

**HAUNTED STAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR  
TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DRAMA**

**Tuğba AYGAN**

**Ph.D. Thesis**

**English Language and Literature  
Asst. Prof. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ**

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**ATATURK UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE DEPARTMENT**

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**SOSYAL BİLİMLER ENSTİTÜSÜ MÜDÜRLÜĞÜNE**

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## CONTENTS

<b>CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>I</b>
<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>i</b>
<b>ÖZET.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>ABBREVIATIONS .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>PREFACE.....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>TEŞEKKÜR .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>

## CHAPTER ONE

### TRAUMA: HISTORY, THEORY AND LITERATURE

<b>1.1. EARLY TRAUMA STUDIES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
1.1.1. Traumatic Neuroses and PTSD .....	15
<b>1.2. TRAUMA AND THEORY.....</b>	<b>20</b>
1.2.1. Belatedness .....	30
1.2.2. Acting Out and Working Through .....	32
1.2.3. Self and Social Attachment and other Responses to Trauma.....	36
<b>1.3. SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA .....</b>	<b>41</b>

## CHAPTER TWO

### TRAUMA, WAR AND THEATRE

<b>2.1. TRAUMA AND THEATRE.....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>2.2. WITNESSING TRAUMA AND VERBATIM THEATRE.....</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>2.3. STAGING WAR .....</b>	<b>64</b>

## CHAPTER THREE

### DISTURBING REMAINS ON STAGE

<b>3.1. A NARRATIVE OF TRAUMATIC HAUNTING AND THE IMPENDING LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST: HAROLD PINTER'S <i>ASHES TO ASHES</i> ...</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>3.2. THE TRAUMA OF WAR COMES HOME: SIMON STEPHENS' <i>MOTORTOWN</i> .....</b>	<b>92</b>

<b>3.3. SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN STAGING THEIR TRAUMA: OWEN SHEERS' <i>THE TWO WORLDS OF CHARLIE F.</i> .....</b>	<b>112</b>
<b>3.4. DISRUPTING TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL BORDERS OF WAR AND TRAUMA: ZINNIE HARRIS' <i>MIDWINTER</i> .....</b>	<b>136</b>
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>159</b>
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY .....</b>	<b>164</b>
<b>CURRICULUM VITAE.....</b>	<b>178</b>

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Ph.D. THESIS**

## **HAUNTED STAGES: REPRESENTATIONS OF WAR TRAUMA IN CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH DRAMA**

**Tuğba AYGAN**

**Advisor: Asst. Prof. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ**

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**Jury: Asst. Prof. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ**

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**Prof. Mehmet TAKKAÇ**

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**Prof. Arda ARIKAN**

Trauma has started to figure prominently on the British stage as a response to wars and catastrophic events in the last three decades. Taking this upsurge of interest in war and trauma on British stage as a point of departure, this thesis study examines four contemporary plays, in which war trauma ensues, in the light of modern trauma theories. The central concern of the study is to raise questions about the issues between trauma experience and its representation as well as the function of theatre in the face of excessive events.

The study consists of three main chapters, introduction and a conclusion. First chapter gives a genealogy of trauma including early and modern studies, and literary representations of traumatic events. Second chapter discusses the interrelation between trauma, war and theatre. Third chapter probes four contemporary British plays as examples of war trauma. Through these plays, destructive effects of war on people, the role of theatre in voicing these traumatic experiences and theatre's therapeutic function in overcoming trauma have been affirmed.

**Keywords:** Trauma, War, Contemporary British Theatre, War Plays, Trauma Theory.

## **ÖZET**

### **DOKTORA TEZİ**

## **ÇAĞDAŞ İNGİLİZ TİYATROSUNDA SAVAŞ TRAVMASI**

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Son yıllarda dünyayı derinden sarsan savaşlar ve felaketlere koşut olarak travma İngiliz tiyatrosunda sıkça yer almaya başlamıştır. Bu tez çalışması İngiliz sahnesinde bu tür konularının hızlı artışından hareketle savaş travmasını konu alan dört çağdaş oyunu modern travma teorileri ışığında incelemektedir. Çalışmanın ana hedefi travma deneyimi ve bu deneyimin yansıtılmasındaki problemleri ele almak ve tiyatronun travmatik olaylar karşısındaki rolünü tartışmaktır.

