torture, and merits examination as a transitional play between Kane’s earlier, more representational work and the linguistic turn of her later, more abstract plays *Crave* (1998) and the posthumous *4:48 Psychosis* (2000).

In their more realistic representations of physical violence, *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* share a common goal of audience resensitization to violence. While proof of such resensitization is difficult to obtain without a large-scale study of audience members from

¹³ Nor am I suggesting that *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* are works of realism.

specific productions, discussions of Kane's work both explicitly and implicitly indicate resensitization as a crucial element. As Simon Kane, Sarah Kane's brother and estate executor, told *The New York Times* in 2008, "The purpose of the violence in Sarah's plays is to resensitize people to what violence is" (qtd. in Blankenship 6). Moreover, documented responses to the premieres of *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* betray spectators' visceral reactions to the material. Tinker's infamous *Daily Mail* review, while derisive of *Blasted*'s graphicness, begins with the proclamation, "Until last night I thought I was immune from shock in any theatre. I am not" (5). Robin Stringer of the *Evening Standard* noted how "eight people...walked out of performances" of *Blasted* in its first week of previews (5), while Charles Spencer of the *Daily Telegraph* commented that "hardened theatre critics looked in danger of parting company with their suppers" (qtd. in Stringer 5). Critics had somewhat warmed to Kane by the time *Phaedra's Love* premiered in 1996, but their responses still noted the difficulty of experiencing the work. *The Times*' Kate Bassett remarked on the "extravaganza of grisliness" onstage and the production's intense staging wherein "the cast thwack between clumps of seats." Michael Coveney of the *Observer* praised Kane's final-scene choice to have "actors among the squatting audience rise like a lynch mob to take matters into their own hands," finding it "a powerful, genuinely effective equivalent of the monster rising from the angry sea to frighten the prince's horses" (13). And *The Independent*'s Paul Taylor quipped that "it might be advisable not to wear your best frock" to *Phaedra's Love*, citing Kane's "highly visceral production" (11). None of these evaluations directly confirm that Kane's plays have changed the writers' sensitivity to violence, but they do demonstrate how the witnessing of such graphic physical violence in the context of live performance can prompt a bodily response perhaps stronger than that felt when seeing violence onscreen. The intensity of that response, one of queasiness or even disgust, stems from human bodies sharing the same space and responding

physiologically to the actors' representations via the process of embodied simulation enabled by mirror neurons.

Of course, these visceral representations, not to mention the shock they can instill in audiences, run the risk of overshadowing the plays' complex interrogations of violence. Physical violence is but one form of violence Kane dramatizes, and it emerges from a system of human behavior that relies on fear as a means of control. Kane regards various identity-based systems of oppression—"[c]lass, race and gender divisions"—as "symptomatic of societies based on violence or the threat of violence, not the cause" (Stephenson & Langridge 134). I want to emphasize Kane's mention of "the threat of violence" in particular. While the graphic physical violence of *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* is certainly worthy of attention, it is important not to analyze these scenes in a vacuum. Rather, they must be contextualized in relationship to the other, subtler forms of violence present in each play, as these types of violence are emblematic of the threat that Kane mentions—or rather, that threat of violence *comprises* these other violences.

The other prevalent form of violence in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, and the form this chapter explores most deeply, is emotional violence. As I mentioned previously, this type of violence involves one character deliberately inflicting psychological pain on another. Terms like "psychological violence" and "emotional abuse" exist to describe this phenomenon; however, I use the term "emotional violence" in this chapter because it most accurately captures the affective response these plays produce. A term like "psychological" risks eliding the physical aspects of emotional response: though a body experiencing negative affect may not bear external physical injury, it nonetheless undergoes physiological processes instigated by the external stimulus responsible for that negative affect. I also shy away from the term "emotional abuse" here, at least when relating onstage action to spectator response, as it implies mistreatment within the context of an intimate

relationship. Certainly, some of Kane's characters emotionally abuse others—Ian abuses Cate and Hippolytus abuses Phaedra—but the audience's experience of those characters' relationships does not automatically render them abuse victims. The term “emotional violence” thus accounts for the variation between character and audience experience while acknowledging the potential commonalities in affective response between the two.

Emotional violence assumes many forms in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love*, but its bottom line involves producing an experience of suffering for both characters and spectators. In *Blasted*, it emerges in Ian's early treatment of Cate, in the Soldier's descriptions of the violence he has perpetrated, and in the characters' final struggles for survival. In *Phaedra's Love*, where physical violence does not erupt until the finale, emotional violence permeates much of the action, especially Hippolytus' behavior toward the love-stricken Phaedra. Kane's focus on emotional as well as physical violence in these two plays reflects her investment in staging “societies based on violence or the threat of violence.” *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* demonstrate the ubiquity of emotional violence in the worlds they dramatize; physical violence emerges as a product of social systems that normalize emotional violence. In order to make those systems visible to her audience, Kane demands that her viewers experience the suffering that comes from witnessing both emotional and physical violence.

Since gender forms an essential component of this dissertation, I must note that the various types of violence in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* often but do not exclusively involve men behaving violently toward women. Critics have already addressed Kane's engagement with gender and her unwillingness to accept the label of “woman writer,” but such issues merit review here. Unlike Wertenbaker, Kane did not consider her work explicitly feminist in nature, and in fact found that the feminism of her predecessor's plays “didn't really make much sense to young women living in the so-called post-feminist age”

(Ward 237). Yet as Graham Saunders points out, “almost all of Kane’s work explores a diseased male identity” and its effect on relationships, especially heterosexual ones (*Love Me or Kill Me* 30). Perhaps this focus on male identity springs from Kane’s historical moment: the 1990s became known for what the Royal Court’s Ian Rickson called the “crisis in masculinity” that dominated British playwriting (qtd. in Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 154). Plays by and about men ruled the London theatre scene, where Kane’s contemporaries like Mark Ravenhill, Jez Butterworth, and others explored “every kind of male discomfort” (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 154). Yet unlike many of her contemporaries, who worried about that discomfort itself, Kane was more concerned with the source of the worry. As I mentioned above, Kane saw identity-based oppression as rooted in violence and the threat thereof; her assessments of gender politics maintain an understanding of underlying systemic issues. And while I do not mean to claim feminism as the only suitable critical lens for Kane, I also cannot entirely divorce Kane’s female subject position—or my own, for that matter—from my analysis of her work. Male-female violence in the context of heterosexual relationships is obviously not the only violence that appears in these two plays, but in cases where it does, I will attend to the ways in which it makes visible the different forms of violence that converge in masculine aggression toward and abuse of women.

It is not surprising that plays so concerned with the connection between emotional and physical violence, and with violence against women, center upon rape. Emotional and physical violence converge particularly acutely in this act, which also often has a female victim. Given this chapter’s focus on how multiple forms of violence intertwine, representations of rape in *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* factor significantly in my analysis of each play. In *Blasted*, Ian rapes Cate offstage early in the play, and the Soldier rapes Ian onstage after an explosion rocks the hotel room. In *Phaedra’s Love*, the title character claims Hippolytus has raped her after their sexual encounter, and Theseus rapes his

stepdaughter Strophe in the midst of the play's violent final scene. Though these rapes are driving forces in each play, I have chosen not to make rape this chapter's exclusive focus in order to avoid fetishizing the act. Rather, I will situate each instance of rape within the context of the emotional violence that presages or enables it. My analysis will demonstrate how these acts of rape render the normalization of emotional violence both visible and palpable for Kane's audience, and in so doing, aim to reverse that normalization.

In the analysis that follows, then, I seek to make a few key interventions in the discourse surrounding Kane's early plays. First, I aim to broaden the understanding of what constitutes violence in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* through an examination of the relationship between emotional and physical violence. Second, in order to enlarge this understanding, I aim to expand the volume of affective analyses of Kane's work and deepen comprehension of how suffering works upon Kane's audiences. Third, I aim to establish that, while it may not form the crux of Kane's message, identity (i.e., gender) cannot be ignored when conducting an analysis of how violence operates in Kane's plays, as it invariably affects how audiences respond to theatre. Ultimately, through these interventions, I will show how Kane's experiential theatre cultivates an affective environment in which a spectator can develop a deeper sensitivity to injustice.

Blasted

Blasted's reputation precedes it: the aforementioned response to its 1995 Royal Court premiere has made it "one of the most talked-about plays of the 1990s" (Aston, "Feeling" 22). By now, its plot is well known. Ian, a dying journalist (he has ruined his liver and lungs with alcohol and cigarettes), and Cate, a young woman prone to seizure-like fits, occupy a hotel room in Leeds. Once romantically involved, their relationship is overtly unhealthy. Ian verbally and sexually abuses Cate, ultimately raping her. After Cate

escapes through the bathroom, an unnamed Soldier pushes his way into the hotel room, which is then “*blasted by a mortar bomb*” in the midst of an unnamed war (Kane, *Blasted* 39). In the wake of the explosion, the Soldier rapes Ian, sucks out his eyes, and then kills himself. Cate then returns with a baby a woman has given her. When the baby dies, Cate leaves to find food. While Cate is gone, Ian eats the baby's corpse and crawls into a hole in the floorboards, hoping to die himself. He does not, however, and Cate returns with sustenance, for which Ian thanks her.

As previously mentioned, such graphic action incited outrage among London theatre critics who viewed the play as an affront to decency and theatrical convention. Yet as time passed and the conversation surrounding *Blasted* continued, critics began to recognize its depth and staying power, and substantial scholarship of the play emerged. This scholarship generally attends to two main facets of *Blasted*: its form and its violence. Indeed, the play is notable for its unusual form, which trades social realism for surreal expressionism with the explosion of one mortar bomb. On the one hand, this form grew out of Kane's writing process: she had written drafts of the play's first two scenes before witnessing televised coverage of conflict in Bosnia, which caused a shift in her writing's focus. On the other hand, such a fragmented structure was formally daring and inventive in 1990s London, disorienting viewers and reviewers who had come to expect realism as the theatrical norm.

Beyond shattering generic conventions, *Blasted's* form renders visible the connection between domestic and military violence that Kane seeks to highlight. As Graham Saunders states, the Soldier, who enters just before the bomb blast, provides “the integral link to the physical and mental abuse Ian perpetrates on Cate in the first part of the play” (*Love Me or Kill Me* 46). The Soldier inflicts similar abuse upon Ian to what Ian has inflicted upon Cate; his actions prompt audience contemplation of the circumstances

surrounding each scenario and of the factors enabling each cycle of abuse. Elaine Aston notes that “Cate’s rape re-circulates in the images of war that follow” the explosion (“‘bad girl’” 85). Similarly, Ken Urban connects the “individuated” rape of Cate by Ian to the “symbolic” rape of Ian by the Soldier, which in turn is a “representation of the violence occurring outside the hotel room” (“The Body’s Cruel Joke” 158). Form, then, is one way Kane links multiple types of violence, none of which she shies away from representing.

Unsurprisingly, examinations of *Blasted*’s profuse graphic content constitute another large part of the play’s critical reception. For many scholars, such violence houses Kane’s commentary on underlying English attitudes that enable violence at home and abroad. Saunders writes that the play’s violence allows Kane to “draw comparisons between acts of rape in the play against the part mass rape played in the Serbian policy of ‘ethnic cleansing’” (Saunders, *Love Me or Kill Me* 48). Likewise, Urban notes that *Blasted* “articulate[s] the coherence between individualized acts of rape and strategic programmes of war” and “suggests that a culture that sanctions mass murder abroad inevitably allows crimes of rape to occur at home” (“The Body’s Cruel Joke” 158-59). Saunders argues that these connections, in turn, render *Blasted* a “state of Britain” play, as it “asks uncomfortable questions about British identity, and in bringing a foreign war into a Leeds hotel room also asks questions about British engagement with broader Europe” (*Love Me or Kill Me* 51). Part of the way in which it asks such questions involves its extreme violence. As noted above, Kane watched televised coverage of the Bosnian war; this coverage, beamed nightly into countless 1990s British living rooms, perhaps desensitized many television viewers who became accustomed to two-dimensional, compressed images of conflict. In staging part of that conflict with live actors before a live audience, Kane forces her viewers to confront the horror they could otherwise avoid by changing channels. As the Soldier terrorizes Ian, “Ian’s violated body becomes the means by which the

atrocities occurring outside become visible” (Urban, “Cruel Joke” 158). And with those atrocities made visible, the play achieves a double impact: it both “stays in Leeds, and warns against complacency in Britain” and “shifts to Bosnia, and confronts us with the reality of war, breaking down the distance imposed by geography and indifference” (Sierz, *In-Yer-Face* 107). The notion of resensitization to violence, then, shapes a major strain of critical thought on the play.

Such resensitization, presented in an innovative form, leads critics to varied readings of *Blasted*'s dramatic impact. Including the play within the in-ye-face movement, Sierz contends that “Kane doesn't have a message, she makes connections” and that *Blasted* “raises questions without providing answers” (*In-Yer-Face* 104). Urban places the play within the framework of the Theatre of Catastrophe, a model developed by Howard Barker that eschews the explication of meaning and revels in despair and uncertainty (“Ethics of Catastrophe” 40); in conforming to such a model, *Blasted* “offers neither solutions nor redemption,” yet presents the “possibility that an ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible” (37). Aston reads *Blasted* as part of “an experiential genealogy of women's playwriting,” one in which “feeling the loss of feminism”—that is, feeling a shift away from prior decades' overt feminism in the uneasily “postfeminist” 1990s—produces a dramaturgy geared toward eliciting emotional, bodily responses from audiences (“Feeling” 25). Alyson Campbell pursues this experiential thread when she contends that “what is needed to produce an effective methodology for discussing Kane's work is an ‘affective analysis’ based on ‘affective specificity’”; that is, since Kane seeks “to affect the spectator through a challenge to perception,” we must experience her drama in performance in order “to address its sensory impact in the moment, to ground our experience of it in our corporal response to it” (83, 94). These concepts of uncertainty and affect provide the foundation for my intervention.

As noted above, rape occurs twice in *Blasted*: Ian rapes Cate offstage before the dividing explosion, and the Soldier rapes Ian onstage after it. In terms of critical attention received, the latter rape far eclipses the former, in no small part because it is represented onstage, while Cate's rape remains unseen. Kim Solga provides a corrective for the proliferation of scholarship that has “almost fetishistically” obsessed over Ian's violation (346); she reads Cate's unstaged rape as key to understanding *Blasted*'s “most trenchant critique of the workings of realism” (349). I join Solga's effort to afford more attention to Cate's rape, albeit from an affective rather than genre-based perspective. While I will also address Ian's rape, I aim to temper any earlier critical fetishism with a more rounded analysis of how the emotional violence that underpins it connects to emotional violence prior to the explosion. Exploring Kane's treatment of rape in *Blasted* enables me to articulate the multiple layers of emotional violence that circulate between the action onstage and the audience. In particular, the issue of consent (or lack thereof) reverberates throughout the play's character relationships and anchors the play's multilayered experiences of suffering.

You Hurt Me, I Love You

Emotional violence drives the play's action prior to the explosion, as the play's first two scenes revolve around Ian's emotional (and later physical) abuse of Cate. The first scene is a protracted escalation of this abuse that culminates in her offstage rape after the scene ends. First, Ian hurls prejudicial slurs at Cate, asking if she is a “nigger-lover” and calling her brother a “[r]etard” and a “[s]paz” before placating her with a “You know I love you” when she becomes agitated (5). Ian then insults Cate's appearance, remarking that her clothes make her look “like a lesbos” (7). When Cate retorts that she also dislikes Ian's clothes, he “*takes them all off and stands in front of her, naked*” and demands that she

perform oral sex on him (7). When Cate “*bursts out laughing*” in refusal, Ian insults her intelligence, claiming that she is “never going to get a job” because she is “stupid” (8). This latest round of insults agitates Cate so much that she faints and enters into one of what Ian calls her “fits” (9). Ian's behavior immediately prior to this first fit broadcasts his disavowal of Cate's resistance. Though Cate recognizes that Ian is “deliberately” provoking her and insists that he “[s]top,” Ian denies her with another put-down: “No, I'm talking, you're just too thick to understand” (8). The buildup to the fit thus establishes Ian as a perpetrator of emotional violence. Though Cate repeatedly commands him to cease using offensive language, Ian continues despite knowing that it upsets her. He subjects her to his nudity and only grudgingly accepts her refusal to pleasure him. And he laughs at Cate's frustration immediately prior to the fit (9). He has not technically raped Cate yet, but he emotionally punishes her with his insults and invalidations, and the scene clearly links her fit to his treatment of her. The lead-up to Cate's first fit, then, establishes a precedent of violation, not only for the relationship between Ian and Cate, but also for the play as a whole.

If we trace the ramifications of this violatory dynamic for characters, performers, and spectators, we can see how Kane uses non-consent as the foundation for her theatre of suffering. In ignoring Cate's pleas to stop insulting her, Ian violates a fellow character's boundaries. In stripping naked onstage, the actor playing Ian provides theatergoers with perhaps more than they expected to see. And in dramatizing emotional abuse that drives its victim to physical distress, Kane subjects her audience to difficult emotional experiences. For one, disgust operates on a number of levels here: the viewer may feel disgusted at having to witness a fully naked male body (a rarer occurrence than female nudity in

performing arts)¹⁴, or disgusted that Ian would so callously shove his naked body in Cate's face, or disgusted that Ian would verbally assault Cate to the point of a fit. The disgust becomes productive at the intersection of the audience's and Cate's experiences of Ian's nudity. If a spectator bristles at the sight of a naked Ian, her reaction is similar to Cate's laughter in that it conveys distaste for his behavior. Regardless of whether the spectator is concerned with theatrical decorum—which “the pale, soft, slightly corpulent, anonymous flesh of a male human being, notable most of all for its banality” ostensibly violates (Carney, “Tragedy” 283-84)—or character relationships, her agitation marks her as an unwilling witness. Her subject position in relation to Ian, then, mimics Cate's. By recognizing this overlap, the spectator can come to understand the psychological harm such nonconsensual experiences can cause.

Beyond disgust, the play's early action provokes anxiety among spectators, as Ian's disregard for Cate establishes him as untrustworthy and his escalation of emotional violence hints at dire consequences to come. Cate's fit itself fomenters that anxiety: it is distressing to witness a young woman's medical emergency and to hear Ian's disbelief as he commands her to “[s]top fucking about” and asks whether the fit “was real” once she regains consciousness (9). The play's first few minutes thus create an atmosphere where emotional abuse becomes the primary form of communication and physical repercussions of that abuse are commonplace. Though spectators do not directly experience Ian's abuse like Cate does, they do become conditioned to anticipate it, and in their anxiety over what might next befall Cate (and what they might next witness) enter into a state of hypervigilance. While that state does not replicate exactly what someone constantly anticipating abuse might feel, it nonetheless conditions the spectator to expect unpleasant

¹⁴ Of course, disgust is not the only possible emotion a naked male actor's body may produce. Surprise, excitement, confusion, and curiosity may all emerge as well. Nonetheless, I include Ian's nudity in the list of disgust-producing events because the rarity of male actor nudity renders the event unusually shocking.

experiences. With this expectation, the spectator adopts the “future-orientedness” Ngai regards as a hallmark of anxiety (209); she is placed on high alert for the discomfort she will experience next.

Cate’s and Ian’s relationship, and the audience’s experience of it, turns on this anxiety, which only escalates the longer the pair are onstage. We recognize the scene moving toward rape, as Ian’s advances become more pressing and Cate repeatedly refuses consent. At first, when Ian kisses Cate, she “*pulls away and wipes her mouth*” and objects to him using his tongue (12). Ian apologizes, but tries to kiss her again shortly thereafter; this time Cate “*responds*,” and Ian becomes more physical, touching Cate under her shirt while he “*undoes his trousers and starts masturbating*” (14). When he tries to remove her shirt, Cate refuses: “I don’t w- want to do this,” she stutters in agitation (14). “Yes you do,” Ian responds, before kissing her again and trying to remove her pants. Ian only halts his advances because he is “*frightened of bringing another ‘fit’ on*,” then admonishes Cate that her behavior “wasn’t very fair” to him (14). After complaining some more, Ian grabs Cate’s hand and uses it to masturbate to completion. Not only does Ian take Cate’s hand without her consent, but his refusal to believe Cate constitutes a form of gaslighting—the tactic in which an abuser twists the victim’s experience in order to instill doubt in the victim. Gaslighting is a particularly potent form of emotional violence, as it causes a victim to question the veracity of her own experience. Ian’s treatment of Cate in these moments both foreshadows his upcoming rationalization of her rape and demonstrates on an interpersonal level the relative ease with which an oppressor can define a victim’s experience.