Çalışma üç ana bölüm, giriş ve sonuç kısımlarından oluşmaktadır. İlk bölümde travma ile ilgili ilk çalışmalar ve modern travma teorileri hakkında genel bilgiler verilmiştir. İkinci bölümde savaş, travma ve tiyatro arasındaki yakın ilişki tartışılmış, son bölümde ise dört oyun savaş travması örnekleri olarak incelenmiştir. Oyunlar aracılığıyla savaşların yıkıcı etkilerinin yanı sıra travmanın dile getirilmesinde ve travma ile başa çıkmada tiyatronun etkili rolü doğrulanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Travma, Savaş, Çağdaş İngiliz Tiyatrosu, Savaş Oyunları, Travma Teorisi.



## **ABBREVIATIONS**

APA : American Psychiatric Association

DSM : The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders

PTSD : Post-traumatic Stress Disorder

WIS : Wounded Injured and Sick

## **PREFACE**

In today's world, unfortunately, war and terror incidents occupy headlines every day, correspondingly, we are exposed to traumatic incidents through perpetual circulation of upsetting news and graphic images. This way, trauma has become an inseparable part of our society infiltrating our everyday consciousness and claiming a great deal of public attention with unremitting media coverages of the pains suffered by the victims of rape, political terror and massive catastrophes such as wars and terrorist attacks. Given the upsurge of interest in trauma studies due to the climate of the time, it is not surprising to witness corresponding interest in literature depicting the impact of war both on the returning soldiers attempting to integrate into society and the civilians. From this viewpoint, as its title also suggests, the present thesis is fundamentally concerned with the interrelation between the dynamics of trauma and war in contemporary British plays.

This study could not be completed without the insights, criticisms and encouragement of many individuals. Firstly, I am deeply grateful to my advisor Asst. Prof. Yeliz BİBER VANGÖLÜ for her kind guidance, endless patience and continuous support during this process. I also wish to express sincere appreciation to my dissertation committee members Prof. Mukadder ERKAN, Prof. İbrahim YEREBAKAN, Prof. Arda ARIKAN, and Prof. Mehmet TAKKAÇ for offering thorough and valuable comments and questions which incited me to widen my perspective, and inspired further research.

My sincere thanks go to my colleagues and friends Research Assistants Gonca KARACA, Cansu GÜR and Esma SEÇEN who were always there for me whenever I needed them. Furthermore, I would also like to thank staff of the English Language and Literature Department for offering me collegial support.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to extend a special note of gratitude to my parents Fatma and Fikret AYGAN, my sisters Bilge and Kübra who are the chief begetters of this study. Their kind words and trust, as always, served me well.

**Erzurum, 2018**

**Tuğba AYGAN**

## **TEŐEKKÖR**

Bu tez alıőması Atatürk Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araőtırma Projeleri Koordinasyon Birimi tarafından 2015/420 No'lu lisansüstü tez projesi kapsamında desteklenmiştir. Ayrıca TUBİTAK 2214/A Doktora Sırası Araőtırma bursu desteęi ile Leeds Üniversitesi'nde altı ay süreyle tez araőtırması gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Desteklerinden dolayı TUBİTAK'a ve Atatürk Üniversitesi Bilimsel Araőtırma Projeleri Koordinasyon Birimi'ne teşekkürü bor bilirim.

**Erzurum, 2018**

**Tuęba AYGAN**

I rather believe with Faulkner, “The past is never dead, it’s not even past,” and this for the simple reason that the world we live in at any moment *is* the world of the past; it consists of the monuments and the relics of what has been done by men for better or worse; its facts are always what has *become* ... In other words, it is quite true that the past *haunts* us; it is the past’s function to haunt us who are present and wish to live in the world as it really is, that is, has *become* what it is now.

Hannah Arendt, “Home to Roost” (1975)

## INTRODUCTION

What secret trauma in the mind of the creator had  
been converted to the symptoms of pain everywhere  
around us?

D. M. Thomas, *The White Hotel*

When I first embarked on the writing process of my thesis, I decided to explore war representations on the contemporary British stage as the main focus of my study. Then I have seen that theatre, like literary history, from its beginning, has abounded in a plethora of war narratives dealing with various aspects and results of war. With numerous depictions of war, ranging from those celebrating sacrifice and courage to anti-war propaganda criticising it, the stage has always provided a fruitful arena to re-enact warfare. For me what sparked the idea of exploring trauma, however, was a photograph of an Iraqi soldier taken during the First Gulf War that I came across while carrying out research on war for my PhD thesis. The image was inexpressibly disturbing and equally unbelievable. The soldier was completely burnt but still attempting to pull himself up over the dashboard of his vehicle which was engulfed by flames. His body was incinerated and turned into a blackened pile of bones. Although he has no sign of a real body, it is quite clear that “he was fighting to save his life till the very end”<sup>1</sup> as Kenneth Jarecke, the photographer, asserts. The image made me question the im/possibility of representing by any means this very reality of war. How, as Adorno famously chanted, could this pain be put into words or depicted on the stage? Or how could we continue to live with those images and memories of the atrocities in our mind? Whereupon, I have decided to refocus my attention on the horrendous effects of war on people and to explore the limits to which those impacts can be depicted.

Nineteenth-century Europe’s industrial revolution, its enormous population, wealth and energy transformed the world by creating productive and exploitative industries and even more so by producing arms - the most destructive instruments of wars. With the application of new technologies, deadlier arms in great numbers led to a war.

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<sup>1</sup> Torie Rose DeGhett, “The War Photo No One Would Publish”, *The Atlantic*, 8 August, 2014. Retrieved 10 August 2017, from <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2014/08/the-war-photo-no-one-would-publish/375762/>

Thus, the twentieth century awakened to unprecedented wars and ominous catastrophes all over the world. The First World War, also known as the Great War, caused the deaths of some ten million people, left many injured and bereaved, and shattered the emotional lives of millions more. It left scars on the minds of these millions that took a long time to heal. Those scars, with their gravity, still continue to haunt modern consciousness reminding us of the horrors and casualties that by no stretch of the imagination can be expressed. Contrary to the rhetoric of the time, it proved not to be ‘the war to end all wars’ but rather brought about the Second World War, which was the bloodiest and deadliest of all wars. Despite being separated by only two decades, the First and Second World War were not otherwise similar. The Second World War, albeit a continuation of the First World War, differed extensively from it which meant military power, extended boundaries and colonial possessions. While the former was “five times more destructive of human lives and incalculably more costly in material terms”,<sup>2</sup> the latter, on the other hand, aimed at re-ordering the world and gaining control over it, and marked the eradication of inferior or undesirable ‘others’ from the earth. These two wars consumed more wealth, killed more people and inflicted more pain and suffering than any of the previous wars in human history.

Despite their differences, as John Keegan notes, “The Second World War in its origin, nature and course, is inexplicable except by reference to the First.”<sup>3</sup> Shortly after the Great War, the 1930s witnessed enormous changes: in Russia, Stalin rose to power while Germany experienced Nazism under Hitler who, in order “to rebut the imputation of ‘war guilt’”<sup>4</sup> of the First World War; and to retrieve Germany’s place in the world, went to war. Justifying his invasion of Poland at the beginning of the Second World War, Hitler stated; “it cannot be that two million Germans should have fallen in vain and that afterwards one should sit down as friends at the same table with traitors. No, we do not pardon, we demand - Vengeance.”<sup>5</sup> His point was clear, and the results were as catastrophic as his words. Although Hitler’s Germany initiated the war with the aim of conquering Europe, the Second World War soon turned into a horrendous war between the Allies (France, the United Kingdom, the Soviet Union and the United States) and the

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<sup>2</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War*, Hutchinson, London 1999, 3.