Ian’s gaslighting continues as the scene progresses. He chalks his use of racist epithets to describe Cate’s current partner up to a desire to “look after” Cate, whose response to this excuse produces one of *Blasted*’s crucial exchanges: “You hurt me,” she declares, only to hear Ian respond, “No, I love you” (17). This pivotal moment verbalizes

the crux of *Blasted*'s emotional violence. Ian, the perpetrator, claims to act out of love, even when Cate, the victim, clearly expresses pain. By articulating this dynamic so clearly, Kane facilitates audience recognition of an abusive thought process, one that will surface again in matters pertaining to military intervention. Kane makes this abuse so clear in Ian and Cate's relationship that Cate's rape becomes a matter of when, not if. By the time the pair's dialogue breaks down into monosyllables at scene's end (23), the audience is well aware that Cate's repeated refusals mean little to Ian.

But when Ian does rape Cate, the act takes place offstage. Kane's choice not to stage Cate's rape has not gone unnoticed. As Solga notes, "Cate's rape, the very first act of violence committed in the play, is remarkable for being a spectacular non-event; its revelation, after the fact, in scene two, is even delayed by several minutes of dialogue" (348). I want to amend Solga's statement slightly: the rape is the play's first act of *physical* violence. As I have shown above, emotional violence drives the entire first scene toward the physical violence that occurs offstage. Solga argues that, through Cate's rape's absence from the stage, *Blasted* "does not stage what is missing, what we fail to see, so much as it stages the process of our failure to see it" (350). Solga's point is compelling and accurate. But what *Blasted* also stages by concealing the rape itself is the notion that trauma comprises more than a single moment or event. In Cate's case, protracted emotional violence gives way to physical violence, which is in turn followed by more emotional violence. By keeping the rape itself offstage, Kane stages the context that both enables and erases violence against women. Ian Ward notes that the rape's "[t]ragedy lies in the predictability" of it; that is, in choosing to stay in the hotel room, Cate subscribes to the common rape myths of "the victim who should have seen it coming, who failed to take evasive action, who somehow contributed to her own violation" (231). Ward is not implying that Cate is actually to blame for her rape, but rather that prevailing societal

narratives often question the victim's behavior rather than the perpetrator's. Yet Ian's behavior also contributes to the rape's predictability. In gaslighting Cate and willfully misreading her non-consent as consent in disguise, Ian reveals how rape is normalized and explained away by a culture given to discounting the victim's point of view.

That erasure becomes all the more apparent after Cate's rape, as Ian dismisses Cate's vitriol and continues misinterpreting her behavior. Now devoid of any earlier traces of innocence, Cate calls Ian a "[c]unt" and tells him to "[c]hoke on" his breakfast (25-26). When Ian responds that she is a "[s]arky little tart this morning," Cate attacks him physically, "*slapping him around the head hard and fast*"; after a struggle, she grabs Ian's gun and "*points it at his groin*" before fainting (26). Though the dialogue has not yet confirmed the rape, Cate's behavioral shift—not to mention her strategic pointing of the gun, a gesture that may cause many audience members to flinch—indicates that something very wrong happened between scenes. Ian's reaction, however, involves calling Cate names and reenacting the rape after she faints: "*He puts the gun to her head, lies between her legs, and simulates sex*" (27). Not content with one nonconsensual encounter, Ian essentially rapes Cate again while she is unconscious; this time, Kane does not conceal the act, but rather emphasizes the ingrained nature of Cate's trauma by connecting Ian's action directly to Cate's fits. Indeed, when Ian orgasms, Cate "*sits bolt upright with a shout*" and then "*laughs hysterically*" before "*crying her heart out*" (27). Though she appears to be in a trance-like state at this point, Cate's fit evinces the link between sexual and emotional trauma and works against Ian's sense of entitlement. As Solga writes, "what is meant in Ian's script of the event to be Cate's articulation of pleasurable submission turns out to be an uncanny wave of emotion that he cannot, or will not, recognize as traumatic" (364). Cate's laughter, then, is both "a genuine expression of sexual trauma and a conscious refusal to play Ian's game. Now it is up to us to decide which is more truthful: Ian's script

of the event or Cate's resistive performance" (365). That decision-making comes into play again shortly thereafter when the between-scenes rape is revealed through dialogue: "Loved me last night," Ian says. "I didn't want to do it," Cate replies (31). But Ian still questions Cate's experience, claiming that he "[t]hought she liked that" because she "[m]ade enough noise" (31). Despite Cate's insistence on her non-consent and her cries of pain when he bit her genitals, Ian never apologizes or indicates belief; instead, he excuses his behavior by claiming that he "went down on" a previous partner "all the time" and it "never hurt her" (32). Not only does Ian discount Cate's perspective and minimize her trauma, but he also speaks for a former lover who is not present to confirm or deny Ian's claim. And given how Ian has behaved toward Cate, spectators may find that claim unreliable.

Kane's construction of this scene, including the offstage rape that precedes it, highlights the pervasive minimizing of sexual assault victims' experiences and trauma. By not showing the rape itself, Kane highlights how the victim's testimony is often the only "evidence" of a rape; by staging Ian's misinterpretation of Cate's experience, Kane highlights how the perpetrator's account often overrides the victim's. As Ward points out, legally speaking, consent "is a blunt instrument, cherished for its simplicity rather than its subtlety. It struggles to deal with the inevitable myths of implied consent, and fares no better when challenged by the realities of inequality and abuse in sexual relations" (232). Yet Cate's trauma is so evident from her behavior in the second scene—not to mention Ian's actions—that to question whether Ian really raped her seems ridiculous. Ian's assault on the unconscious Cate, along with Cate's later fellating of Ian in which she bites his penis when he ejaculates, are two pivotal moments in this regard. Solga contends that these two "live rehearsals" of the offstage rape illuminate "the coercive discourse that attempts to rewrite rape as female pleasure" (363). And indeed, in staging both the "simulated" rape

and Cate's later retaliation (a reversal of Ian biting Cate earlier), Kane reveals the inanity of questioning Cate's experiences. We should not need to see the rape, Kane implies, to believe the survivor's account of it and to recognize the trauma it has caused.

Though staging the buildup to and aftermath of Cate's rape rather than the rape itself may seem like a choice geared to temper viewers' suffering, it is actually another way in which *Blasted*'s "form puts the audience through that material it presents" (Kane, Letter to Aleks Sierz, 18 January 1999, qtd. in Aston, "Feeling" 577). As I stated above, trauma is often more than one obvious shocking event, and in cases of domestic violence, protracted emotional trauma often accompanies physical trauma. By subjecting the audience to the emotionally abusive elements of Ian and Cate's relationship, as well as to Cate's physical and psychic trauma following her rape, Kane inflicts a measure of trauma on her audience. While viewing a simulation of an abusive relationship is not the same as being a real-life victim of abuse, Kane's audience still experiences a degree of the suffering specific to abusive relationships. Through a process of embodied simulation, Kane's audience is sensitized to this particular form of suffering. The spectator learns, through the experience of her sensory responses to the action onstage, how a victim of abuse inhabits a heightened or raw emotional state.¹⁵ In other words, Kane steeps her audience in pain. Representing the before and after of Cate's rape recalls Ahmed's reminder that "pain is not simply the feeling that corresponds to bodily damage" (23). Indeed, Cate's emotional trauma at Ian's hands, along with spectators' experiences of it, call attention to how pain works upon Kane's audience. Ahmed asserts that, "[e]ven in instances of pain that is lived without an external injury (such as psychic pain), pain 'surfaces' in relationship to others, who bear witness to pain, and authenticate its existence" (31). By demanding that *Blasted*'s

¹⁵ Audience members also bring their personal experiences and memories to the performance; some spectators may themselves have experienced a form of abuse and can relate particularly intensely to the action onstage.

spectators witness—and experience a fraction of—Cate’s psychic pain, Kane calls her audience to validate Cate’s experience as painful. Of course, spectators do not actually experience Cate’s pain themselves, but if they experience anxiety, sadness, and/or anger over Cate’s circumstances, they suffer in relationship to that pain. And that suffering exists in infinite permutations, as each spectator will respond uniquely as a result of their varied identities, beliefs, and personalities. As Ahmed states, “pain does not produce a homogenous group of bodies” (31), and this proliferation of pain-induced affects reinforces the notion that suffering manifests in countless forms.

When the War Comes Home

The trauma of Cate’s rape reverberates throughout the remainder of *Blasted*. Though the play appears to change direction with its famous bomb blast and the Soldier’s scene with Ian, connections to Cate’s assault abound during this central interlude. These connections reveal that the Soldier/Ian scene is not simply comeuppance for Ian or the inevitable military extension of domestic abuse, but rather a continued exploration of sexual assault’s effects on victims, witnesses or confidantes, and even perpetrators. In doing so, I will continue Solga’s project of correcting for the notion that “the only violence that really matters” in *Blasted* “is that which befalls Ian, allows him to suffer for his sins and to seek redemption” and that Cate’s rape functions “as a premonition of the violence that will later overwhelm the stage, as a harbinger of the more ‘real,’ and really violent, spectacle to come” (348). Indeed, the violence of the Soldier/Ian scene can be read as a further manifestation of Cate’s trauma—and perhaps as a product of her traumatized mind. Kane herself noted that “[t]he play collapses into one of Cate’s fits” (Stephenson & Langridge 130), and several critics have seized on this remark in their analyses of the play (see Aston, Kim, Saunders, Solga). My analysis of post-blast *Blasted* joins this critical

tradition, but does so in service of exploring how Kane engages with the idea of post-traumatic suffering.

The bomb blast's shocking interruption is often considered in the context of military violence, a valid reading given the events unfolding onstage and Kane's own profession that television coverage of the Siege of Srebrenica influenced her playwriting direction (Rebellato). The blast's staging—it involves “*a blinding light, then a huge explosion*” (39)—reflects the idea that “what happens in war is that suddenly, violently, without any warning whatsoever, people's lives are completely ripped to pieces” (Kane, Interview with Nils Tabert, qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me*, 41). And indeed, by staging a hotel's bombing, Kane places her audience practically inside a virtual war zone; the live theatrical experience stresses viewers' bodies much more than would televised war coverage. Whether newcomers to *Blasted* or familiar with the play, spectators are bound to feel a surge of adrenaline in response to the explosion. This heightened sensitivity inaugurates a more intense form of the anxiety produced by Ian's abuse of Cate in the first two scenes. Having endured an explosion inside the theatre, Kane's audience now nervously anticipates further military atrocity. Affect, then, is another means by which the link between domestic and military violence becomes clear: just as war disrupts countless lives without warning, so does rape and abuse. But it is also a reminder, along with the staging of the explosion's aftermath—the blast has left “*a large hole in one of the walls, and everything is covered in dust which is still falling*” (39)—of the lasting impact of trauma upon its victims.

Cate may not be physically present during Ian's interaction with the Soldier, but the memory of her abuse pervades the scene. For one, the hole the explosion creates serves as a reminder of the traumatic rupture in Cate's life. Solga argues that the hole “embeds her missed scene of suffering into the physical structure of the stage, translates her earlier bodily and psychic trauma onto the whole of the space” (358). Yet the hole also, through

its status as an absence, provides an “image of the inaccessible,” including “the would rape makes, the thing we can’t see even when we manage to witness sexual violence empathetically” (Solga 366-67). Like Cate’s rape’s offstage positioning, the hole is emblematic of the unknowability of another’s pain. Beyond that unknowability, however, the explosion and its resultant hole also evokes the *unexplainability* of traumatic experiences like sexual assault. Though a number of attempted explanations for rape—many of which, Ward points out, place responsibility for the act on the victim (228)—still circulate in contemporary society, no amount of logic or rationalization can justify a single rape or make a victim understand why that rape happened to them in particular. The hole reproduces this logical void. As Christopher Wixson notes, “part of what makes Kane’s dramaturgy effective is the disorienting effect it creates” (79). The explosion is disorienting in itself, but the hole it leaves behind perpetuates and intensifies that disorientation through its connection to the emotional violence that is the aftermath of sexual trauma.

The hole in the wall is not the only way in which Kane stages the fallout from Cate’s rape when Cate is not present. The Soldier’s interaction with Ian contains many echoes of the earlier assault and continues emphasizing the potency of emotional violence. Many previous examinations of the Soldier/Ian scene focus on its onstage rape, in which the Soldier rapes Ian, first with his penis and then with his gun. I have already noted Solga’s critique of the scholarly obsession with this scene; I do not wish to add to that voyeurism beyond pointing out, as other critics have, that it mimics Ian’s earlier “simulated” sex on Cate in that the Soldier “*holds the revolver to Ian’s head*” during the act (49). Saunders reads this rape as a “reenactment of the rape Ian originally perpetrated on Cate” (47), while Aston sees the two parallel acts as part of a “bridge of recognition” (she borrows Bert O. States’ term) in which “elements work intertextually and allow for the possibility of seeing something new” (“bad girl” 84-85). Certainly, the rape recalls Cate’s earlier trauma and

produces various forms of suffering in Kane's audience, yet it is but one form of violence the scene contains.

Emotional violence also characterizes the dynamic between Ian and the Soldier and forms a connection to Ian and Cate's relationship. The Soldier's primary means of inflicting emotional violence upon Ian involves his descriptions of the violence he and his compatriots have inflicted on others and that others inflicted on his girlfriend. These descriptions, some of the play's most disturbing imagery, prompt both Ian and the audience to imagine their particularly grisly scenarios. First, the Soldier tells Ian of the time he and two other soldiers raided an abandoned house, where they shot a young boy "through the legs" and the Soldier raped four women, the youngest of whom was only twelve years old, in front of three men, whom his colleagues restrained (*Blasted* 43). As the Soldier narrates his experience, each spectator imagines the events he describes and reacts affectively. The Soldier's descriptions likely elicit disgust from the audience; in keeping with disgust's inherent ambivalence, the viewer may feel simultaneously horrified by the Soldier's actions and intrigued by the salacious content of his speech.¹⁶ This conflicting emotional state enables the potential realization that the discomfort of simply hearing about such atrocities pales in comparison to actually experiencing them.

Beyond its frequent mention of rape, the Soldier's descriptions are themselves a form of non-consent in this scene. Numerous times, Ian demands that the Soldier refrain from describing gruesome events, only for the Soldier to ignore him and tell him anyway. When the Soldier recounts how enemy troops "buggered" his girlfriend, then "[c]ut her throat. Hacked her ears and nose off, nailed them to the front door," Ian responds with

¹⁶ Ahmed and Ngai both highlight the relationship between disgust and desire: there always exists "desire for, or an attraction towards, the very objects that are felt to be repellent" (Ahmed 84), and disgust "both includes and attacks the very opposition between itself and desire" (Ngai 335).

“Enough.” But the Soldier persists, asking Ian, “Ever seen anything like that?” Ian again demands that the Soldier “[s]top” (47). Ian’s refusals mirror Cate’s non-consent of his own advances during Scene 1, and indeed, Ian has moved from perpetrator to victim for this portion of the play. Yet Ian’s subjugation is not simply a form of revenge for his earlier crimes, as some critics have suggested; it is also the avenue through which Kane intensifies her audience’s suffering by drawing connections to Ian’s treatment of Cate. As I wrote above, Ian’s emotional abuse of Cate in Scene 1 holds the potential to produce audience anxiety. That anxiety grows here through the alignment of Ian’s and the audience’s perspectives. In other words, both Ian and the audience are forced to imagine the scenarios the Soldier describes. Spectators may recognize that they are not in immediate physical danger like Cate in Scene 1 or Ian here, but when it comes to being subjected to emotional violence, they are just as at risk as Ian. This joint perspective further immerses the audience in the world of the play and functions as a key experiential technique, as it is the point at which the distance between character and spectator is most collapsed.

This fusion of experiences, followed by their sudden separation when the Soldier rapes Ian, provides a perspectival shift that enables recognition of the parallel cycles of violence that occur before and after the Soldier’s entrance. Cate and Ian endure emotional violence before becoming victims of a very specific form of physical violence. The audience does not see Cate’s rape, but they do see Ian’s. Solga writes that Ian’s rape “is, for many, the ‘key’ moment in *Blasted*, the *gest* that explains the play; it thus forever risks oversimplification” (369). I do not wish to oversimplify the rape, but I do want to suggest that, in rupturing the alignment between spectators’ and Ian’s experiences (but one of its many functions), it drives spectators to recognize the pattern of emotional violence leading to physical violence via the transition from suffering *with* Ian to suffering *for* him. Once

they have suffered along with Ian when subjected to the Soldier's descriptive violence, they are primed to suffer for him when he is raped in front of them.

The contrast between seeing Ian's rape and not seeing Cate's rape highlights the concealment of the latter from the audience's sight. But beyond that, it brings the specter of Cate's rape to the stage via an act that, in some spectators' minds, punishes Ian for his violence against her. As Solga points out, "Ian's rape appears emphatically as both the memory of Cate's rape and yet not Cate's rape; in this hypnoid form it becomes a challenge to spectators to witness both his suffering and more than his suffering" (359). Not only does Ian's rape cultivate suffering for Ian, then, but it also prompts compassion for Cate and contemplation of the systems of power that led to her assault. In feeling along with Ian before witnessing his rape, spectators more readily understand how the emotional violence and non-consent that permeates human relations precipitates physical violence. In seeing Ian's rape and remembering not seeing Cate's rape, spectators reflect upon Cate's experience and, after suffering through Ian's experience along with him, feel yet more compassion for her as well.

Rubble

Blasted's first three scenes, then, draw connections and elicit affects that emphasize the pervasiveness of emotional violence and its traumatic repercussions, including extreme acts such as rape. The play's final two scenes explore the aftereffects of that violence and pose questions surrounding the possibility of survivorship and recovery. Much existing scholarship reads the play's conclusion as somewhat hopeful in nature given Cate's return and Ian's gratitude for her care of him. Saunders notes the potential for Ian "to recover his lost humanity" after he has been "stripped of power and made to feel extremes of physical and mental anguish" (*Love Me or Kill Me* 61). Wixson considers the ending "guardedly

hopeful, as Ian (clearly at rock bottom) matures and a stronger Cate, who retains virtues of innocence and kindness lacking in this world, is born” (85). Urban discusses how “Kane emerges from calamity with the possibility that an ethics can exist between wounded bodies, that after devastation, good becomes possible” (“Catastrophe” 37). And indeed, the play’s conclusion showcases the Beckettian bond between Cate and Ian, who face the future together despite their previous antagonism. Yet *Blasted*’s ending is more complicated than mere redemption and resolution, a fact that critics also acknowledge. Using this scholarship that accounts for the conclusion’s ambiguity as a backdrop, I will trace how the play’s final two scenes map the complex affective landscape of survival.

If we read the play’s final two scenes against the concept that they stage a journey toward “post-traumatic” survival, we can come to understand how *Blasted* renders the very concept of “post-trauma” a fiction via its affective dramaturgy. The action that begins Scene 4 indicates, if not a lull in conflict, at least a change in direction: the Soldier has “*blown his own brain out*” after raping Ian and lies dead onstage, and upon her return to the hotel room’s ruins, Cate indicates that “Soldiers have taken over” outside because “[m]ost people gave up” (*Blasted* 51). Yet any tension diffused by the Soldier’s suicide—the act of which Kane also keeps offstage—resurfaces when one realizes the extent of the damage outside. “Everyone in town is crying,” Cate reveals, and she carries a baby a woman gave to her (51). In addition, Cate’s return restores the play’s original abusive relationship. Their dynamic is different this time around, however. Blind and victimized, Ian is powerless compared to early in the play, and implores Cate for support. Rather than threatening Cate, he repeatedly assures her that he “[w]on’t hurt” her (53, 56) and asks her to bring him his revolver so that he can put himself out of his misery (54). Cate ultimately grants his request, but removes the bullets from the gun before giving it to Ian. Her action results in Ian’s futile suicide attempt: “*He pulls the trigger. The gun clicks, empty. He*

shoots again. And again and again and again. He takes the gun out of his mouth” (56). This moment, in which a character’s attempt to end his suffering is thwarted, crystallizes the play’s perpetuation of suffering through the generation of negative spectator affect.

Despite the gun’s unloaded state, Ian’s use of the weapon nonetheless possesses potential to cause discomfort among audience members. For one, viewers may flinch reflexively when Ian puts the gun in his mouth and pulls the trigger, even if they know it will not fire. Moreover, spectators may experience disgust if they realize that the gun in Ian’s mouth is the same one that was used to anally rape him. Beyond these physiological responses, viewers may feel anguish at Ian’s continued suffering or at the fact that Cate must continue to exist alongside her rapist—even though she has chosen to let him live. Indeed, there are multiple ways to interpret Ian’s thwarted suicide, yet most of these interpretations involve the perpetuation of suffering. If Cate removes the bullets from the gun to deny Ian death, the thing he most wants, then she prolongs his suffering, perhaps in retaliation for that which he has caused her. If Cate removes the bullets because she cannot bear to witness a suicide up close, then she does so perhaps at the expense of her own well-being. And Ian’s continued existence means that *Blasted*’s harrowing experience continues for the audience. Cate and Ian remain trapped together, and unlike the baby, who eventually dies—“[l]ucky bastard,” Ian remarks (57)—they cannot escape the trauma they have undergone and will continue to undergo. The futile suicide attempt, and the discomfort it causes among spectators, is therefore a reminder that suffering allows no easy exit.

As the play draws to a close, it continues to highlight the enduring nature of suffering in the aftermath of trauma. In the play’s final scene, Cate leaves the room again in search of food and leaves Ian behind alone. Through silence, Cate reveals the manner in which she plans to “get [food] off a soldier”: she “[d]oesn’t answer” Ian’s inquiry as to how she plans to do that, implying that she will pay for the food with her body (58). This

silence in turn recalls Ian's rape of Cate, which was also rendered as an absence. By drawing this connection, Kane reminds her audience of Cate's continuing trauma and her need to relive that trauma in the name of survival. Moreover, Cate's departure leads to the play's famous montage of Ian "*masturbating*," "*strangling himself with his bare hands*," "*shitting*," "*laughing hysterically*," "*having a nightmare*," "*crying, huge bloody tears*", and "*lying very still, weak with hunger*" before eating the dead baby (59-60). In addition to provoking various combinations of distress, disgust, and anxiety among spectators, this scene's fragmentation of time—blackouts precede and follow each act, rendering unclear the amount of time that passes—resembles the passing in and out of consciousness. This disorienting tactic can affect spectators' ability to make sense of the world represented before them, a feature that also applies to the processing of trauma. The montage thus becomes another moment where Ian's and the audience's perspectives align in terms of their struggle to process a harrowing experience, but are split with every new action Ian performs. This concurrent alignment and separation of perspectives once again enables spectators to suffer with and for Ian, and consequently to feel a glimpse of the profound and lasting nature of Ian's suffering.

The play's final moments reinforce the inability to escape from suffering. After his montage of harrowing experiences, Ian finds that death eludes him once more: though he "*dies with relief*" after he crawls into the hole in the floorboards, he is revived when "*[i]t starts to rain on him*" (60). Rather than provide any sense of relief that Ian's suffering has ended, Kane perpetuates both his and the audience's discomfort by keeping him alive. Moreover, when Cate returns shortly thereafter with bread, sausage, and gin, "*[t]here is blood seeping from between her legs*," another reminder of both the means by which she procured the sustenance and of her earlier rape. Though she tends to Ian, who thanks her for feeding him, their final dynamic is still one of suffering. Ian and Cate's relationship

may appear to have reached a detente, but the rubble that surrounds them indicates the extent of their psychological damage. Trapped and blind, his head protruding from the floorboards like that of a Beckett character, Ian remains immobilized, literally unable to move forward from his experience. Meanwhile, despite the steelier resolve she has cultivated, Cate reverts to infant-like behavior as she “*sucks her thumb*” in the play’s last moments (61). Moreover, she “*sits apart from*” Ian, indicating the psychological distance that exists between them (61).

The comparatively tender exchange between Cate and Ian at play’s end is therefore a deceptive resolution. No amount of love, hope, or relational progress will erase or undo the trauma they have endured; neither will it prevent them from further suffering. *Blasted* ends, then, with the consequences of emotional violence writ large. The wreckage onstage reflects the extent of the trauma to which Kane has subjected her characters and her audience. It is, in effect, a visual representation of Kane’s characters’ and spectators’ emotional states. Spectators may already occupy a heightened emotional state after witnessing *Blasted*’s gruesome action; the physical evidence or remnants of that action prolong that emotional state. Rather than allowing a release of those emotions through catharsis, the final scene preserves spectators’ discomfort—their “ugly feelings” of anxiety and disgust. Kane attempts resensitization of her audience by blocking a return to “normal” for her spectators, who have, in their own way, been traumatized by what they have experienced. Yet the spectators, unlike witnesses to real-world violence, can leave the theatre. When they do leave, however, they will leave in a different state from that in which they entered. In effect, the spectators themselves will be victims of emotional violence—the play’s traumatic effect upon them. The potential for resensitization lies in the space between the spectators’ experience and the experience of real-world victims of violence. Having experienced emotional trauma at the hands of *Blasted*’s dramaturgy, spectators feel

a fraction of what real-world victims or witnesses feel; they also recognize the difference between simulated and real violence. If watching a known simulation like *Blasted* proves emotionally traumatic, they might reason, then witnessing or experiencing real-world violence would prove even more traumatic. Experiencing this trauma in the theatre thus primes Kane's spectators to empathize with victims of violence in the real world by affording them a glimpse of real trauma. Kane's next play, *Phaedra's Love*, works from a similar experiential foundation.

Phaedra's Love

Commissioned by the Gate Theatre, where it premiered in May 1996, *Phaedra's Love* adapts Seneca's tragedy about the titular character, but it also takes cues from Brecht's *Baal*, the play Kane originally planned to adapt before anticipating trouble obtaining permissions from the Brecht estate (Kane, interview with Nils Tabert, qtd. in Saunders, *Love Me* 72). In Kane's version of the Phaedra myth, the focus rests on the "depressed" prince Hippolytus, who spends most of his days listlessly watching television and masturbating into socks (*Phaedra's Love* 65). His stepmother Phaedra remains obsessed with him despite the fact that the royal doctor and her daughter Strophe both urge her to "[g]et over him" (68, 73). On Hippolytus' birthday, a lovesick Phaedra gives her stepson the "present" of fellatio (81), then commits suicide and accuses him of rape in the wake of his callous treatment of her after the act (86-90). Roused from his depression by the turmoil surrounding the accusation, Hippolytus turns himself in, subjecting himself to public execution by an angry mob. The play concludes with that mob scene, during which the crowd fatally mutilates Hippolytus and Phaedra's husband Theseus unknowingly rapes and murders Strophe, his stepdaughter. The play's final moment is a blackly comic tour-de-force: bleeding to death, surrounded by corpses, with vultures circling above him,

Hippolytus cracks, “If there could have been more moments like this” (103). Hippolytus may be dying, but he welcomes the suffering he endures at the end of his life over the ennui that previously dominated his existence.

In terms of its reception, *Phaedra’s Love* is often overshadowed by *Blasted*. Its premiere did not generate the critical firestorm that *Blasted*’s first production did at the Royal Court, and it has received comparably less attention from scholars. Perhaps this milder reception springs from its less provocative form: Urban considers the play the “least adventurous, at least formally, of all Kane’s works” (“Ethics” 42), and Ruby Cohn regards it as “Kane’s weakest play architecturally” (3). Despite such critical attitudes, *Phaedra’s Love* has nonetheless sparked conversation about its engagement with classical tragedy and its deployment of humor and satire. Simon Critchley situates the play among other permutations of the Phaedra myth and notes how “playing tragedy as comedy” results in “the radical separation of the character of Phaedra from the noisy and senseless world that surrounds her” and raises the question of whether, in irony-soaked contemporary times, the tragic “can only be played comically” (35). Saunders notes how Kane “uses the characters of Phaedra and Strophe to draw parallels to the British royal family” in that the two women “are depicted as outsiders to the royal household, and in a cynical move are brought in by the old order in an attempt to refresh and restore its mystique” (*Love Me* 75). Sean Carney calls the play “a brutal social satire of England in the 1990s and a metaphysical picture of a completely corrupt cosmic order, debased by a pervasive and ubiquitous bad faith” (*Politics and Poetics* 272). Overall, the play’s “deliciously dark humor” (Critchley 36) is its most critically lauded aspect.

This focus on humor and satire sometimes eclipses discussions of the play’s violence, which unsurprisingly center upon the gruesome final scene and the ways in which Kane overturns the classical tradition of keeping violence offstage. Peter A. Campbell

notes how *Phaedra's Love* “rejects many of the classical conventions of Euripides and Seneca and the even more restrictive rules of the neoclassical Racine, especially in showing the acts of violence that occur offstage in earlier versions” (174). Saunders states that the plays “bloody climax also transposes elements from Elizabethan and Jacobean revenge tragedies, in which a form of stage violence is performed that is both outlandish and shocking to the sensibilities” (*Love Me* 80). And Woodworth locates the play in a modern dramatic tradition that includes such “excessively bloody pieces” as Martin McDonagh’s *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* and the campy *Evil Dead the Musical* (14). This focus on the goriest parts of *Phaedra's Love*, while understandable, risks distracting from the less obvious (and less physical) moments of violence in the play.

Suffering takes many forms in *Phaedra's Love*, and these forms reveal shared concerns between the play and its predecessor in Kane’s canon. As in *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* partakes in the “dissection of a male identity that is diseased and nihilistic,” where Hippolytus, like Ian, belongs to a group of “embittered nihilists who play out their frustrations on the women trapped with them” (Saunders, *Love Me* 72-73). Furthermore, like in *Blasted*, these frustrations culminate in graphic representations of sexuality and violence (and often the combination of the two): both plays involve staged masturbation, oral sex, rape, and grave bodily injury. Additionally, and perhaps most significantly, both plays locate the underpinnings of these acts of physical violence in emotional violence. Like *Blasted*, *Phaedra's Love* is invested in how emotional violence connects to physical violence, and explores the intersection of these types of violence through the act of rape—which, in this play, is perpetrated exclusively by men against women. Moreover, *Phaedra's Love* continues Kane’s project of representing violence to impact theatrical spectators emotionally through the production of negative affect and anticathartic dramaturgy. Ultimately, as I will show below, *Phaedra's Love* deploys its affective dramaturgy to

explore how a culture that normalizes emotional violence, especially against women, produces grave physical consequences. In effect, as the play shows, emotional violence is often a prelude to physical violence.

“Hate me now?”

Hippolytus’ characterization demonstrates how emotional violence is woven into the “male identity” that Saunders identifies. Apathy is an essential aspect of Hippolytus’ personality; much of his stage time in the first half of the play involves him blankly staring at a television screen. In his one scene with Phaedra, he plays with a remote-control car as “[h]is gaze flits between the car and the television apparently getting pleasure from neither” (74). Cultivate by television and toys, Hippolytus’ numbness sounds a note of caution for Kane’s media-saturated audience. The dangers of such apathy become clear when Hippolytus uses it to inflict emotional violence, coldly provoking and responding to Phaedra. “When was the last time you had a fuck?”, he flippantly asks her, knowing full well her feelings for him (74). When Phaedra later turns the question back upon him, his response is flat and crass: “Someone came round. Fat bird. Smelt funny. And I fucked a man in the garden” (76). His evident disregard for his conquests, not to mention his admission of homosexual sex, further wounds Phaedra, a shift he detects when he asks her, “Hate me now?” (76). This question, which betrays Hippolytus’ intent to provoke his emotionally vulnerable stepmother, becomes a refrain in the scene; he asks it again after calling Phaedra “Mother” despite her protestations (78) and again after disclosing his gonorrhea in the wake of their sexual encounter (85). By repeating this question, Hippolytus reveals his utter disregard for Phaedra’s feelings and establishes himself as a perpetrator of emotional violence—and of physical violence, considering he knowingly passed his disease to Phaedra.

Though tonally different from *Blasted*, the scene between Hippolytus and Phaedra is capable of provoking similar spectatorial anxiety to that felt upon witnessing Ian and Cate's emotionally abusive dynamic. Both scenes evince a sense of inevitable progression towards a sexual act, though Phaedra's declarations of love seem more genuine than Ian's coercive overtures. Nonetheless, Phaedra's earnestness and ostensible good intentions do little to ease the anxiety of anticipating disastrous consequences. Even if a spectator is unfamiliar with Kane's play or with its source material, she can still detect the hurt that Hippolytus inflicts upon Phaedra and the pain of Phaedra's unrequited love. Phaedra's persistence and Hippolytus' flippancy, coupled with the incestuous nature (legally speaking) of Phaedra's desire, creates a queasy atmosphere. The more Hippolytus rebuffs Phaedra, and the more Phaedra professes her love, the more it becomes apparent that the royal family dynamic is broken beyond repair and can only result in a tragic outcome.

Phaedra's scene with Hippolytus, along with her previous scenes, also makes clear that unrequited love is its own form of emotional violence. No amount of cruelty from Hippolytus, not even his ignoble treatment of Phaedra after she fellates him, can stop Phaedra from feeling as though Hippolytus "burn[s]" her (82). This language of violence appears earlier in the play as well, when Phaedra describes her feelings to Strophe: "Can't switch this off. Can't crush it. Can't. Wake up with it, burning me. Think I'll crack open I want him so much" (71). Phaedra's suffering reveals how the intensity of her unrequited love produces an emotional violence that resembles physical pain. Yet beyond this internal pain, the way others address Phaedra's unrequited love intensifies its violence. Both the Doctor and Strophe advise Phaedra to simply "[g]et over" Hippolytus (68, 73); their reactions to her emotional state harbor little compassion or validation. Phaedra does not admit her feelings to the Doctor, but his repeated prurient questioning about whether she and Hippolytus have had sex, not to mention his asking whether she is in love with

Hippolytus, exacerbates her frustration (66-68). Strophe detects Phaedra's anguish immediately—"I'm your daughter," she replies when Phaedra wonders if it's obvious (69)—but focuses more on the potentially grave consequences rather than on her mother's emotional turmoil. "If anyone were to find out," she warns. "It's the excuse they're all looking for. We'd be torn apart on the streets" (73). Strophe's concern with royal reputation is understandable, but her emphasis on secrecy does nothing to soothe her mother.

Moreover, Strophe's advice highlights the connection between silence and shame. Made to feel the full weight of her love's taboo nature, Phaedra's shame only grows, and the violence of her emotional burden becomes more palpable. Ahmed calls for "an ethics of responding to pain" that "involves being open to being affected by that which one cannot know or feel" (30). Such an ethics recalls the Levinasian suffering-for-the-other with which Kane's theatre aligns; it also emphasizes the harmful nature of the Doctor's and Strophe's responses. No other character or spectator can truly know Phaedra's pain, but the potential exists for them to recognize her experience as painful. When they fail to acknowledge that pain, the other characters wound Phaedra all the more deeply. In staging successive uncharitable reactions to Phaedra's love—in fact, her entire stage time consists of scenes containing this type of reaction—Kane implies that responding to another person's pain without compassion can have disastrous consequences.

Believe Her

The dire effects of empathy deficiency become even more apparent in the play's treatment of rape, an act wherein emotional violence turns physical. The play addresses rape on two occasions: first, when Phaedra accuses Hippolytus of rape in her suicide note, and second, when Theseus rapes and kills Strophe during the play's gory finale. On its face, the second instance is much more obvious than the first, as Theseus' rape of Strophe

is staged plainly and leaves no doubt as to its nonconsensual nature. Yet while the first instance may initially seem a false accusation after a consensual act, the encounter between Phaedra and Hippolytus proves more complicated than a simple act of revenge. Indeed, Phaedra's accusation brings to light the nuances that surround the issue of consent. In the analysis that follows, I will focus on how Kane's handling of those nuances advocates for a culture that believes rape victims.

Phaedra's accusation and the encounter that prompts it have already generated significant critical discussion. Much of the conversation addresses the validity of Phaedra's accusation and concludes that, while the sex act was consensual, Phaedra was nonetheless treated poorly. Ian Ward writes, "There can be little doubt that Phaedra was abused, at least emotionally. But there is nothing in Kane's play to suggest that she was raped in any sense that might be recognized in law" (235). Laurens de Vos avers that "[w]e may argue that Phaedra's accusation is false, because she never was raped by her stepson. Yet in the crude and indifferent misrecognition of her love, Hippolytus has at least mentally abused her" (*Cruelty and Desire* 97). Saunders suggests that "there is perhaps justification for the charge" of rape in that "one could see how Hippolytus' brutal contempt and rejection of her obsessive love could be likened to a form of mental rape" (*Love Me* 77). Carney notes how "[t]he rape in this play is not apparently a rape when it takes place," but ultimately concludes that Phaedra's "accusation of rape is not incorrect" (*Politics and Poetics* 274). These critics' validation of Phaedra's charge may stem from Kane's own proclamation that "the English language doesn't contain the words to describe the emotional decimation" Hippolytus causes, so "'[r]ape' is the best word Phaedra can find for it, the most violent and potent" (Stephenson & Langridge 132). Ultimately, the current scholarly consensus supports Phaedra's claim without ascribing any nonconsensuality to the incident itself.

Reluctance to label the act itself a rape may stem from the play's source material. In the original myth, Phaedra writes Theseus a letter accusing Hippolytus of rape after he rejects her; there is no sexual encounter between Phaedra and Hippolytus, who is a chaste devotee of the goddess Artemis. Kane's adaptation, in contrast, portrays Hippolytus as an emotionally numb sex addict and implicates Hippolytus in Phaedra's demise. Staging an encounter between Phaedra and Hippolytus reveals Kane's investment in illuminating the consequences of emotional (and sexual) violence. The Phaedra-Hippolytus dynamic is no longer one of unrequited love, but one in which Phaedra's desire is somewhat consummated. That interaction casts Phaedra's accusation and her ultimate suicide in a new light. While classical portrayals of the Phaedra myth emphasize the danger of vengefulness (Euripides' *Hippolytus*) or the value of Stoicism and/or asceticism (Seneca's *Phaedra*), *Phaedra's Love* focuses on the psychological impact of negotiating sexual consent in a society that privileges male pleasure and minimizes female agency. Careful attention to the Phaedra/Hippolytus encounter reveals that Hippolytus does, in fact, violate Phaedra's limits of consent, causing her emotional and physical harm.

While Phaedra's charge of rape may be difficult to prove legally, I want to offer an alternative reading of her encounter with Hippolytus, one that foregrounds the nonconsensual aspect of the act. As the encounter reaches its climax, Kane's stage directions indicate physical struggle: "**As [Hippolytus] is about to come he makes a sound. Phaedra begins to move her head away—he holds it down and comes in her mouth without taking his eyes off the television**" (81). Only after he has finished does he let go of her head. Phaedra may initiate and willingly continue the act, but Hippolytus clearly interferes with her desire to move her head before he orgasms. Moreover, he restricts her movement without her consent. The act may not fit any legal definition of rape, but in its sharp turn toward the nonconsensual, the encounter highlights the potential limitations of such legal

definitions. As Ann J. Cahill writes, “Any definition of rape seems doomed to be either too broad or too narrow, and the mutual dangers of identifying an experience as rape and of failing to recognize a case of rape seem paralyzing indeed” (109). Nonetheless, Cahill’s conception of rape as an “embodied experience” helps clarify the nuances of Phaedra’s encounter. If a spectator recognizes Phaedra as an “embodied, fluid, intersubjective being” (Cahill 108) whose experience of rape (and of life) is inherently unique thanks to that subjectivity, then she can more readily accept the possibility that Hippolytus did in fact violate Phaedra’s boundaries in some way during their sexual congress. And while Phaedra may have realized the ostensible legal falsehood of her accusation, her death means that her motivation for accusing Hippolytus remains forever unknown. Ultimately, the nonconsensual turn in Phaedra and Hippolytus’ encounter reveals how rape can encompass more than just nonconsensual penetration. That Phaedra “*cries*” after the act only reinforces how violated she feels (82). Unlike in the original myth, where Phaedra occupies the position of spurned pursuer, Kane’s Phaedra has become a victim of sexual trauma. Her emotional distress stems from sexual violence, not from simple rejection.