<sup>3</sup> John Keegan, *The Second World War*, Pimlico, London 1997, 1.

<sup>4</sup> John Keegan, 1997, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Adolf Hitler, *My New Order*, Reynal & Hitchcock, New York 1941, 45.

Axis Powers (Nazi Germany, Italy and Japan), responsible for about 50 to 70 million deaths, most of whom were civilians.

There was an enormity of events that originated from the upheavals of 1939; however, the Holocaust was one of the most inhumane and darkest episodes of the war. It was, as John McCumber posits, “the master rupture”<sup>6</sup> of the twentieth century, and its magnitude was beyond the comprehension of human mind. Coming from two Greek words ‘holos’ (whole) and ‘kaustos’ (burned) meaning burning sacrificial offering to gods on an altar,<sup>7</sup> the word ‘holocaust’, after 1945, acquired a new meaning: the systematic murdering of six million Jews and more than five million gypsies, homosexuals, the disabled and all Slavic peoples by Hitler’s Nazi Germany during the Second World War. Hitler initiated his ethnic cleansing by sending his mobile killing squads called ‘*Einsatzgruppen*’ to search out and kill Jews and other ‘undesirables’. Murders started in the form of shooting Jews in large numbers and depositing them in pits, such as in one of the largest massacre sites Babi Yar in Kiev, Ukraine where around 100,000 Jews were killed up until September 1945.<sup>8</sup> This relatively slow practice soon evolved into portable gas vans which, in time, turned into death camps or so-called concentration camps suitable for killing thousands of Jews in a day, such as Auschwitz, Treblinka and Sobibor. “During the Holocaust, it is estimated that”, records the Jewish Virtual Library based on “*Le Livre des Camps*” by Ludo Van Eck (1979) and *Atlas of the Holocaust* by Martin Gilbert (1993), “the Nazis established 15,000 labour, death and concentration camps”<sup>9</sup> in the occupied countries. At the end of the war, the Nazis had killed around 11 million people their systematic plan to eradicate Jews and other ‘unwanted’ groups.

Development of nuclear weapons and their use drastically changed the nature of this war when the fateful decision to end the war by dropping two atomic bombs on two Japanese cities was put into action by the USA. On 6<sup>th</sup> August 1945, an atomic bomb ‘Little Boy’ was dropped on Hiroshima killing 70,000 people instantly and by 1946,

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<sup>6</sup> John McCumber, “The Holocaust as Master Rupture: Foucault, Fackenheim, and ‘Postmodernity’”, *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (eds.), Ropodi, Atlanta 1998, 239-264.

<sup>7</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, Retrieved 03 March 2017, from <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/3847-burnt-offering>

<sup>8</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, Retrieved 03 March 2017, from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/babiyar.html>

<sup>9</sup> Jewish Encyclopedia, Retrieved 03 March 2017, from <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/cclist.html>

140,000 people had lost their lives as a result of radiation and injuries. Only three days later, another atomic bomb, called 'Fat Man', was to be dropped on Nagasaki on 9<sup>th</sup> August, this time killing 80,000, and largely destroying the city. With these brutal and bloody episodes resulting in great destruction on an unprecedented scale, the century, as Mark C. Taylor points out was "eventually forced to confront the flames of Hiroshima and the ashes of Auschwitz."<sup>10</sup> These episodes have remained the open wounds of the recent history haunting the present day with their harrowing legacies.