From an affective perspective, foregrounding the nonconsensual element of Phaedra’s experience augments the potential for Kane’s audience to suffer along with Phaedra. If the action around Hippolytus’ climax is staged with minimal physical conflict, it threatens to conceal the moment of nonconsensual contact. Moreover, it “risks reinforcing” an “enduring” rape myth: “that some women are prone to having sex and then, if they feel rejected, crying rape” (Ward 236). Yet if the director and actors choose to emphasize Hippolytus’ restraint of Phaedra and her struggle against his force, the lack of consent in that moment becomes painfully clear. What began as the consummation of Phaedra’s desire ends in physical and emotional trauma. Witnessing a performance that underscores the moment that produces that trauma not only magnifies Phaedra’s suffering,

but facilitates spectators' potential to suffer along with her. Indeed, experiencing live bodies representing such trauma can prove physically uncomfortable for a theatre audience. The clear performative demarcation of part of Phaedra's encounter as nonconsensual, then, maximizes the affective discomfort essential to Kane's theatre of suffering.

Validating Phaedra's rape within the physical encounter also generates implications for the encounter's aftermath and the reception of Phaedra's accusation. For one, it adds dimension to Hippolytus' acceptance of her claim. When Strophe urges Hippolytus to deny the accusation, his response exposes the heart of the play: "She says I did and she's dead. Believe her. Easier all around" (90). While his statement does not originate from a desire to advocate for rape victims, it nonetheless constitutes a moment where a male protagonist supports taking a woman's claim of rape at its word. As Ward writes, "[t]here is a subtlety in Hippolytus' observation that if a rape victim feels she was raped then so, disregarding legal nicety, in a sense she was" (236). Yet we must not forget the irony surrounding his command. Hippolytus wants Strophe to believe the accusation, not because he champions believing women, but because he relishes the excitement and discord her charge has created: "Life at last" (90). In a production where the staging of Phaedra's assignation with Hippolytus effectively validates her claim, Hippolytus' casual treatment of the situation becomes all the more cringeworthy. Hippolytus may get his long-awaited shot at excitement, but Phaedra has paid for it with her life.

The irony in Hippolytus' imperative to believe Phaedra is one of the play's crucial affective moments in that it crystallizes a tonal disjuncture within the play. Though *Phaedra's Love* is based on a classical tragedy, Kane called the play her "comedy" (Interview with Tabert), and as Saunders notes, "of all her work it is perhaps the most overtly and darkly humorous" (*Love Me* 78). Critchley concurs that the play's "bleakness" is "sustained by moments of deliciously dark humor" (36). And Carney describes

Phaedra's Love as “a comic burlesque of tragedy” (*Politics and Poetics* 272). Yet for all its humor, the play preserves its source material’s tragic action, including the suicide of a woman who has been emotionally—and, as I argue above, physically—mistreated. Carney avers that “Phaedra is someone painfully serious within a situation where seriousness is not possible” and that she is the play’s only character who “doesn’t know she is in a parody of tragedy” (*Politics and Poetics* 273). I contend, in turn, that Phaedra’s seriousness within this parodic environment renders her fate all the more tragic. We may laugh at Hippolytus’ wry commentary on his situation—“A rapist. Better than a fat boy who fucks.” (88)—but our laughter curdles as we learn of Phaedra’s death and realize that Hippolytus profits emotionally from her suicide and accusation. Unease settles in as we begin to understand that Phaedra has become collateral damage.

Phaedra’s suicide also highlights a critical connection between *Phaedra's Love* and *Blasted* in that it illuminates Kane’s decision-making regarding what to represent. Though *Phaedra's Love* culminates in a bloody conclusion, its title character’s suicide remains offstage. Perhaps Kane’s choice stems from desire to retain some aspects of classical tragedy, to circumvent potential voyeuristic or fetishistic spectator tendencies, or to maximize the final scene’s impact by keeping prior representations of violence to a minimum. Yet it also resonates with her decision to keep Cate’s rape offstage in *Blasted*. In that play, not showing Cate’s rape called attention to both the minimization of female sexual assault and the lingering effects of trauma. In *Phaedra's Love*, not showing Phaedra’s suicide also emphasizes the relegation of female experience to the margins. Phaedra’s physical absence from the second half of the play further highlights that marginalization; like the hole in the wall in *Blasted*, Phaedra’s absence hangs over the action and reminds the play’s audience of the consequences of emotional violence.

Hippolytus' emotionally incongruous reaction to Phaedra's accusation and suicide only magnifies the systemic inequality the play dramatizes.

Phaedra is not the only woman in the play to become collateral damage via an act of rape. Strophe, too, pays the ultimate price for voicing her beliefs. In the play's bloody final scene, during which an angry mob disembowels Hippolytus, Strophe urges the crowd not to kill Hippolytus because he is innocent. Upon hearing her cries, Theseus accuses her of "[d]efending a rapist," then "*rapes her*" and "*cuts her throat*" while "[t]he crowd watch and cheer" (95). Only after he has raped and killed her does he realize her identity. Ward notes that "Strophe's rape is perhaps the most striking in the casual as well as the extreme nature of its violence" (236). Indeed, this event, the play's most horrifying moment amid its goriest scene, renders overtly and gruesomely the mechanisms that led to Phaedra's death. For one, the irony that characterized Hippolytus' response to Phaedra's suicide is even more pronounced here, as the crowd's cheers replicate the supposed offense for which Theseus rapes Strophe; in other words, Strophe is raped for defending a rapist, and the crowd in turn defends and encourages *her* rapist. There is no question that Theseus has committed rape, and no laugh line to diffuse the tension. The connection between Phaedra's and Strophe's fates is clear: the bloodlust that sprang from Phaedra's accusation, an accusation born from Hippolytus' emotional violence, has resulted in the rape and murder of an innocent bystander.

Beyond reinforcing the connection between emotional and physical violence, the staging of Strophe's rape and of the final bloodbath in general implicate the play's spectators in its action. As many critics have noted, the original production of *Phaedra's Love* at the Gate Theatre involved a production design that allowed actors to sit among the audience up until the final scene, where they assumed the roles of crowd members. This technique served Kane's goal of "attempting to break down the barriers between audience

and actors,” surprising spectators who “suddenly found that their up to then silent neighbor turned out to be from the cast” (Saunders, *Love Me* 80). By collapsing the divide between performers and spectators, Kane suggests that her audience too is capable of the violence staged before them.¹⁷ As Woodworth observes, “Kane does not allow for passive audience witnessing of this dramatic event. Planting actors in the audience implies that we are not only complicit in the violence enacted before us, but that we participate in it as well” (16). Woodworth’s identification of witnessing as a passive act proves fruitful here; indeed, Kane’s directorial choice takes the audience’s experience from witnessing to suffering, as spectators both confront their complicity in the action and find themselves caught in the middle of it. The physical and psychological stress of experiencing the final scene, wherein “bleeding body parts” were “chucked over the audience’s heads” (Hemming), may produce an array of negative affects, from anxiety to disgust. The combination of recognizing one’s complicity in a violent system while fearing the spatter of stage blood is a particularly potent one.

To close this phase of my analysis, I return to Hippolytus’ final words: “If there could have been more moments like this” (103). Hippolytus is earnest in his desire for more visceral experiences, but the circumstances surrounding his statement—he has been mutilated and is about to be eaten by vultures—render his line darkly comic. Though humorous, this statement provides the touchstone for this chapter and articulates a critical connection between *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* in that it represents the vitality of suffering. What’s more, Hippolytus’ dry delivery distinguishes that vitality from value. Carney highlights *Blasted*’s “ambivalence toward the traditional tragic paradigm that

¹⁷ Even in a production that uses a more traditional seating arrangement and preserves the fourth wall, the final scene still holds the potential to elicit affective responses from its viewers. The onstage audience in this final scene functions as somewhat of an avatar for the theatre audience; spectators can take emotional cues from the actors portraying members of the crowd. The implication that the offstage audience is not immune to bloodlust still remains.

suffering is somehow ennobling” (“Tragedy of History” 287), and he notes a similar attitude in *Phaedra’s Love*: “The idea that the descent of a tragic protagonist...in fact further elevates and ennobles said man through his struggles and travails is teasingly parodied” (*Politics and Poetics* 273). This tension between the necessity of suffering and its lack of inherent value is central to both *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love*. It anchors Kane’s experiential theatre in that no character or spectator is immune to it or can fully escape it (except through death or walking out). In the final section of this chapter, I will explore how Kane’s dramaturgy of suffering in *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love*, coupled with her ambivalence toward tragic convention, leads her to develop a tragic theatre based on the subversion of catharsis.

An Anti-Cathartic Tragedy

The consistent experience of negative affect involved in witnessing *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* results in an innovative dramaturgy that challenges existing theatrical models to advance Kane’s particular ethics of empathetic spectatorship. Despite their classical roots, the plays deny the spectator the opportunity for catharsis that one might expect from a tragedy. Carney examines each play in the context of tragic dramatic convention; he considers *Blasted* “a particularly contemporary form of tragedy” in its skepticism of the redemptive nature of suffering and finds “justifiable contempt for what tragedy in a classical sense signifies” in the parodic landscape of *Phaedra’s Love* (“Tragedy of History” 287, *Politics and Poetics* 273). Building upon Carney’s points, I contend that Kane’s less valorizing view of suffering enables her to form a new tragic paradigm, one that regards suffering as its goal rather than catharsis. By eliciting affective responses from spectators yet inhibiting emotional release, Kane’s tragedy is anti-cathartic in nature.

The concept of catharsis in a tragic sense is itself broad and ambiguous. Aristotle may be the “founder” of tragedy, but his writings on the matter are, like all theories, open to interpretation. R. Darren Gobert rightly reminds us of the ambiguity of the *Poetics*’ *katharsis* clause and the cultural constructedness of its reception: “plays and interpretations of Aristotelian *katharsis* (like other texts) produce and are produced by their culture’s unstated assumptions about the nature of emotion” (2). Different cultural understandings of emotion, Gobert argues, result in different meanings of catharsis.¹⁸ Despite this variation, however, a commonality of emotional purgation or release emerges in the interpretations Gobert identifies. This concept of release—and, by extension, relief—is what Kane challenges in *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love*.

Students of tragedy often refer to the rising up and casting out of pity and fear as the key cathartic mechanism Aristotle identifies. In Kane’s experiential theatre, however, pity and fear (among other affects) may rise up, but they are not cast out. Instead, Kane conjures negative affects and asks her audience to dwell in them. The endings of *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love*, while tinged with hope, do not offer release from the emotional states incited by preceding events in each play. These plays, then, conform to Ngai’s model of the “noncathartic aesthetic,” or “art that produces and foregrounds a failure of emotional release...and does so as a kind of politics” (9). Of course, audiences have reacted to *Blasted* and *Phaedra’s Love* with stronger emotions than the “ugly feelings” Ngai highlights, and these plays represent more fraught scenarios than Ngai’s prime example of Melville’s *Bartleby*. Nonetheless, the noncathartic nature of Kane’s plays places them in a similar realm and becomes a sort of political stance: if witnessing or experiencing emotional and/or physical violence in reality does not produce catharsis, Kane seems to ask, then why should

¹⁸ Gobert uses “*katharsis*” to refer to the specific clause in the *Poetics* and “*catharsis*” to refer to the general phenomenon. I follow this distinction.

it in the theatre? Though *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* still exist within a controlled dramatic environment, their primary aim is not the “enjoyment” of the repulsive of which Aristotle speaks. Rather, it is to put the spectators through a traumatic experience in an attempt to offer them a glimpse of real-world suffering. For Kane, catharsis is beside the point.

A closer look at the conclusions of *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* reveals how they “foreground a failure of emotional release” along the lines that Ngai describes. In *Blasted*, Ian and Cate remain trapped alive in a purgatory-like state; Ian’s failure to die and Cate’s continued relationship with him both interfere with the potential for emotional release. Ian’s death appears imminent when he crawls under the floorboards, but his complaint of “Shit” when rain revives him undercuts a potentially somber moment with humor. The audience’s laughter proves incongruous with typical tragic catharsis: perhaps the dark humor provides an escape valve for tension, but it also stems from discomfort prompted by the knowledge that Ian must go on living despite horrific surroundings and the trauma he has both endured and perpetrated. Moreover, this dark laugh, like the one that followed Ian’s thwarted suicide by gun, precede moments of stark pathos. As Ken Urban notes, Ian’s failure to shoot himself is followed by Cate’s realization that the baby has died, after which “laughter ceases, giving way to tragedy” (“Joke” 159); Ian’s rain-induced curse immediately precedes Cate’s return to the room with “*blood seeping from between her legs,*” confirming the traumatic means by which she procured food and drink (*Blasted* 60). These juxtapositions foreclose any emotional release that the laughter allowed and plunge spectators back into disgust and discomfort. Even though the play ends with Ian thanking Cate for feeding him, it leaves viewers with the understanding that Cate and Ian remain trapped together and dependent on each other amid a landscape of suffering.

The finale of *Phaedra's Love* also works against expectations of tragic catharsis in its juxtapositions of humor with tragedy. As I noted above, Hippolytus’ final line injects

black humor into an otherwise wrenching scene. Yet Hippolytus' desire for "more moments like this" is particularly poignant because he expresses it at the moment when he is about to die. As Sierz writes, his "tragedy is that everything comes together at the moment of his death" (110). On one level, Hippolytus' death in *Phaedra's Love* is not unlike that of other tragic protagonists who meet their ends after receiving life-altering knowledge. On the other hand, unlike in classical tragedy, his death is represented onstage, complete with blood and body parts, and his fatally wounded body lies alongside other maimed corpses who have killed themselves and others. Representing this carnage onstage alerts spectators to the extent of the damage Hippolytus' actions (and Phaedra's love) have wrought. The possibility of emotional release dwindles as audience members, perhaps viscerally affected by the onstage gore, recognize the difficulty of moving forward.

Ultimately, these subversions of catharsis in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* are crucial to the potential for empathy that Kane's theatre of suffering generates. By trapping the spectator in a heightened emotional state, the representations of violence in *Blasted* and *Phaedra's Love* rely on processes of embodied simulation to ensure that spectators feel along with the characters. Through the prolonged experience of negative affect, spectators learn (or, in some cases, remember) how it feels to consistently withstand emotional and physical abuse. At the same time, spectators recognize the onstage action as fictional, allowing for intellectual reflection to accompany their physical response. This combination of reflection and emotion enables understanding of how the play's violence comes to fruition. In this emotional-yet-reflective state, spectators are primed to contemplate and validate the trauma of emotional and physical abuse by experiencing a modicum of that trauma themselves. Just as the suddenness of *Blasted's* explosion mimics the suddenness with which violence erupts in reality, the anti-cathartic nature of these plays underscores

how emotional release is not always consistent or possible when navigating oppressive and/or traumatic situations.

Chapter 3: “I been thinkin’ I’m already a ghost”:

Marina Carr’s Theatre of Haunting

At first blush, Marina Carr’s Irish citizenship—not to mention the obvious Irishness of many of her plays—sets her apart from the other playwrights in this dissertation. Most studies of her work, including those that take gender into account, operate within the context of modern Irish drama.¹⁹ Yet as Cathy Leeney states, “Carr’s canvas is larger than Irish women’s or Ireland’s or even women’s concerns and experience” (“Violence and Destruction” 510). Indeed, a closer look at her work’s production history and subject matter reveals similarities to Wertenbaker and Kane. For one, Carr has become well-known far outside her native country. Many of her plays have enjoyed London productions that have placed her work in the same culture of audience reception that surrounds Wertenbaker’s and Kane’s drama. The first play I discuss in this chapter, *By the Bog of Cats...* (1998), strengthened Carr’s international renown via its 2004 West End production at Wyndham’s Theatre, which starred American actress Holly Hunter as protagonist Hester Swane. Other plays, such as *Portia Coughlan* (1996), *On Raftery’s Hill* (2000), and *Woman and Scarecrow* (2006), have been produced at the Royal Court. Carr’s work has also reached audiences beyond the British Isles, with productions taking place across North America and Europe. In addition to her cosmopolitan appeal, Carr’s adaptation of classical tragedy, her representations of violence, and her engagement with issues of gender and power place her in conversation with Wertenbaker and Kane. The plays I examine below, *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel* (2002), each refashion Greek tragedy in a way that places graphic violence onstage and illuminates how the social systems dramatized normalize oppression

¹⁹ See Murphy, Parrott, Sihra, and others.

and enable that violence. Like Wertenbaker and Kane, then, Carr uses myth and violence to address contemporary cultural concerns about systemic injustice.

Carr's career trajectory has established her as distinct voice in contemporary playwriting. Born in Dublin in 1964, Carr spent her early years in County Offaly, Ireland, where she and her sibling created theatre to entertain themselves. From the beginning, violence was a hallmark of the Carr family's plays: "Our dramas were bloody and brutal," Carr writes. "Everyone suffered: the least you could hope to get away with was a torturing" (*Plays One* ix). Carr's childhood theatre-making provided a foundation for her playwriting; she draws from children's knowledge "that morality is a human invention" and their "sense of justice" to get at "the scuts' [kids'] view of things as they are or were or should be" (Ibid. ix-x). Her professional career began when she wrote *Ullaloo* for Dublin's Abbey Theatre while a student at University College Dublin. The play's 1991 premiere made Carr "the first living woman playwright to have a play performed on the main stage of the Abbey" (Upton 76). After graduating from university, Carr spent a year teaching in New York before returning to University College Dublin to pursue a master's degree. The subject of her graduate studies, Samuel Beckett, profoundly influenced her early plays.

Carr's first several plays can be divided into two groups: her early, Beckett-esque works and her Midlands tragedies. There are four Beckett-influenced plays: *Low in the Dark* (1989), *The Deer's Surrender* (1990), *Ullaloo* (1991), and *This Love Thing* (1991). Carol-Anne Upton writes that these plays "may fairly be summarized as a creative exploration of Beckett's dramatic techniques from a female perspective" (76). *Low in the Dark* details the relationships between a mother and daughter, Bender and Binder, and two men, Baxter and Bone, who become pregnant during the piece. It presents "an absurdist exploration of gender constructs, irrespective of biological sex" (Upton 76). In her study of Carr's early plays, Siobhan O'Gorman notes that *The Deer's Surrender*, which remains

unpublished, relies on several chorus members and archetypal figures of Woman, Man, and God to “subvert and expose the interconnections of traditional gender constructs, patriarchal representation and religious ritual” (502). *Ullaloo* stages the stagnant relationship between long-term couple Tilly and Tomred, through which Carr “reveals the oppressive nature of compulsory, life-long heterosexual monogamy maintained by gendered traditions and the institution of marriage” (O’Gorman 495). *This Love Thing*, also unpublished, uses caricatures of biblical figures to “expose the artifice of artistic and religious representations of women and to reveal the historical construction of woman as a product of patriarchy” (O’Gorman 501). Upton’s and O’Gorman’s assessments illustrate how Carr’s early work demonstrates the playwright’s investment in challenging systems that oppress women.

After writing her first four plays, Carr shifted her dramatic style away from Beckettian absurdism and toward a stronger sense of narrative and place. Known as the Midlands tragedies, Carr’s next five plays—*The Mai* (1994), *Portia Coughlan*, *By the Bog of Cats...*, *On Raftery’s Hill*, and *Ariel*—set myth-inspired tales of family conflict against the wild, rural landscape of the Irish Midlands. *The Mai* examines four generations of women; in doing so, Jody Allen Randolph writes, the play “invokes and renegotiates images of women from the national tradition” (48). *Portia Coughlan* dramatizes its titular character’s disconnection from her family and eventual suicide as a result of her incestuous relationship with her deceased twin brother’s ghost. *By the Bog of Cats...* adapts Euripides’ *Medea* to tell the story of Hester Swane, a Traveler woman displaced from her family’s longtime home by her lover’s marriage to another, younger woman. *On Raftery’s Hill* explores the incest and abuse patriarch Red Raftery inflicts upon the women in his family. And *Ariel*, taking cues from Euripides’ *Iphigenia at Aulis* and Aeschylus’ *Oresteia*, stages the familial destruction and revenge that occur in the wake of its titular character’s murder

by her own father. The Midlands tragedies thus indicate two major developments in Carr's career: her increasing representation of violence and her incorporation of classical mythology. Randolph notes that "Carr's appropriation of classical forms and themes locates her in a theatrical tradition of Irish writers who, from the late 1960s onward, found in the classics ways of dealing with the Troubles" (49). Yet her Midlands tragedies also "use myth to confront national violence on a domestic register rather than a sectarian one" (Randolph 50). Moreover, setting these plays in the present-day Irish Midlands allows Carr to address social issues related to the Celtic Tiger, Ireland's decade-long economic boom that began in the mid-1990s. Carr's use of violence and myth in these plays thus reveals her developing investments in reimagining classical source material to critique contemporary injustices, further aligning her with Wertenbaker and Kane.

Since writing the Midlands tragedies, Carr has broadened her plays' geographical and topical scopes while maintaining her interest in domestic relationships and power dynamics. In *Woman and Scarecrow*, the dying Woman reflects on her life alongside her mysterious and incisive interlocutor, Scarecrow, who may also be a manifestation of Woman's subconscious. *The Cordelia Dream* (2008) adapts *King Lear* to a contemporary father and daughter's competition for the same inheritance. *Marble* (2009) addresses issues of fantasy and infidelity among two wealthy couples. *Phaedra Backwards* (2011) marks a resurgence of Carr's mythic influences, restructuring the Phaedra myth to shed new light on its issues of history, memory, and love. Carr's latest play, *Hecuba* (2015), adapts Euripides' tragedy to focus on Hecuba's actions as born from injustice rather than from a desire for revenge (Hutton). These more recent plays eschew the Irish midlands for nondescript locations and nonspecific dialects, but they retain Carr's application of classical influences to explore interpersonal relationships. The Midlands tragedies,

however, provide the most fertile ground for examining how and why Carr represents violence.

This chapter will analyze two of Carr's Midlands tragedies: *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel*. It may seem odd to focus on some of Carr's most Irish work in order to connect her to Wertenbaker and Kane. Yet aside from their use of heavy Midlands dialect and reliance on Irish folklore, the plays prove remarkably similar in aim to those of the other two playwrights. As I mention above, Carr's adaptation of classical material places her alongside Wertenbaker and Kane, two other playwrights who reimagine myth in order to comment upon contemporary power dynamics and the violence they engender. For Carr, as well as for Wertenbaker and Kane, representing violence onstage rather than off holds significant purpose: it forces audiences to confront the consequences of the social systems that normalize and enable such violence, and in so doing, makes more visible those systems themselves. Wertenbaker draws attention to acts of witnessing and spectatorship to advocate for compassionate responses to trauma. Kane crafts experiences of suffering for her audiences, plunging viewers into states of negative affect to foment empathy for victims of emotional and physical violence. Carr, meanwhile, dramatizes the act of haunting in order to illustrate how systems that normalize violence perpetuate themselves and to posit accountability for one's actions as a step toward disrupting those systems.

Ghosts and haunting are central to the representation of violence in both *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel*. In each of these plays, vestiges of past violence—whether emotional or physical—haunt the action of the present and lead to future violence. For Carr, haunting encompasses more than just troubling memories; it involves the persistence of the past into the present to the extent that it significantly affects characters' lives and influences their behaviors. Moreover, haunting in Carr's plays often involves physical manifestations of past violence, including apparitions like Joseph Swane in *By the Bog of Cats...* or presences

like Ariel's disembodied voice. When haunting involves memories, as in Hester's pining for her absent mother and in the looming of Ariel's disappearance over the Fitzgerald family, those memories encompass events so traumatic that they dictate characters' decisions, often to their detriment. Carr's emphasis on haunting underscores her interest in showing how the connection between past and future is often rooted in social systems that enable the originary trauma, whether by marginalizing certain individuals or groups or glorifying certain behaviors. In this chapter, I will read *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel* through theories of haunting in order to demonstrate how representations of violence in these two plays underscore the pervasiveness of toxic social systems and reveal the ultimate futility of using violence to disrupt or escape such systems.

Theoretical Hauntings

The concept of haunting has informed much critical thought, especially in more recent decades characterized by anxiety about the future and the looming influence of history. One major voice on this subject is Jacques Derrida, whose *Specters of Marx* (1993) introduces the concept of "hauntology." An alternative form of ontology, hauntology posits that "it is necessary to introduce haunting into the very construction of a concept. Of every concept, beginning with the concepts of being and time" (202). Hauntology, then, focuses on haunting rather than being (the focus of ontology). For Derrida, who writes in the context of Marxism's influence after the decline of communism, there is no such thing as mere presence or existence; that presence is always haunted by specters. Derrida's work sparked what has become known as the "spectral turn" in scholarship wherein critics have grappled with the implications of haunting, particularly in a materialist sense, as it appears in literature and culture (Luckhurst 527). No singular theoretical definition of haunting exists, but articulations of the phenomenon tend to focus on the irruption of the past into

the present and on making the invisible visible. Maria del Pilar Blanco avers that haunting involves “the disquieting experience of sensing a collision of temporalities or spaces” (1). Avery Gordon regards haunting as “one way in which abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life” (xvi). Haunting “is not the same as being exploited, traumatized, or oppressed,” Gordon writes, “although it usually involves those experiences or is produced by them.” Rather, haunting “is an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely” (xvi). These senses of colliding temporalities and emerging social violences are driving forces in Carr’s plays, which often explore how violent power structures persist across generations.

Discussion of the relationship between haunting and violence thus also proves useful for examining Carr’s work, particularly in the context of how future generations confront the legacy of extreme trauma. Carr often dramatizes intergenerational violence—that is, violence committed by one generation of a family against another. The effects of such violence recall Gabriele Schwab’s idea of “haunting legacies,” or the “things hard to recount or even remember, the results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable” (1). Though acts of past violence are generally very memorable in Carr’s plays—some of them are even represented onstage—they are also the kind of violence that one might deem unspeakable: a mother’s abandonment of her daughter, a father’s murder of his daughter. In dramatizing the effects of such violence on multiple familial generations, Carr explores how unspeakable acts hold an “unrelenting grip” on the memories of those affected by them. In doing so, she reveals how haunting legacies can perpetuate trauma and effectively generate systems that normalize that trauma. Schwab argues that “[v]iolent histories generate psychic deformations passed on from generation to generation across the divide of victims and perpetrators” (3). By staging the

transference and consequences of these so-called psychic deformations, Carr illustrates how systems of intergenerational trauma can complicate distinctions between victims and perpetrators, resulting in further perpetuation of such systems.

Because Carr writes plays, it is also useful to examine how theories of haunting operate in a theatrical context. Central to the discourse of theatre and haunting is Marvin Carlson's *The Haunted Stage*, which interrogates the "ghostly quality" of theatre and performance to articulate theatre's role as a "repository of cultural memory" (3). Carlson coins the term "ghosting" to describe the "process of using the memory of previous encounters to understand and interpret encounters with new and somewhat different but apparently similar phenomena" as it applies to theatre (6). For Carlson, ghosting is distinct from other functions of memory in that it "presents the identical thing [spectators] have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context" (7). Ghosting can thus entail an audience member's memory of previous productions of the same play, the source material of an adaptation, or an actor's previous performances. Carlson's influence has facilitated and shaped scholarly discussion of theatre and ghosts, yet it remains mostly divorced from the materialist and trauma-theory approaches to haunting described above. Sensing this gap, Mary Luckhurst and Emilie Morin point out, "analysts of theatre have paid relatively little attention to the burgeoning discipline of Spectrality Studies and the insights that it yields into wider socio-political agendas" (3). An opportunity therefore exists for greatly expanded analysis of haunting as it applies to theatre. Luckhurst and Morin advocate for "putting spectrality studies and theatre in dialogue" and champion "the illuminating ways in which plays and performance can be newly analysed and understood through a focus on tropes of the ghostly and representations of haunting" (2). This chapter aims to answer Luckhurst and Morin's call, examining Carr's representations of haunting

in order to demonstrate how those representations illuminate the violent social systems—including the dangerous capitalism of the Celtic Tiger—Carr’s characters inhabit.²⁰

Carr’s fascination with ghosts and haunting has infiltrated her work’s reception. As Jennifer Parrott writes, “Marina Carr is in the business of haunting: her characters are haunted by their pasts, she is haunted by the great Western playwrights who came before her, and she haunts her audience with visions of deeply troubled Irish families whose stories do not reflect the triumphant news clips characteristic of a post-Celtic Tiger Ireland” (1). Similarly, Frank McGuinness observes, “Marina Carr is a writer haunted by memories she could not possibly possess, but they seem determined to possess her” (“Masks” 78). Critical discussions of Carr have begun to apply the concept of hauntology to her plays, especially with regard to Carr’s literary influences. As Paula Murphy explains, Derrida’s view that “the future cannot be comprehended without coming to terms with the Other, whether this Other signifies ghosts, death, or both” is particularly relevant for Carr because her writing “is haunted by the ghosts of those who have gone before her,” from the Greeks to Shakespeare to past generations of Irish dramatists (392). Murphy argues that “Carr’s drama could be interpreted in the context of contemporary Ireland as a coming to terms with the Other, the ghosts from our past, and as creating a space in which they can speak to the living” (400). Murphy is speaking of Carr’s writerly influences, but her claim also works within the worlds of Carr’s plays. In both *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel*, characters must consistently come to terms with ghosts from their pasts; the plays’ actions create spaces where those ghosts can and do speak to the living. And what those ghosts say and do becomes crucial for understanding Carr’s message.

²⁰ My approach is not wholly materialist in nature, though Carr’s critique of Celtic Tiger capitalism certainly figures into the analysis. I am more interested in exploring how the environments within which Carr’s characters reside result in traumas that lead to continued harm against characters marginalized by those environments.

My analysis of Carr's work draws upon theories of haunting to illustrate how Carr uses this phenomenon to cultivate a productive mode of spectatorship. In both *By the Bog of Cats...* and *Ariel*, Carr is attuned to the ever-present persistence of the past. She stages the haunting legacies that affect families across generations, resulting in cycles of violence that prove extremely difficult, if not impossible, to disrupt. Such a dramaturgy demonstrates how haunting exposes toxic power structures. By calling so much attention to how the past informs the present, Carr facilitates what I call a hauntological spectatorship: a form of spectating that taps into and activates viewers' memories to better enable them to recognize how social systems influence the course of events, including the perpetuation of cycles of violence. This increased awareness of the pervasiveness of toxic systems enables viewers to feel compassion for the characters so deeply entrenched within them.

By the Bog of Cats...

Though her previous plays *The Mai* and *Portia Coughlan* allude to Greek myth²¹, *By the Bog of Cats...* is Carr's first true adaptation of classical source material. A reimagining of Euripides' *Medea*, *Cats...* revolves around Hester Swane, an Irish Traveler woman whose longtime lover, Carthage Kilbride, has decided to marry a younger, non-Traveler woman, Caroline Cassidy, in order to gain eventual access to Caroline's father Xavier's wealth and land.²² Carthage has also ordered Hester to vacate her home alongside the Bog of Cats, even though the home has belonged to the Swane family for generations, so that he and Caroline may reside there. Moreover, Carthage intends to gain custody of

²¹ *The Mai* draws upon the tale of Electra, while *Portia*, with its incestuous relationship between the title character and her brother, recalls the story of Zeus and Hera.

²² Carthage's name, too, is a form of haunting, as it recalls the *Aeneid*'s tale of Dido, Queen of Carthage, and the Trojan warrior Aeneas, who (at least in Virgil's telling) was romantically entangled with Dido, but eventually left Carthage and his lover behind. Dido, like Hester in *Bog*, is devastated at her lover's departure and ultimately commits suicide.

Josie, his daughter with Hester, permanently separating her from her mother. Displaced and despondent, Hester burns down the family home and, when confronted with the reality of never seeing Josie again, kills both her daughter and herself. Like Wertenbaker and Kane, Carr places these climactic acts of violence onstage; she operates within the tradition of refashioning Greek tragedy that forces audiences to confront the violence the myth describes.

Carr's most famous play, *Bog* has enjoyed a rich production history since its premiere at Dublin's Abbey Theatre in October 1998. It was mounted twice in the United States in 2001, first at the Irish Repertory of Chicago and then at the San Jose Repertory Theatre (Leeney & McMullan, 241-42). The play's London premiere at Wyndham's Theatre in 2004 retained two actors from the San Jose production, Holly Hunter as Esther and Gordon McDonald as Carthage, but was otherwise a separate entity. Despite its tepid critical response—proving the effect ghosting can have, Michael Billington remarked that the play “made infinitely more sense” in its original Dublin production, yet felt “like an exotic transplant” in London (“Bog of Cats”)—the Wyndham's production raised Carr's international profile. Since then, the play has been performed frequently, not only in Ireland, but also in regional and university theatres across the UK and United States.²³

Given its prominence in Carr's canon, *Bog* has generated substantial scholarly discussion. Critics tend to focus on Carr's engagement with literary influences (both Greek and Irish), on issues of gender, and on ideas of place and displacement. Carr herself has sparked conversation surrounding her influences through her lecture entitled “Dealing with the Dead,” in which she grapples with the question, “What is the sacrifice that I must make to be in easy conversation with ghosts and more specifically ghosts of dead writers?” (191).

²³ Notable productions include the Guthrie Theatre's 2009 staging and the Abbey's 2015 revival, among others.

Critics like Richard Russell examine in turn how Carr converses with those ghosts. Russell situates Carr within the Irish literary and dramatic traditions, noting *Bog*'s relationship to the works of writers like William Butler Yeats, John Millington Synge, and Samuel Beckett. Carr's "metaphorical conversation" with these writers, Russell argues, "led her to write a drama suggesting that in contemporary Irish theater, action leading toward death remains the proper focus of the playwright" (166). Melissa Sihra reads Big Josie Swane, Hester's mother, "as an alternative to the romanticised literary Mother Ireland figure" and a "re-imagined" version of Yeats's Cathleen Ni Houlihan (260). Eda Dedebas weds discussion of influence with discussion of gender, contending that "Carr's deconstructing of Greek myths and women's position in a patriarchal society works together with her structuring a new type of tragedy, which allows women to be reborn through the violence that deconstructs the social order" (248-49). In Dedebas' estimation, Hester's ultimate brutality is a form of resistance to that patriarchal society, and shapes "a model of a new woman, who chooses a different and violent way to be taken seriously" (264). Derek Gladwin takes an ecocritical approach, elucidating "how Hester—daughter of the great mother Ireland—mirrors the bog as an abandoned landscape that has been marginalised and traumatised for centuries" (388). And Victor Merriman contends that *Bog* is "primarily a play about travellers, the land, and rural Ireland," where "Hester as traveller is unrelentingly the issue in the dramatic world of the play" (154, 156). These critical perspectives, while certainly not exhaustive, outline some key threads that I aim to interweave as I trace the relationship between haunting and violence in Carr's play.

In the reading that follows, I will consider how Carr engages with these issues of influence, gender, and displacement as she represents violence in *By the Bog of Cats*.... Reading the play through theories of haunting, I will show how Carr establishes haunting not only as a precursor to or reminder of violence, but as a form of violence itself. Beyond

the level of literary influence, haunting persists through two primary vehicles in *Bog*: apparitions and memories. Apparitions—human forms like the Ghost Fancier and Joseph Swane—embody the past’s persistence, give voice to past harms, and signal future violence. Memories, including recollections of dead children like James Cassidy and departed parents like Big Josie Swane, reveal the depth of the bog community’s (and especially Hester’s) pain and function as a form of verbal violence through their regurgitation of past trauma. Together, these apparitions and memories create a sense of inescapability and inevitability from which the play’s most brutal acts of violence, Hester’s infanticide and suicide, ultimately emerge. In highlighting the role of haunting in perpetuating violent cycles, Carr asks her audiences to draw connections between past actions and present outcomes. As a result, she maximizes her spectators’ chances of recognizing systemic problems.

Apparitions

From the play’s beginning, it is clear that not all of its characters are of the physical, human world. Some characters, while appearing human, are of supernatural or paranormal origin; I call these characters apparitions. The two main apparitions in *Bog* are the Ghost Fancier, who appears in the play’s first and final scenes, and Joseph Swane, who appears at the wedding banquet and then again to Hester in the play’s final act.²⁴ Both these apparitions are linked to violence, whether as predictors, perpetrators, or victims of it. In their scenes, these apparitions reinforce the significance of memories and threats of violence as part of a self-perpetuating cycle. Their presences render physical the inevitability of death and the continuing influence of past violent events, making those

²⁴ A third figure, the Catwoman, is not herself of the ghostly realm, but displays unusual and clairvoyant qualities that render her a bridge between the physical and spiritual world. While not an apparition per se, her presence alongside the play’s true apparitions underscores the links between past and present that Carr aims to illuminate.

concepts more tangible for audiences. Apparitions are thus one means by which Carr encourages a hauntological mode of spectatorship.

The play's first apparition, the Ghost Fancier, lends the play its sense of tragic inevitability. As *Bog* opens, Hester Swane walks across the titular setting's "*bleak landscape of ice and snow*," dragging a dead black swan behind her (*Plays* 265). Meanwhile, the Ghost Fancier, "a handsome creature in a dress suit" (261), looks on. Hester is surprised by his presence, having never seen him before. After a brief, elliptical discussion of what a ghost fancier does—"where there's ghosts there's ghost fanciers," he says (265)—the Ghost Fancier's role becomes clear. "I'm ghoulin' for a woman be the name of Hester Swane," he proclaims, only to be surprised to find that his interlocutor is Hester: "You couldn't be, you're alive" (266). The darkly comic moment escalates when the Ghost Fancier realizes that he has mistaken dawn for dusk and is "too previous" in his arrival (266). He excuses himself and exits, leaving Hester confused and shouting, "Come back! – I can't die – I have a daughter" (267). But the damage is done. The Ghost Fancier has foreshadowed Hester's death; from the very first scene the audience learns Hester's fate.

The Ghost Fancier's premature arrival provides a textbook example of Carr's tragic sensibility. But such a twist would not align with Carr's tragic sensibility. "There is no knowing what is going to happen in any play by Marina Carr, except the inevitable," Frank McGuinness writes in his program note to *Bog*'s Abbey premiere ("Writing in Greek" 87), and indeed, the Ghost Fancier's appearance encapsulates McGuinness' sentiment and reveals how Carr both upholds and upends her classical sources. Although, as Bernadette Bourke points out, "the Greek messenger of death [*i.e.*, the character in Greek tragedy who enters with news of a major character's demise] is subverted" in this opening scene, "thus undermining the classical tradition" (129), the Ghost Fancier's appearance nonetheless

signals the inevitability of Hester's death. Hester's liminality—her occupation of the threshold between living and dead—is central to spectators' comprehension of the play. In M.K. Martinovich's estimation, *Bog* turns on the understanding that “even though alive, Hester is liminal” (123); Parrott avers that “the fact that she is the only one who can see and communicate with the Ghost Fancier suggests that she may already be at least partially dead” (128). Hester's liminality colors spectators' reception of the remainder of the play, which becomes haunted by the Ghost Fancier's words. The audience expects Hester to die, and as time progresses and dusk draws nearer, spectators' unease about Hester's impending death has room to grow.

The Ghost Fancier's first encounter with Hester announces haunting as a form of violence. On the literary level, the Ghost Fancier parodies the oracles and soothsayers that populate Greek tragedy. From the moment he appears, the spectator understands his purpose and Hester's fate. Moreover, Hester's mention of her daughter alerts viewers—especially those familiar with *Medea*—that Hester is not the only character who will suffer at the mercy of this tragic paradigm. This form of literary haunting, akin to Carlson's ghosting, traps Hester and Josie in a tragic tradition from which they cannot escape. These hauntings, along with the Ghost Fancier's unintentional prophecy, constitute the play's first act of violence. Though no physical violence occurs, the Ghost Fancier's actions no doubt harm Hester psychologically: she is left wondering what may befall her at dusk and whether she will be separated from her daughter—a particularly unbearable fate given her own mother's absence from her life. The Ghost Fancier's first visit, then, primes viewers to recognize the tragic impact of *Bog*'s classical influences and the ramifications of the Ghost Fancier's actions.

The psychological violence of Hester's liminal state produces physical consequences when the Ghost Fancier returns to claim Hester's life at the end of the play.