Marked by Fascism, the announcement of the advent of the Atomic age and the acceleration of the arms race, which also brought about developments in science and technology as well as in the reconstruction of individual and national identities, the twentieth century could not capitalise on an atmosphere of peace and comfort when the war ended. The war took an estimated 40 to 70 million lives and, contrary to expectations, after 1945 the world was still rocked by smaller wars and catastrophes. Some of them were caused by the Cold War (1947-1991) which was a manifestation of the power struggle between the USA and the Soviet Union lasting almost fifty years; the Suez Crisis (1956); the Vietnam War (1955); the Falklands War (1982); the Gulf War (1990); the dissolution of the Soviet Union (1991); and the Bosnian War (1992), which resulted in killing and persecuting Muslims and Croats and ended with the air strikes of NATO against Bosnian Serbs (1995). In the new millennium, on the other hand, many terrorist attacks were perpetrated, the most notorious of which were 9/11 Terrorist Attacks (2001) and 7 July London Bombings (2005). Following the terrorist attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Centre, former president of the USA, George Bush, declared a so-called 'War on Terror' which led to the subsequent US invasion of Afghanistan (2001) and the second Invasion of Iraq (2003) which brought more death and misery to millions. The world is still being plunged into wars and conflicts, with the Syrian War (2011), Turkish-PKK conflicts (1978-present) and ISIS suicide bombings all around the world.

As a natural result of all these previous ruptures and the recent terrorist attacks in various countries, an apparent perturbation reigns the world. It is obvious that the advent of television and its spread all over the world in the second half of the twentieth century

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<sup>10</sup> Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992, 47.



are major factors in augmenting this collective sense of anxiety, because it enables access to the happenings in any corner of the world, especially to wars and other catastrophes. With subsequent advances, moreover they have become accessible to all. Thus, via various technological means, people have been exposed to a bombardment of footages from thousands of kilometres away. While aggravating the sense of insecurity and terror, the exposure to a plethora of disturbing images of wars, terrorist attacks and various forms of violence have also become somewhat trivialised. Based on this normalised and intense exposure to traumatic events, E. Ann Kaplan defines British society from the 1990s as a “trauma culture”<sup>11</sup> drawing on Mark Seltzer’s concept of ‘wound culture’ which in Seltzer’s terms is “the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound.”<sup>12</sup> Witnessing the images of violent deaths, torture, war victim children and other disturbing visions, or hearing about them, have become so commonplace that they seem to have become a part of everyday life rather than traumatising us. Being constantly exposed to these images has numbed most people’s feelings and inflicted involuntary voyeurism of violence and other people’s suffering.

While the increased availability of such images runs the risk of desensitising people, traumatic events continue to have deleterious impacts on those who experience them first hand. Soldiers deployed to the war zones who have spent a long period of time there and people who live in war zones, unlike those seeing the war and pain in images, suffer particularly from the long-lasting effects of war. They epitomise the trauma of war with their war-torn bodies and psyches. In tandem with the enormity of traumatising events, with traumatised subjects that have appeared along with these events and with over-preoccupation with the sense of shock and trauma in the contemporary world, Western psychiatric, academic, artistic, literary and cultural discourses have become interested in the analysis of a trauma paradigm.

Although the Greek word ‘trauma’ is historically associated with physical injury and was first used in English to refer a bodily wound in the seventeenth century, today, it

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<sup>11</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, Rutgers University Press, London 2005.

<sup>12</sup> Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere”, *The MIT Press*, Vol. 80, Spring 1997, 3.

is more usually configured within psychopathology. The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) defines the term as

A psychic injury, especially one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed; an internal injury, especially to the brain, which may result in a behavioural disorder of organic origin. Also, the state or condition so caused.<sup>13</sup>

The term gained official recognition when Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was accepted as a psychological disorder by American Psychiatric Association in the third edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM III) in 1980. According to the definition, PTSD arises when someone is confronted with an extreme event “that is generally outside the range of usual human experience”<sup>14</sup> such as natural disasters, wars and accidents that brings serious injury to their physical integrity. The recognition of PTSD as a disease initiated an increased medical attention to trauma which has extended to cultural and literary criticism, humanism and beyond.