After enduring the wedding, burning down the Kilbrides' farm, and killing her own daughter, Hester is more than ready to meet her end. In fact, she wishes the Ghost Fancier had arrived sooner: "You're late, ya came too late," she tells him, holding Josie's body (*Plays* 340). Here, ghosting operates via memories of earlier moments in the play, rendering the final scene especially potent. Carr's audience remembers the Ghost Fancier's first entrance and perhaps cringes knowing that he has once again timed his arrival poorly and that Hester's death is nigh. Hester demands that the Ghost Fancier "take [her] away from here," and the two "*go into a death dance with the fishing knife, which ends plunged into Hester's heart*" (*Plays* 340-41). As Hester dies, she whispers "Mam – Mam –" (*Plays* 341), another moment of intra-play ghosting that recalls Josie's identical dying words and confirms that (as I will discuss below) Hester's mother's absence has haunted her until the end of her life. The Ghost Fancier's involvement in Hester's death and the moments of ghosting his final entrance produces demonstrate the tangible impact of apparitions. Though the others onstage cannot see him, the Ghost Fancier and the hauntings he represents claim Hester's life.²⁵ While he has become "too late" instead of "too previous," the Ghost Fancier's return nonetheless confirms Hester's inability to escape the tradition and predetermined fate that haunts her. Hester was always already haunted, not only by foreknowledge of her own death but by generic convention.

The other apparition in *Bog* is the ghost of Hester's brother, Joseph Swane. Joseph offers an example of Carlson's ghosting, as for knowledgeable spectators, his ghostly presence evokes other famous dramatic ghosts like Hamlet's father and Banquo, connecting Carr to Shakespearean as well as classical theatrical traditions. But beyond

²⁵ Of course, the stage directions leave room for interpretation as far as who lands the fatal blow, but the dance between the Ghost Fancier and Hester signals both characters' active participation in Hester's death.

these allusions, Joseph's ghost also conveys both the finality of death and the unending nature of trauma. He first appears in the play's second act, during Carthage and Caroline's wedding banquet, wearing a "*bloodstained shirt and trousers*" and bearing "*a throat wound*" (*Plays* 299). He has mistakenly come to the Bog of Cats while looking for Bergit's Island, where he once lived. His arrival works in his favor, however, as he encounters the Catwoman, who can communicate with ghosts and informs Joseph that his sister is nearby. Though Joseph's yearning "to be alive again," to "rest, ate a steak, meet a girl" must go unfulfilled (*Plays* 300), he nonetheless will have the chance to communicate with Hester, as the Catwoman offers to escort him to Hester's home. During their conversation, the Catwoman squashes Joseph's hopes of participating in activities reserved for the living, matter-of-factly stating that he'll "never do them things again" (*Plays* 300). This proclamation disappoints Joseph, who finds the afterlife miserable: "It's fierce hard to knock the best out of nothin', fierce hard to enjoy darkness the whole time" (301). Joseph's circumstances reveal how haunting affects the haunter as well as the haunted. Death is a void in which Joseph remains conscious, searching for a way to reconnect with humans. Like Hester, he is trapped in a liminal state, unable to cross into the world of the fully dead or the fully living. That state prolongs both his trauma and that of the living people he contacts—especially Hester, who we later learn is responsible for his death. As long as Joseph remains embodied in some way, frozen in the mutilated state in which he died, neither he nor his killer can move past their trauma.

When Joseph finally does reach Hester, his confrontation with her reinforces the depth of the trauma haunting the Swane family, and Hester in particular. As he watches the morose Hester, who has just set the Kilbride farm on fire, he sings the song from which the play's title derives. Joseph's singing is doubly traumatic for Hester, as she expected neither to encounter her brother's ghost nor hear him sing the song that her "mother made up for"

her (317). Hester and Joseph's conversation reveals that she murdered him, just as Medea murdered her brother Absyrtus. In Hester's case, she killed Joseph because she could not comprehend why her mother would leave her, raise a son elsewhere, and never return: "Should've been with her for always and would have only for you" (321). Hester is so deeply wounded by her mother's abandonment that she blames Joseph as well despite his lack of responsibility.

Joseph's encounter with Hester is a touchstone for how haunting operates in Carr's play. As an apparition embodied in the physical presence of an actor, Joseph makes the usually-invisible effects of haunting visible to Carr's audience. Carr further emphasizes notions of invisibility by rendering the characters unable to see each other. The audience therefore both sees the effect of haunting (via Joseph's embodiment onstage) and understands its insidious nature (via Hester's inability to see Joseph's ghost). Moreover, Hester's reactions to Joseph's statements make clear the lasting damage of Big Josie's departure. When Joseph insists that he "didn't know" that his mother composed the song for Hester, his sister accuses him of lying (318); when Joseph says Big Josie "never spoke to [him] about" Hester, Hester bristles at him for "talkin' as if I never existed" (320). The feelings that Joseph's ghost dredges up within Hester recall Gordon's assertion that "the ghost is the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place" (8). Joseph's return is evidence that Hester is still profoundly haunted by her mother's absence. Hester's violence against Joseph has not resolved her grief; instead, it has perpetuated a destructive cycle, trapping both Joseph and Hester in a purgatorial existence. When Hester laments, "I been thinkin' I'm already a ghost" (321), she indicates how the haunted can become the haunter. In other words, the past's grip on Hester is so strong that she resigns herself to further destruction.

Apparitions like the Ghost Fancier and Joseph Swane promote hauntological spectatorship through their physical presences' effects. The Ghost Fancier reveals Hester's future and ushers her into it, while Joseph resurrects her past. Together, their appearances unite disparate temporalities before spectators' eyes, demonstrating the connection between them. Moreover, they literally embody these temporalities: Carr enlists actors to represent these apparitions, rather than using projections, offstage voices, or any other illusory means. Gordon writes that "the ghost is a living force" that "may reside elsewhere in an otherworldly domain," yet "it is never intrinsically Other....There is no question that when a ghost haunts, that haunting is real" (179). Using actors to portray apparitions underscores the realness of that haunting. Even though neither the Ghost Fancier nor Joseph Swane exist in the play's mortal world, their presences have tangible impacts upon Hester and vice versa. By representing these apparitions with actors' bodies, Carr makes those tangible effects as clear as possible for her audience.

Memories

If the use of apparitions in *Bog* augments the physical impact of haunting, the prevalence of memories underscores its psychological impact. Memories of departed lovers and relatives permeate the play and influence its characters' behavior—especially Hester's. When these memories surface, they do so within a context of rejection, abandonment, or displacement, and their recollection involves a considerable amount of emotional trauma. Moreover, these memories are linked to physical violence, whether through description of a past act of violence or portension of a future one. The gruesome deaths of Joseph Swane and James Cassidy supply some of these memories, as do Hester's previous relationship with Carthage and, in particular, Hester's abandonment by her own mother. Each of these memories involves some form of repudiation—in most cases,

Hester's repudiation. Memories in *Bog* thus haunt by reminding their rememberers, namely Hester, of their rejection.

This link between haunting and rejection connects directly to Hester's status as a marginalized figure. Since Hester is the play's protagonist, the audience encounters the action from her point of view; the memories that surface are therefore hers. Hester's marginalization stems from her Traveller heritage: she belongs to a historically subjugated ethnic group "considered outsiders by sedentary members of the Irish community" (Parrott 119). Indeed, Travellers are an Irish variant of the nomadic people often derogatorily called "gypsies," and only earned official recognition as an ethnic group in 2017 despite a long history of self-identifying as an ethnicity (Kennedy and White). Hester's Traveller identity thus marks her as an outsider in a community of settled townspeople, most of whom look down upon her for her difference. Hester's otherness amplifies the repudiation in Carthage's decision to marry Caroline: not only is Carthage choosing wealth amid a political climate that venerates it, but he is also choosing a non-Traveller bride over a Traveller woman. Moreover, the Swane family's persecution spans generations, as Xavier reminds Hester that he "ran [her] mother out of here" and will do the same to her (*Plays* 328). Hester's memories haunt her so intensely because they remind her of her otherness. Moreover, the alignment between the audience's and Hester's perspectives primes spectators to recognize the toxic effects of these memories and of the community to which Hester belongs. "Instead of detachedly observing the excentric [sic] figure from within," Sihra notes, "the audience, through its engagement with Hester also becomes marginalised from the so-called 'settled community' in the play" (262). By witnessing Hester's experience of traumatic memories, spectators come to understand Hester's marginalization and the haunting it causes as an apparatus of psychological violence, one which leaves Hester feeling perpetually "discarded" and leads her to extreme retaliation.

Untimely deaths, particularly of children and siblings, constitute one form of memoric haunting. As detailed above, Joseph Swane makes a physical appearance, but recollections of his death also illustrate the repercussions of Hester's marginalization. When Hester and Carthage clash in the final act, she accuses him of being "ashamed of [his] part in [Joseph's] death"; the audience learns that Carthage was present when Hester cut Joseph's throat and helped her dispose of the body (*Plays* 333). The memory of Joseph's death dredges up not one, but two rejections of Hester: first, Carthage's, and second, Big Josie's. Hester believes Carthage's shame at being an accomplice underlies his orders for her to leave the bog, while her recollection of the murder betrays a motive rooted in Big Josie's departure: "I looked across the lake to me father's house and it went through me like a spear that she had a whole other life there – How could she have and I a part of her?" (333). Rejection thus drives Hester's murder of Joseph, and the memory of that murder colors Hester's interpretation of present events. By highlighting how Joseph's death is enmeshed in a web of other hauntings, Carr makes visible how Hester's displacement carries violent consequences. To a reasonable audience member, Hester's behavior seems irrational and extreme: no amount of abandonment or subjugation justifies murdering one's brother. Yet Hester's violence against Joseph reveals her deep pain and warns of grave consequences for societies that stigmatize non-mainstream identities. Carr implies that Big Josie's departure stems in part from the desire to live a "normal" family life, a desire that wounds the individualistic, outwardly proud Traveller Hester deeply. This emotional violence against Hester in turn leads to Hester's physically violent behavior.

The death of Xavier Cassidy's son James also reveals the violent repercussions of rejection. Hester mentions James's death while confronting Xavier prior to the wedding. When Xavier admonishes her to "keep a civil tongue...over things ya know nothin' about," Hester responds that her knowledge explains "why ya want me out of here" (293). This

confrontation establishes James as an absent presence that haunts the Cassidy family; it also reveals how Hester's knowledge of taboo subjects hangs over the Cassidys and influences Xavier's desire to banish her. Hester later announces the cause of James's death—she found the boy “strychnined to the eyeballs, howlin’ ‘long the bog and his dog in his arms”—and insinuates that Xavier poisoned James because “he wasn’t tough enough” (*Plays* 329). For Hester, James's death springs from his outsider status in his own family, much like her banishment from the bog stems from her marginalized position. Hester speaks up about James's death in a moment of affinity between outcasts. Her articulation of such a memory illustrates the cost of repression and dismissal. Though Xavier wants to forget James, Hester will not let him. Xavier's abusive response to Hester's outspokenness reveals the discrimination at the heart of his complaints. He chides Hester for trying to “outwit [him] with [her] tinker ways” and uses his gun to peer down her dress in an effort to see “the leftovers of Carthage Kilbride” (330). Maria Doyle writes that Hester displays “the clearest insight into the troubling nature of Xavier's character” (“Slouching” 502), but beyond that, her insight reveals the systemic underpinnings that make his character so troubling. By testifying to James's memory, Hester unearths the xenophobia and sexism of a wealthy, settled Irishman. When Hester demands that Xavier and family remember how James died, she encourages Carr's audience to bear witness to the boy's marginalization—and, through Xavier's response, to her own.

Beyond memories of the dead, memories of dead relationships also reinforce the extent of Hester's marginalization. For one, Hester and Carthage's defunct union hangs over Carthage's new relationship with Caroline and haunts Hester as a constant reminder of her displacement. The audience in turn comes to understand the systemic injustice of Hester's othering through memories of her relationship with Carthage. Hester blasts other bog residents for thinking that “Hester Swane wither her tinker blood is gettin’ no more

than she deserves” and for at one time gossiping that she had “taken a step above herself in gettin’ Carthage Kilbride into her bed” (*Plays* 268-69). Hester’s memories illustrate the impact of pervasive anti-Traveller prejudice: Hester has constantly been viewed as an outsider, so her memories of the relationship are also memories of discrimination. For Hester, then, remembering her time with Carthage necessarily involves inflicting emotional violence upon herself. Not only must she remember how he left her for a more socially desirable relationship; she must also remember why she was marked as socially undesirable.

Hester’s memories of her relationship with Carthage haunt her so strongly that she refuses to accept the relationship’s end. “Carthage Kilbride is mine for always or until I say he is no longer mine,” she proclaims (269). Even though Carthage has already chosen to abandon Hester for Caroline, Hester cannot let him go, citing the “things about me and Carthage no wan knows except the two of us” as reasoning for her staunch denial (269). Hester’s inability to move on stems in part from the fact that Carthage at one point accepted Hester’s Traveler ethnicity enough to have a relationship with her. Hester cannot reconcile the Carthage who once pursued her with the Carthage who rejected her in favor of a more financially and socially desirable match. When she presses Carthage for his reasoning, Hester asks whether her older age factored into his decision, but Carthage responds that Hester “know[s] right well it isn’t that” (288). His comment implies that the ethnic and economic discrepancies between himself and Hester, and between Hester and Caroline, accounted for his decision. The more Hester is reminded of her past with Carthage, and the more she is reminded of her status as Other, the more she resists the current state of affairs, which ultimately leads to grave harm. The defunct Hester-Carthage relationship thus demonstrates how memory can serve as a form of psychological violence, the haunting

effects of which can affect a person's choices so intensely as to drive them to physical violence.

The most profound of all of *Bog's* hauntings, however, is Hester's memory of being abandoned by her own mother. Big Josie Swane left the Bog of Cats when Hester was seven years old and never came back; Hester has awaited her return ever since. Hester's abandonment has such a strong impact on *Bog's* action that Sihra considers Big Josie "the protagonist of the play" (258). And indeed, Josie's departure has so strongly shaped Hester's worldview that it effectively is responsible for the play's events. "There's a longin' in me for her that won't quell the whole time," Hester tells the Catwoman (*Plays* 275). That longing keeps Hester firmly planted on the Bog of Cats; she refuses to leave because she is still waiting for her mother to come back, no matter how many years have passed since Big Josie left. As Hester avows, "I watched her walk away from me across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return" (*Plays* 297). If Hester recognizes the unlikelihood of ever seeing her mother again, she gives no outward indication of it. Sihra notes that Hester "has never gained a sufficient substitute for the loss of her mother" and therefore "has failed to become a fully subjectified individual" (257). Josie's departure, then, can be regarded as an act of violence against Hester's identity, one which magnifies Hester's sense of displacement to such an extent that it drives her to behave violently, even toward her own daughter.

Even before the audience learns the full story, Big Josie's presence haunts the stage. She emerges physically through the body of Hester's daughter, who shares her grandmother's name and in her first appearance sings a song spectators later learn, via Hester's conversation with Joseph, that Big Josie wrote. Though the audience does not know it yet, the song's lyrics provide insight into Big Josie's thoughts:

By the Bog of Cats I dreamed a dream of wooing.

I heard your clear voice to me a-calling.
That I must go though it be my undoing.
By the Bog of Cats I'll stay no more a-rueing –
...
To the Bog of Cats I one day will return,
In mortal form or in ghostly form,
And I will find you there and there with you sojourn,
Forever by the Bog of Cats, my darling one. (*Plays* 270)

From early in the play, then, Carr's audience hears the reasoning behind Big Josie's departure and the promise of her return. That young Josie sings these lyrics proves especially haunting for Hester, as not only does Josie bear the same name as Hester's mother, but also has "her eyes" and wears the same outfit—a Communion dress—that Hester wore the night Big Josie disappeared (*Plays* 296-97). Hester must therefore wrestle with the pain of her abandonment while also confronting memories of that abandonment via her own daughter—not only through Josie's appearance but also through Carthage's decision to keep Josie with him until Hester leaves the bog. Caught between two generations of departing Josies, Hester longs to disrupt the cycle of abandonment that plagues her existence.

Yet the specter of Big Josie looms so large that Hester ultimately perpetuates and escalates her mother's toxic legacy. When Josie comes to tell her mother that she will accompany Carthage and Caroline on their honeymoon, Hester rebukes her on account of past abandonments: "Another that had your name walked away from me. Your perfect Daddy walked away from me. And you'll walk from me too. All me life people have walked away without a word of explanation" (*Plays* 326). Hester's panic over Josie's imminent departure prompts her to fabricate a threat wherein she claims that "a sourt of

curse” will result in Josie’s demise if the child leaves (326-27). When the frightened Josie reassures Hester that she prefers living with her mother, Hester apologizes and reveals that the curse does not exist (327). Though Josie ultimately forgives Hester’s behavior, Hester’s fear of abandonment has nonetheless caused her to inflict psychological violence upon her own child. Unfortunately, that psychological violence soon turns physical, as Hester unintentionally presages Josie’s fate. When Josie approaches Hester to say goodbye before the honeymoon, she interrupts Hester on the verge of suicide. Hester tells Josie that this goodbye will be permanent because she is “goin’ away too” to a place where “once ya go there ya can never come back” (338). Struggling to understand, Josie insists that Hester take her along to keep her from pining: “Mam, I’d be watchin’ for ya all the time ‘long the Bog of Cats. I’d be hopin’ and waitin’ and prayin’ for ya to return” (338). Disturbed to hear her own daughter articulate the same fate that has befallen her, Hester tries to push Josie away, but the girl protests so strongly that Hester relents. “I won’t have ya as I was, waitin’ a lifetime for somewan to return,” she tells Josie before instructing the child to close her eyes and “*cut[ting] Josie’s throat in one savage movement*” (339).

By killing Josie, Hester disrupts the cycle of abandonment that plagues her family. Yet her act of infanticide also perpetuates the violent social structures that engender her oppression. As Traveler women, Big Josie and Hester occupy the margins of the bog’s social world; indeed, Big Josie’s departure stems from her outsider status on the bog and her desire to pursue a more traditional family structure elsewhere. Big Josie’s sense of non-belonging in turn compounds Hester’s marginalization, rendering her an orphan as well as a Traveler. Hester has thus struggled for most of her life against multiple social disadvantages that prompt most other residents of the bog to regard her askance. In killing Josie, she commits what Parrott deems “an act of mercy,” halting “the cycle of abuse, neglect, loneliness, exile, and misery that she knows will follow Josie throughout

adulthood” (110). Yet she also telegraphs the disheartening notion that there is no place at all for a young woman like Josie in the world of the bog. Young Josie has the chance to “grow up big and lovely and full of advantages” Hester could not provide (338), but the price of those advantages is the same perpetual longing for her mother that Hester experiences. Ultimately, the implications of Big Josie’s departure haunt the action so profoundly that they foreclose any potential future for successive generations of marginalized women. In escaping the bog’s toxic environment, Big Josie imprisoned Hester within it. In killing young Josie, Hester makes visible the violent consequences of that imprisonment and reinforces the dominant social system’s hostility toward marginalized people.

The memories that influence *Bog*’s action are crucial for understanding how Carr encourages a hauntological spectatorship. Deceased or departed individuals like James Cassidy and especially Big Josie Swane are themselves characters in the play, their presences driving its action despite their never appearing onstage. Their absent presences, and Hester’s engagement with them, alert viewers to the effects of discrimination and marginalization upon the play’s characters and events. As such, spectators realize the depth of injustice, tracing back to the persecution and displacement of Travelers, that ultimately leads to the play’s bloody outcome. In the context of hauntological spectatorship, Hester’s defiance and violence become acts of resistance—albeit ultimately futile ones—rather than irrational gestures of denial. Moreover, Carr’s staging of a modern Irish *Medea*, and the ghosting that entails, communicates how cycles of oppression and abuse have persisted across centuries and continents. Hester’s anger and violence, her unthinkable acts of fratricide and infanticide, spring not purely from her rejection by Carthage, but from ongoing Irish marginalization of Travellers and patriarchal demeaning of women. Moreover, ghosting and haunting function as a lure to keep Carr’s audiences engaged;

ghosts and ghost stories, with their paranormal thrill, instill both excitement and fear in their consumers. That emotional combination heightens spectators' senses, not unlike the anxiety audiences might feel during Kane's work, potentially increasing their sensitivity to the action before them. That sensitivity in turn enables spectators to draw multiple connections between the past and present in *Bog*. Carr haunts her audiences, not just with the ghosts onstage, but with the ghosts of classical tragedy, in order to demonstrate the ancient roots of contemporary issues. By placing violence onstage alongside these ghosts, Carr communicates the urgency of confronting both toxic social environments and the haunting legacies that (re)produce them. Carr continues to encourage this way of seeing in her subsequent Midlands tragedies, the last of which, *Ariel*, stages multiple temporalities in its efforts to emphasize the gravity of haunting.

Ariel

Carr's final Midlands tragedy, *Ariel* revolves around a decade in the life of the Fitzgerald family and the litany of family secrets that plague them. Like *Bog*, *Ariel* bases its plot on a Euripidean tragedy, in this case *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Just as Agamemnon offers up his daughter Iphigenia as a sacrifice to placate Artemis in Carr's source material, so does family patriarch and cement magnate Fermoy Fitzgerald kill his daughter, the titular Ariel, in what he regards as a blood sacrifice designed to secure his victory in a county election and subsequent entry into Irish national politics. The play does not solely adapt one tragedy, however; *Ariel* also draws from Aeschylus' *Oresteia* trilogy and Euripides' *Electra*. The play also contains multiple Shakespearean valences, naming its title character after the spirit in *The Tempest* (and assigning her similar premonitory characteristics) and channeling *Hamlet* in its strategic use of a skull late in the play. Whereas *Bog* takes place in a single day, *Ariel*'s actions spans a decade. The play's first act takes place on the night

leading up to Ariel's murder, which also happens to be the night of her sixteenth birthday. The second act begins ten years later; since Ariel's death, Fermoy has become a successful government minister and rumored future frontrunner for Taoiseach (Irish prime minister). Ariel has become a tragic footnote in Fermoy's story: the public believes she disappeared on the night of her sixteenth birthday and never returned. Ten years of grief and deception have taken their toll on the Fitzgeralds. Fermoy's wife Frances, her relationship with her husband strained from its inception, mourns both Ariel and her deceased son from her previous marriage, while the remaining Fitzgerald children, Elaine and Stephen, resent living in the shadow of Ariel's death. These tensions ultimately reach breaking points that drive the play's second and third acts to bloody conclusions wherein Frances kills Fermoy and Elaine kills Frances. Like *Bog*, *Ariel* places its climactic violence onstage, but it also escalates that violence to melodramatic heights. The bloodbaths that close Acts 2 and 3 recall the gory climax of Kane's *Phaedra's Love*, and indeed, *Ariel* also fuses Jacobean revenge tragedy with Greek storylines in a similar manner. The latter play thus places Carr squarely in conversation with other women playwrights refashioning previous eras' tragic forms to address contemporary issues.

Ariel's melodrama and thematic grandiosity earned its 2002 Abbey premiere a mixed critical response. Many critics considered the play thematically overstuffed and its characters unsympathetic. Marianne McDonald found it an "awkward procrustean creation that lumbers after Euripides and Aeschylus and Sophocles and others" and lacks the "fresh believability of [Carr's] earlier work" ("Light Angel"). Fintan O'Toole observed that Carr's attempt "to fuse an immediate vision of political crisis with a large sweep of religious and Biblical images," and to do so across ten years, proves "quite simply too much for one play" (90). Michael Billington offered a more charitable view, arguing that while "[n]o one could call this a perfect play," *Ariel* nonetheless "confirms Carr's status as

a writer who, in an age of ironic detachment, believes in the enduring possibility of tragedy.” On the basis of such reviews, the play was a commercial disappointment, playing to mostly-empty houses despite anchoring the Dublin theatre festival season (McDonald, “Fatal Commission” 140). This lukewarm reception, coupled with the play’s vast scope, has given *Ariel* a lower profile within Carr’s oeuvre. The play has yet to receive a major production since its premiere fourteen years ago and lacks *Bog*’s venerable reputation. To be sure, *Ariel*’s thematic density renders it a difficult play to stage, but its epic scope and skillful interweaving of the classical and the contemporary establish it as a considerable dramatic achievement nonetheless.

Despite its scant production history, *Ariel* has generated a fair amount of scholarly conversation, as its robust contents tackle interpersonal, political, and mythic issues. Leeney regards *Ariel* as “the apotheosis of elements manifested in earlier plays” and as the last in a trilogy of works, along with *Bog* and *On Raftery’s Hill*, that interrogate 21st-century “anxieties that rise through our love/hate relationship with planet Earth” and reveal “how the human family has its feet in the filth and its head in the stars” (“Violence and Destruction” 510). Randolph notes that the play “reads like a national allegory,” especially given that it was drafted in the thick of the Celtic Tiger (49). Maria Doyle also reads the play within an Irish cultural context, articulating how *Ariel* builds upon the associations between nation and patriarchy established in *Raftery’s Hill*: “the community that is reluctant to see a corruption that is actually hidden in plain view is not a distant rural world but a broader spectrum of Irish society” (511). Dedebas focuses on the play’s gender- and myth-related aspects, considering *Ariel* alongside *Bog* and *Woman and Scarecrow* to explore how “Carr’s deconstructing of Greek myths and women’s position in a patriarchal society works together with her structuring a new type of tragedy, which allows women to be reborn through the violence that disrupts the social order” (248-49). Kelly A. Marsh

further explores Carr's contributions to the field of tragedy, drawing upon Emily Wilson's concept of "tragic overliving"—i.e., the consciousness of living too long—to examine how "the characters in *Ariel* respond to the conviction that they have overlived not only in their decisions about their own lives but also in their decisions about their children's lives" (133). The many thematic threads contained in *Ariel* thus render the play ripe for examination of the multifaceted connections linking nationhood, patriarchy, familial conflict, and the tragic paradigm.

Analyzing *Ariel* in the context of haunting offers another means of parsing the play's diverse thematic threads. As in *Bog*, ghosts and hauntings figure prominently in *Ariel* and provide insight into how cycles of violence and injustice traverse generations on both personal and political levels. Yet whereas *Bog*'s action unfolds in the course of 24 hours, *Ariel*'s action disrupts Aristotelian unity with a ten-year gap between the first and second acts. This temporal disjunction allows Carr to explore more fully the effects of haunting across multiple generations; the play effectively "ghosts" itself as characters (and their memories) return to the stage ten years later. *Bog*'s apparitions and memories allow Carr's audience to grasp how the past as a whole affects the present; *Ariel*'s multiple temporalities build upon that awareness to illuminate the effects of both the *distant* and *recent* pasts. Haunting in *Ariel* thus operates on two levels: the effect of the distant past becomes clear via memories articulated during the play, and the effect of the recent past becomes visible through pivotal events (and their aftereffects) that unfold onstage. In what follows, I will examine how this multilayered haunting draws connections between distant and recent acts of violence to reveal the depth of characters' entrenchment within a violent social order. Moreover, I will demonstrate how *Ariel*'s two-pronged haunting complicates the notion of inevitability that Carr puts forth in *Bog* by illuminating characters' willing participation in cycles of violence.

The Distant Past

Events of the distant past maintain a strong presence throughout *Ariel*. Over the course of the play, information surfaces about previous happenings that continue to affect characters' behavior. Hauntings of the distant past emerge through two primary avenues: memories that haunt Fermoy and memories that haunt Frances. As the play unfolds, spectators learn that the seven-year-old Fermoy witnessed his father murder his mother and that Frances was once married to another man and had a now-deceased son with him. These memories haunt Frances and Fermoy by making them reflect on the choices that precipitated and/or followed the events in question. That questioning in turn leads characters—and, ultimately, Carr's audience—to contemplate the motivations underlying such choices, including fatalistic thinking that neglects personal decision-making.

The first distant memory to surface is that of Fermoy's mother's murder. The details of the murder are revealed slowly over the course of the first act. The night of Ariel's birthday, Fermoy and his brother Boniface, a recovering alcoholic priest, converse about God. Boniface takes a traditionally Catholic view, while Fermoy's vision describes a god "on fire for us, heaven rellin wud his rage at not bein among us, the eternity of eternity hauntin him" (*Ariel* 16). As McDonald notes, Fermoy's god "resembles Shiva (or Kali) more than even the God of the Old Testament" ("Light Angel"). Boniface interprets Fermoy's intensity as a form of "talkin abouh Ma," which Fermoy denies because she died "thirty-five year ago" (16). The audience also learns that she died in a dramatic fashion, as Fermoy remarks that "[s]he was never the suurt was goin to die in her bed" (16). Though the exact circumstances of her death remain unclear, the brothers' conversation nonetheless signals a family tragedy that spurs regret—at least on the part of Boniface, who wishes he had returned from the novitiate to care for his brother. Later that night, thanks to the Fitzgeralds' younger daughter Elaine, Carr's audience learns that Fermoy's mother is "ah

the bohhom of Cuura Lake where me grandaddy puh her, in a bag wud a boulder, nowan ever found her” (*Ariel* 23). Elaine’s description of the grandmother’s horrific death at her own husband’s hands reveals a family history of violence against women—a history proliferated when Fermoy kills Ariel to fulfill his purported blood sacrifice. Moreover, Elaine’s remark betrays the family’s somewhat callous treatment of the murder. Elaine is parroting words her great aunt Sarah has previously uttered because she “[l]ove[s] the sound” of them (23-24). For Elaine, the murder is a rhythmic sound bite rather than an occasion for mourning or remembrance; she is more concerned with provoking her great aunt than with the family history itself, as evidenced by her further revelation that Sarah was “warmin me grandaddy’s bed” when the murder occurred (24). By treating her grandmother’s memory as a party piece rather than a portent, Elaine demonstrates how familial violence has become normalized via Fitzgerald family lore.

What the family party line leaves out, however, is that Fermoy was an accomplice. Boniface eventually tells Frances that the boys’ father “med [Fermoy] hould Ma down” during the murder and remarks that “somethin like that is bound to take uds toll on a person’s view a the world” (26). Fermoy’s involvement haunts both the Fitzgerald family as a whole and Fermoy himself. Not only is the murder a black mark on the family’s history, it also affects Fermoy’s memory and behavior. As Fermoy’s political rival Hannafin remarks, “You were forged in a bloodbah, Fitzgerald, and the son allas carries the father somewhere inside of him” (33). Hannafin wants to unsettle Fermoy prior to the county election—“Everywan knows you were there,” he chides as explanation that Fermoy won’t win (32)—but he also opens a memoric portal for Carr’s audience. Hannafin’s comment about sons and fathers alludes to the biblical adage that God “visit[s] the iniquity of fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation” (Numbers 14:18 KJV). It also conjures, in an apt act of literary ghosting, Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts*, in which the young

Oswald Alving, infected with syphilis inherited from his philandering father, exclaims that “the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children” (74). For those familiar with Ibsen’s play or the Bible, Hannafin’s remark strongly hints that Fermoy’s unsavory past will result in future catastrophe. Carr’s audience can therefore expect that Fermoy, haunted by his role in the murder, will carry on in his father’s bloody tradition, and another woman in his family will perish as a result. Like the Ghost Fancier in *Bog*, Fermoy’s mother’s murder serves as a harbinger of future events; the sense of inevitability that *Bog*’s opening scene engendered emerges again through the violent memory that haunts the first act.

Frances’ distant memories augment the play’s atmosphere of inevitability by driving her to a fatalistic mindset. Once married to another man, Charlie, with whom she had a son, James, Frances had an affair with Fermoy and eventually left Charlie for him; then, while Frances and Fermoy were on their honeymoon, James died in a sporting accident. Tormented by memories of her prior family, Frances incessantly compares her present to her past, interpreting any current misfortune as punishment for her adultery and negligence. She also wears a locket containing James’s and Charlie’s pictures around her neck, an act of commemoration that troubles Fermoy so much that he “yanks [the] locket from her neck” and replaces the photo of Charlie with one of himself (28). Frances’ locket-wearing, while commemorative, also betrays the obsession with her past that leads her to assert that she truly “loved” James and Charlie, while Fermoy merely “threw the dust in [her] eyes” (25). In Frances’ estimation, Fermoy seduced her into a state of clouded judgment that drew her away from her family. Her resentment incenses Fermoy, an already aggressive and possessive man; it also downplays her choice to leave her previous family. Frances paints her current circumstances as a punishment she cannot escape. She clings so strongly to her love for James and Charlie that she develops somewhat of a victim mentality regarding her relationship with Fermoy.

Frances' haunted attitude also affects her relationships with her remaining children. When Elaine treats her mother rudely, Frances muses, "Times I think she's me penance for James" (24). When Aunt Sarah encourages Frances to stop "torturin [her]self" about the boy's death, Frances laments that "no wan in this house [will] let [her] talk about James" (24). Frances also incessantly compares Stephen to James, murmuring to him while he sleeps, "ya don't have hees black curls, you've Fermoy's hair. James had the moust beauhiful, beauhiful head a black curls" (25). Frances thus sees Stephen as a poor substitute for James, even breastfeeding him until the age of ten to assuage her grief and guilt. Marsh reads Frances' breastfeeding as an example of Frances' "preoccupation with the repetition in her experience," or her fear that "life is nothing but repetition without end" (134); in other words, she fears that if she weans Stephen, she will lose him as well. Frances' fear and obsession with James prove hurtful to Stephen, however. The psychological impact of Frances' breastfeeding emerges in the adult Stephen's film about a grown man suckling at his mother's breast and in his accusation that Frances spent "[t]en year pretendin [he] was James" (68). When Stephen finally confronts Frances about her behavior, it is clear that her memories have inflicted psychological violence upon him: "I used pray to die so you'd be given back James, I loved ya thah much. When strangers'd ask me my name, I'd say, James, me name is James, I'm James of the blue black curls" (68). Frances' insurmountable grief wounds Stephen psychologically and stunts him developmentally. Frances' haunting by James' memory thus becomes destructive for future generations of her own family.

Ultimately, Carr deploys these memories of the distant past to illuminate the dangers of allowing past events to determine future actions. Because of their pasts, Frances and Fermoy cling to two types of fatalism—she believes her situation is punishment for prior events, while he regards events and outcomes as "strokes a destiny" divorced from choice and free will (31). Neither character displays the desire or capability to take

responsibility for their behavior. Frances expresses a modicum of regret, berating herself as “a glazed fool” who “flung open the duurs for the plunder” when Fermoy pursued her (59), but she nonetheless places the majority of blame for her current circumstances on Fermoy. Fermoy, for his part, connects his worldview to the peculiar divinity he worships: “the soul is wan age and mine just stood and watched,” he tells Ariel about his mother’s murder, shortly before luring her to her own death (36). Fermoy has rationalized his past behavior as connected to some divine knowledge or plan, and that rationalization drives his future choices, as he believes he must commit a blood sacrifice to appease his god and gain the power he was supposedly “puh on this earth for” (19). By letting the distant past preoccupy their memories, Frances and Fermoy reveal how haunting can interfere with one’s ability to take responsibility for one’s actions. Frances sees herself as a victim, while Fermoy sees himself as a conduit. Neither character considers the possibility that they could break the destructive cycle they inhabit. Carr implies that, by allowing the distant past to trail them so closely, individuals like Frances and Fermoy perpetuate harmful cycles and inflict preventable violence on undeserving future generations.

The Recent Past

If Carr dredges up the distant past in *Ariel* to demonstrate how entrenched memories can engender toxic mindsets that lead to violence, she stages the recent past in order to make physical the results of those toxic mindsets. This physicalization relies on the temporal disjunctions between *Ariel*’s acts: Act 2 takes place ten years after Act 1, and Act 3 takes place two months after Act 2. These time skips allow Carr’s audience to comprehend the lasting effects of the previous act’s events—events they have seen happen onstage—upon subsequent action and to grasp the relationship between those events and the distant past. Moreover, they enable physical remnants of those events to return to the

stage in acts of intra-play ghosting. The principal haunting from the recent past, as the play's title indicates, is Ariel's murder, which occurs just after Act 1 ends; not only does Ariel's death affect her surviving family members in different ways, but it also becomes a prominent presence in the play's remaining acts via a ghostly phone call in Act 2 and her exhumed corpse in Act 3. All other hauntings resulting from events that unfold during the course of the play—including Frances' constant grief and self-victimization, Fermoy's ghost's appearance after Frances murders him, and Elaine's and Stephen's trauma in the wake of so much familial violence—trace their roots to Ariel's murder. Ariel (or her memory) thus becomes the play's pivotal haunting, the bridge between past and present from which Carr forges the foundation for a hauntological spectatorship. The memory of the living Ariel ghosts the dead Ariel's corpse, reminding Carr's audience of the lively young woman whose life was cut short by a power-hungry father. In what follows, I will more closely examine how the specter of Ariel's murder, and the hauntings connected to it, renders visible and tangible the consequences of a thinking devoid of accountability, updating ancient tragic questions for a contemporary socially-conscious world.

Though Ariel is primarily involved in the play through her spectral presence after her death, her living presence in the first act enriches spectators' understanding of the dangerous world she inhabits. On the night of her sixteenth birthday, Ariel remarks to her mother, "I never thought I'd make me sixteenth birthday. I've this thing about a girl in a graveyard, don't know where it cem from...I tap ud ouh on the pilla, puts me to slape like a lullaby" (30). Ariel's premonition, delivered through the eerily rhythmic phrase "girl in a graveyard," is especially unsettling in the wake of Fermoy's earlier conversation with Boniface about a blood sacrifice and Ariel's imminent departure for a drive in her new car. Ariel's remark places her alongside Hester as a woman aware of her own death. In it, she conveys awareness that she exists within a system that renders her life precarious. When,

at the very end of the act, Fermoy “*studies*” Ariel before asking her to “take [him] for a spin in [her] new chariot” (36), Carr’s audience realizes that Ariel’s premonition will soon come true. Ariel’s final line that she will “puh ouh the ligh so” and its resonance with Othello’s line prior to murdering Desdemona—“put out the light, and then put out the light” (5.2.7)—as well as the choice of “*Mors et Vita*’ music” at the act drop (37), reinforce this knowledge. As a young woman in a family headed by a delusional patriarch, Ariel becomes another victim in a scheme where men use violence against women their satisfy their desire for power. Born into a family with an already violent history, she never stood a chance.

Witnessing Ariel alive gives Carr’s audience a frame of reference for the memories that haunt the Fitzgeralds throughout the rest of the play. Carlson writes of instances where memories of certain actors’ performances or specific productions’ qualities affect audiences’ receptions of a work (96-97); for Carr’s audience, their memory of the actress portraying Ariel and her performance informs their reception of the play’s latter acts. Having seen the events immediately preceding Ariel’s death, spectators can weigh what they saw in the first act against what characters do or say in the subsequent two acts. For instance, in the television interview that begins Act 2, Fermoy claims that Ariel “walked ouha this house on her sixteenth birthday to show a friend her new car that we’d goh her as a present. She never cem home” (45). The audience already knows, having seen Act 1, that Fermoy is lying, and any suspicions about his responsibility for her disappearance are confirmed when he states that he “know[s] she is” dead—“Don’t ask how I know, buh I know and wish I didn’t and wish ud was otherwise” (45). The dramatic irony here proves unsettling enough, but Carr foments the unease by further demonstrating the role Ariel plays for one half of the Fitzgerald family. Elaine, who has become an advisor to her father, encourages Fermoy to play up his supposed grief: “Ariel’s your trump card. Play ud...Don’t be afraid to give em Ariel” (45). Elaine’s advice reveals how Ariel’s memory has become

a prop through which Fermoy curries favor with the electorate. The purported blood sacrifice Fermoy made when he killed Ariel thus continues to serve him well—or so he believes—while Ariel was denied the chance to experience life beyond adolescence. Having encountered the living Ariel, and thus carrying memories of the character, Carr’s audience more thoroughly absorbs the absurdity and reprehensibility of a line of thought that venerates power enough to justify the murder of a living, breathing human—the power-seeker’s daughter, no less—in the name of political success. In other words, the spectator can vividly picture the young woman who became collateral damage, and that spectatorial act of remembering amplifies Carr’s critique of the system that enabled Ariel’s death.

Ariel’s living presence in Act 1 also enlivens her posthumous appearances in Acts 2 and 3. In one such appearance, which occurs just before the memorial mass on the tenth anniversary of Ariel’s death, answers his phone to discover that his dead daughter is on the other end. Carr’s stage directions instruct that, “*once convention of the phone has been established, let Ariel’s voice come from everywhere. Fermoy does not talk into the phone after the first couple of exchanges*” (55). This staging reinforces Ariel’s spirit’s pervasiveness in both Fermoy’s and the audience’s experiences. Ariel’s memory is not just a voice piping through a phone on one day of Fermoy’s life; it is an ubiquitous presence that haunts the Fitzgerald family constantly. Moreover, the irruption of Ariel’s voice into the second act renders tangible the victim’s experience. “Come and get me, will ya?”, Ariel implores Fermoy. “Ud’s awful here, ud’s awful. There’s a huge pike after me, he lives in the belfry, two rows a teeth on him and teeth on his tongue, bendin back to hees throah. He won’t rest till he has me” (56). Ariel communicates the suffocating nature of her final resting place, as well as the constant threat of violence the pike poses. “If Fermoy imagined death would be a relief from life,” Marsh points out, “Ariel’s ghost teaches him otherwise”

(136). Though Ariel's body remains unconscious, her voice reinforces the precarious position the young woman held during her lifetime. Hearing her words, spectators sense not only the gruesome conditions under which her life ended but also the terror she must have felt in her final moments. The ghostly Ariel's "*terrible weeping*" and pleas of "I just want to go home," coupled with Fermoy's reaction to "*stand there, utterly still, looking out*" after her voice fades (56), in turn reinforce the impact of Fermoy's murderous actions upon his own psyche. Marsh argues that Ariel's "voice suggests that what Fermoy believed was fate was only repetition" of the previous generation's violence (136). Indeed, Ariel forces Fermoy to focus on the physical conditions surrounding her body, which lies in the same place Fermoy's mother's does, rather than on his justification for killing her. Ariel's ghost thus brings the consequences of Fermoy's actions, including the extension of a violent family history, into plain view. In doing so, Ariel's voice foments audience compassion for Ariel and provokes reflection from Fermoy.

The effects of Ariel's haunting culminate in the play's most violent onstage acts, the killings of Fermoy and Frances, which throw the problematic nature of those characters' deterministic mentalities into sharp relief. Frances confronts Fermoy about Ariel's death, having never previously voiced her suspicion even though Fermoy "thought [she] knew for years" that he was the killer (56). Fermoy ascribes responsibility for Ariel's death to divine forces, claiming that the child "was a drame hopped upon us from start to end" and that "she was never really ours" (56). Fermoy and Frances' confrontation makes clear Fermoy's lack of accountability for his actions and the dire consequences that spring from such a lack. Not only do Fermoy's beliefs result in Ariel's demise; they also bring about his own death. "Blem God, blem the world, anywan bar yourself," Frances rages. "You laid my daughter on an altar for power. You've flourished these ten years since Ariel. You've flourished on her white throat" (58). Frances' condemnations reinforce the

absurdity of Fermoy's belief in a divine mandate for the murder, conjure further images of Ariel's harrowing final moments, and emphasize the carelessness with which Fermoy treated his own daughter's life. This confrontation also erupts into the play's most violent onstage moment thus far: Frances stabs Fermoy repeatedly while asking where Ariel is. Carr renders Fermoy's death very melodramatically; multiple stabs and a struggle ensue before Frances "*gets on top of*" the fallen Fermoy and badgers him until he reveals that Ariel's body is in Cuura Lake. The scene's violent confirms the intensity of Frances' grief. By killing Fermoy and prying Ariel's body's location from him, Frances disrupts the process of haunting that has plagued her for ten years; she enacts revenge upon Ariel's murderer and learns where her daughter is "buried." Yet Frances also perpetuates and intensifies that haunting, as she extends the Fitzgeralds' tradition of killing each other and precipitates both the exhumation of Ariel's corpse and the appearance of Fermoy's ghost.

As the final act barrels toward Frances' death, both Ariel and Fermoy return in physical form to haunt the action. Ariel's recovered body rests in a casket that "*lies center stage*" (61); Carr thus literally centers Ariel amid the action. Though the audience never sees the full corpse, Ariel's siblings' comment on its decomposition: "Thought she'd be better preserved," Stephen remarks, while Elaine notes that "Forensics scraped her down" after the body was recovered (61). Their attention to the body's physical state, while natural given morbid curiosity, also reinforces how Ariel's death has eroded the Fitzgerald family over time. Ariel's body's decay recalls not only the physical violence committed against her but also the psychological violence her disappearance and recovery have inflicted upon the family. Moreover, the distant and recent pasts merge in the revelation that search efforts in Cuura Lake also dredged up the remains of Fermoy's mother and of a pike matching the description Ariel's voice provided earlier. That the rescue efforts turned up the pike's skeleton grants further credence to Ariel's experience and reiterates the constant threat

under which Ariel lived. The prevalence of physical remains in the final act thus ushers the play's hauntings into the tangible realm, using the centrality of Ariel's body to foreground that tangibility.

The other tangible return of the recent past at play's end is the appearance of Fermoy's ghost. In a moment of solitude, Elaine stands at the coffin and, in a nod to *Hamlet*, "[t]akes out skull of Ariel, with a few strands of hair attached to it" (72). Fermoy's ghost appears and watches her, but he does not recognize Elaine or remember Ariel despite finding his surroundings somewhat familiar. Fermoy states that he is "tryin to find this place" that involves "a cuurtyard, yella, or the ligh in ud is yella. There's some girl there I have to meeh" (73-74). He is describing an earlier dream of his in which, he believes, he encountered Ariel and borrowed her from God, but his ghost does not comprehend what he seeks. Fermoy's ghost is still chasing the deterministic vision that consumed him during his lifetime and eventually led to Ariel's and his own demise. Even after death, Fermoy ascribes his actions to forces beyond his control. His ghost's appearance also perpetuates the parental obsession with Ariel that plagues the living Fitzgerald children. In Elaine's estimation, Fermoy's ghost walks in because Frances has disturbed his grave to bury Ariel; the fact that he is also preoccupied with Ariel in this scene signals to Elaine that both her parents have prioritized Ariel over her. Fermoy's ghost is thus yet another reminder that Ariel's legacy drives the family's behavior to the exclusion of the other children's wishes.

Ultimately, the play's conclusion weaves together distant and recent past hauntings to convey the psychological violence of favoring deceased children over the living and of eschewing accountability for past actions. The effects of this violence become acute when Stephen leaves his family and Elaine stabs Frances to death in the play's final moments. When Frances reiterates that she killed Fermoy on Ariel's behalf, Stephen lambasts

Frances'

obsession:

Ya did ud for Ariel. For James. There was only ever two chambers in your heart, Ma, two dusty chambers, me and Elaine tryin to force our way in. Our playground was a graveyard, Ma, we ran among your tombstones like they were swings, we played hop, skip and jump on the bones a your children, your real children, while we whined for ya like ghosts. (68)

Stephen's ghoulish language indicates how the deaths of James and Ariel permeate every part of his and Elaine's lives, to the point where the living siblings feel "like ghosts" rather than fully realized humans. Yet Frances doubles down on her victim status rather than admitting responsibility for Stephen's and Elaine's trauma; after she unsuccessfully begs Stephen not to leave, she laments, "I rue the day I ever seh eyes on the Fitzgeralds" (69).

This victim mentality contributes to Frances' demise, as Elaine kills her after Frances credits Elaine's existence to nefarious forces. "Some zebra stallion grafted you onta me," Frances claims. "I wanted a son to make up for James. And I goh you." (74). As Elaine prepares to kill her mother, she declares, "Ya say ya prayed for a son to make up for James. Well, I am James. I'm James returned. And I'm me father that ya butchered to hees eyeballs. And I'm Ariel. And I'm Elaine wud your death on me palm, carved into my plain a Mars like stone" (74-75). Elaine then "[s]tabs Frances in the throat" and stands by as her mother flails and bleeds to death before the final blackout (75). Elaine's proclamation unites distant and recent hauntings as motivations for killing her own mother. Violence begets violence; in this case, yet again, psychological violence begets physical violence. Yet just because Frances drives Elaine to violence befitting a Jacobean revenge tragedy does not mean that Elaine's actions are justified, nor do they constitute effective resistance against the hauntings that dominate the Fitzgeralds' world. Elaine disrupts Frances' self-victimization and puts an end to the physical form of the person whose behavior tormented her, yet she does so through the play's bloodiest act. Moreover, she does so in the name of

her father, whose troubling behavior and troubled history have contributed extensively to the trauma experienced by other members of the Fitzgerald family. Elaine's murder of Frances thus perpetuates Fermoy's toxic legacy even as it upends the psychological turmoil Elaine experiences thanks to Frances' veneration of Ariel.

As physical reminders of a violent past, Ariel's body and voice and Fermoy's ghost announce that the dead do not stay buried, especially if they meet gruesome and premature ends. Fermoy's thirst for power—a force amplified by the wealth-obsessed Celtic Tiger climate—and Frances' obsessive grief converge to rouse the patriarch from his grave, leading Elaine to murder her mother. The nature of Fermoy's and Frances' deaths also highlights the extent of the toxicity running through the family. As Parrott points out, their demises “are presented as the result of fate rather than as willful acts,” especially since “they do not have the option of taking their own lives—their lives are taken from them” (179). Giving the recent past physical form is one way Carr presents the deaths as fated events. The continued corporeal presences of Ariel and Fermoy prompt Frances and Elaine to seek revenge for those who haunt them. In their embodiment onstage, the deceased Ariel and Fermoy bring the family's violent history to life, making it harder for Frances and Elaine to break the cycle. Ultimately, the recent past hauntings in *Ariel* retraumatize the characters who encounter them, and that retraumatization interferes with those characters' ability to choose a path that leads away from destruction. The play gives no indication that, now that revenge has been enacted, the next generation of Fitzgeralds will confront or attempt to heal their trauma. Stephen has estranged himself, while Elaine shows no signs of unpacking the toxic thinking she has inherited from her father.

Accountability over Inevitability

Like Kane and Wertenbaker before her, Carr is invested in cultivating both a new kind of spectatorship and a new kind of tragedy via her representations of violence. Wertenbaker's emphasis on generating awareness of witnessing posits that awareness as a politically efficacious act of resistance, while Kane's affective focus produces an experience of suffering for viewers that generates empathy via an anti-cathartic form of tragedy. Both Wertenbaker and Kane use representations of violence to create a contemporary form of tragedy that privileges compassionate responses to trauma. Carr proceeds in the same vein, dramatizing hauntings to demonstrate how long histories of toxic thinking and behavior lead to cycles of violence that seem inevitable, but are actually the product of social systems that marginalize those marked as Other and that glorify wealth and power. Overall, Carr connects haunting and violence to reveal how a lack of accountability for actions that cause harm can result in destruction.

Carr's reworking of tragedy turns on her engagement with the notion of fate or determinism that underlies much classical drama. Dedebas considers Carr's form of tragedy "both conservative and innovative" because it "uses the storyline and some of the concepts such as destiny, fate and necessity drawn from Greek tragedies" while also placing "extreme violence and destruction on stage" (249). Moreover, Dedebas writes, Carr "bring[s] together the deterministic universe in the Greek world and a similar sense of helplessness in contemporary Ireland" (256). This sense of helplessness emerges in Hester's grief over Big Josie's departure and her eviction from the Bog of Cats, in Fermoy's belief that God requires him to sacrifice Ariel to gain political power, and in Frances' lamentations over losing her previous family. In both *Bog* and *Ariel*, characters blame forces beyond their control for that which befalls them or regard the violence they commit as the inevitable results of past harms. Yet beyond merely *using* the concept of tragic

destiny, Carr challenges her characters' impulses to ascribe tragic outcomes entirely to uncontrollable forces. The hauntings she stages in both plays encourage audiences to see the systems that undergird the characters' deterministic thinking.

The concept of determinism emerges differently in each play. In *Bog*, it appears through the Ghost Fancier's premature arrival and through the death of Black Wing, the swan whose lifespan Big Josie said would match Hester's. These events render Hester's death a certainty from the play's first scene. Yet the play's progression reveals that Hester's confidence in her own demise is not simply traceable to supernatural forces like the Ghost Fancier or Big Josie's curse-like proclamation; it is also the result of her marginalization by a society that values wealth and bloodline over common humanity. As other hauntings emerge, including Hester's memories of her relationship with Carthage, her murder of her brother, and her mother's departure, Carr's audience comes to realize that Hester's actions spring from a long history of uncharitable treatment on account of her otherness. Hester's final acts of violence, then, fly in the face of the marginalization that haunts her. Her oppression has determined her outcome, but she exerts some semblance of control over when and how that outcome arrives. In *Ariel*, the characters' determinism is more problematic in that it becomes a method of excusing their harmful behavior. Fermoy attributes his violence to a divine mandate, while Frances attributes hers to Fermoy's influence that lured her away from the family she truly loved. The play's marginalized figure, Ariel, perishes early, but returns to haunt the action so that Carr's audience may grasp her continued influence. While her marginalization differs from Hester's—she is not a Traveller, nor is she regarded by her community as an outsider—Ariel is also discarded in favor of increased power. Her death prompts Fermoy and Frances to fatalistic thinking that ultimately results in their demises. When Frances and Elaine resort to violence, they retaliate against the determinism that has caused them pain.

Carr's staging of violence, then, makes clearer the forces against which her characters lash out. Moreover, in rendering those forces visible through haunting, Carr shapes a contemporary form of tragedy that advocates the potential of human choice. Though the protagonists of *Bog* and *Ariel* react to their circumstances in different ways, their final acts of violence are ultimately choices they make, no matter the supposed inevitability of the bloodshed. By dramatizing the hauntings that led to such bloodshed, however, Carr implies that earlier recognition of the harmful systems that underpin destructive choices—for instance, the prejudice that motivates Carthage's rejection of Hester, or the desire for power that motivates Fermoy's murder of Ariel—might have altered the plays' dire outcomes. Gordon argues that haunting "is distinctive for producing a something-to-be-done" (xvi); in Carr's estimation, that something-to-be-done involves cultivating accountability for one's actions. And that accountability requires recognition of and compassion for another's lived experience.

Ultimately, Carr's contribution to contemporary tragedy involves her ability to locate the nexus of that tragedy in the social systems that discount or dehumanize certain individuals for others' gain. In the Irish Midlands of the Celtic Tiger, the pressure to obtain wealth and power drives masculine, patriarchal figures to reject or even eliminate certain women in the name of that wealth and power. Moreover, the histories of subjugation and violence (whether psychological or physical) in those women's pasts—including in generations prior to their birth—become clear through Carr's staging of haunting, rendering those women's vulnerability particularly visible to Carr's audiences. Carr therefore frames the violence that closes *Bog* and *Ariel* as the effect of decisions made in service of a dominant social system that eschews compassion for the individuals who do not align with conventions or share its priorities. If those privileged by the system could recognize their ability to choose compassion for those subjugated by it, Carr suggests, then

the supposedly inevitable tragic outcomes we see onstage might not have been “inevitable” at all.

Epilogue

I am writing these words four days after Donald Trump was declared President-Elect of the United States. Shock, devastation, and panic have consumed my friends and family. Not a single person I know, myself included, expected him to win. “How could someone campaign so openly on a platform of hate and *still* be elected?”, we ask. It is a frightening question, not least because it betrays blindness to that hate’s presence in this country since well before Trump’s election. America is a country of smoldering rage, where the bulk of citizens—especially citizens of color—face daily disempowerment or live in fear of it. When a candidate like Trump rises to prominence, his supporters feel empowered to blame their purported strife on any combination of imagined Others. When he bucks nearly every prediction to win the country’s highest office, his opponents blame his election on nearly every constituency they can name.

Why am I writing about Trump in this dissertation? Because what the blame game before and after the election tells me is that we have an empathy problem. The refusal to validate others’ lived experiences runs deep on both sides of the political spectrum. Some might ascribe this deficiency to 21st century media distribution and consumption practices that limit or eliminate individuals’ exposure to opposing views. Others would argue that it springs from the widening gap between Democratic and Republican parties. Beneath all of these arguments, however, is the implication that people are struggling to place themselves in one another’s shoes, and that they need to get better at doing so if any progress is to be made. And that’s where the arguments fall short.

If any progress is to be made, we need to correct our fundamental misunderstanding of what empathy is. Here is what so many misunderstand: it is unequivocally impossible to walk in another’s shoes. It is impossible to truly “feel with” another person, at least in

the sense of feeling exactly what another human is feeling. It is even impossible to *imagine* exactly what another human is feeling. Walking in someone else's shoes is a fiction, and the sooner we stop talking about empathy in such terms, the better. Empathy, as I've tried to show throughout this dissertation, turns on difference. It is about the utter inability to close the gaps between our persons.

So how do we get from theatre, and the theatre in this dissertation in particular, to a revised understanding of empathy? I am not fully sure. It is hard to believe, at this excruciating moment in history, that the work I've done within these pages has answered that question. It is hard to believe, at this excruciating moment in history, that art can change anyone's mind. And it is especially hard to believe, at this excruciating moment in history, that preaching to a choir of scholars is anywhere near as valuable as having difficult conversations with people who might disagree. But as someone who has long turned to theatre for sustenance, I still believe that theatre is uniquely able to shape the way we look at the world. And so I must press on.

More than any other art form, theatre confronts us with difference. When we go to the theatre, we are surrounded by more forms of difference than we are at the cinema, or at the art museum, or at the symphony. The principal reason for this proliferation of difference is the relationship between theatre's representational nature and its reliance on physical presence. In other words, bodies on stage are both actors and characters, and bodies in the audience sit next to other bodies. A spectator therefore recognizes at least four types of difference: between actor and character, between character and character, between performer and spectator, and between spectator and spectator. And she does so in a space where events unfold before her in real time, in the flesh. Theatre thus presents the ultimate opportunity for her to recognize her fundamental alterity, and the alterity of those around her.

Now add violence to the equation. A spectator watches a character commit violence against another character. Depending on the type of violence, she may see stage blood, bodily contortion, emotional turbulence, or any other simulation of physical or psychological pain. She knows the violence she witnesses is simulated, but she chooses to watch and react anyway. She does not question whether the character is in pain because—assuming a convincing actor portrayal—she sees signifiers of pain written on the body before her. She feels discomfort emanating not only from the stage but also from the spectators beside her. She is a willing participant in a difficult experience that is simultaneously fictional and real. Violence onstage intensifies the duality of that experience. It incites a physical reaction despite the spectator's recognition of the difference between actor and character. It creates a culture of belief. That is where its potential for generating empathy lies.

The playwrights in this dissertation all represent violence in ways that facilitate a culture of belief among spectators. Wertenbaker explores what it means to witness violence in a society that sanctions that violent behavior. Kane explores what it means to experience violence in a world that has become numb to suffering. And Carr explores what happens when violence is allowed to haunt communities for generations. When spectators watch these women's plays, they accept the plays' violence as true because they have seen (and in some cases felt) it themselves. The modes of spectatorship Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr create encourage theatregoers to validate victims' lived experiences, even if those victims are fictional characters. The medium of theatre enables audiences to accept the premises of a constructed situation. The witnessing, suffering, and haunting Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr dramatize shine light on how those premises came into being. In doing so, they radically unsettle (to borrow Grehan's term again) spectators, demonstrating that, however uncomfortable or disorienting the experience of spectating, it is but a fraction of the trauma

visited upon characters who inhabit the worlds onstage. In the context of that radical unsettling, the difference between character and spectator experience drives home the intensity of the victim's (character's) trauma, enabling the spectator to—if we return to Batson's formulations of empathy—feel distress at and respond compassionately to another's suffering.

In her study of theatre and violence, Lucy Nevitt writes, “it seems to me that theatre's responsibility is to help deny violence the status of ‘normal’ and ‘human’” (74). This dissertation argues that facilitating spectator empathy is a crucial element of that denial. If theatre can jostle spectators from their expectations of comfort, and can do so by representing both violence and its systemic origins, then it can establish empathy as a means of fighting violence's normalization. The process of realizing, whether intellectually or experientially, that a character suffers because of social circumstances that render her vulnerable to violence, and that human choice plays a role in dismantling those circumstances, creates space for that empathy. The theatre Wertenbaker, Kane, and Carr create is difficult to watch. It may not appeal to the widest range of spectators. But those spectators it does reach will hopefully emerge from their challenging viewing experiences with a greater understanding of how violence comes into being, and how an empathy rooted in difference can mitigate its proliferation. That understanding is, in its own quiet way, a potent instrument of resistance.

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