Raymond Williams observes that today we live in such a world that we witness more social dramas “in a week, in many cases, than most human beings would previously have seen in a lifetime.”<sup>15</sup> Due to the pervasiveness of these events and their effects on people, trauma was foregrounded, and in the 1990s ‘trauma theory’ inspired interest in many fields. With Cathy Caruth’s ground-breaking works *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996), and an edited collection drawing on a wide interdisciplinary range of literature, pedagogy, psychoanalysis, filmmaking, medicine and history, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995), trauma studies in literary criticism gained significant attention. In the introduction to her edited work, Caruth gives the best-received, perhaps most widely cited, and succinct definition of the term. According to Caruth, trauma consists “in the structure of its experience or reception: the event is not assimilated or fully experienced at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.”<sup>16</sup> While this definition has also been widely criticised and

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<sup>13</sup> “Trauma, n.”, OED Online, Oxford University Press, January 2018. Retrieved 3 January 2018, from <http://0-www.oed.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/Entry/205242?redirectedFrom=trauma>

<sup>14</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed., American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC 1980, 236.

<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams, *Writing in Society*, Verso, London 1991, 12.

<sup>16</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, JHU Press, Baltimore 1995, 4.

problematised, it remains as a crucial insight for the theory. Indeed, her works are particularly significant for raising concerns about traumatic experience and its representation. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992) treating trauma in relation to questions of testimony and witnessing is another significant work that has had a huge impact. Dominic LaCapra is also among those who has made a significant intervention in the growing field of trauma studies in relation to historiography, representation and memory with his works *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1996) and *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (2001). He, similarly, explores the crucial role of post-traumatic testimonies and literal attempts at coming to terms with trauma.

Trauma theory problematises the textual nature of reference and representation of trauma because latency, difficulty in gaining access to traumatic memory, and unspeakability are inherent in trauma's aporetic nature. Leigh Gilmore also argues that "language fails in the face of trauma, and that trauma mocks language and confronts it with its insufficiency".<sup>17</sup> Caruth, shares Gilmore's idea but, also firmly believes that literature is the site where trauma can be represented and analysed where theoretical language fails.

If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is, indeed at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience meet.<sup>18</sup>

Caruth's apparent implication here is that literature, by going beyond the limits, can access trauma that is unavailable to theory. Literary representations, thus, become a medium through which traumatic experience can be signified. Drawing on this assumption, it is possible to see that dramatic works as literary productions can lend themselves more creatively to represent the catastrophic experiences. Moreover, through

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<sup>17</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2001, 6.

<sup>18</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, JHU Press, Baltimore 1996, 3.

the capacity of literary language, dramatic outputs can offer new perspectives and insights as well as elucidating the events shadowed by trauma.

As we live in “an age of testimony”<sup>19</sup> as Felman remarks, traumatic events require oral or written testimonies to be worked through. Due to its capacity to reach larger audiences, literature, especially theatre, can be a powerful mode of witnessing and, therefore, it is of central importance in the process of working through trauma. As LaCapra states, “the literary is a prime if not the privileged, place for giving voice to trauma.”<sup>20</sup> Finding a voice by means of art, the traumatised may reintegrate their fragmented self and psyche, and share their traumatic experience with a wider empathetic community to create bonds between individual suffering and society.

From the very beginning of history, war has always been one of the leading parts of human life and found expression in the dramatic text of all ages. The Greek playwrights themselves were combat veterans. Euripides fought in wars, both Sophocles and Aeschylus served as generals. Aeschylus even immortalised himself by having “fought at the Battle of Marathon” written on his gravestone rather than as the playwright who invented tragedy.<sup>21</sup> For that reason, the majority of their works were about wars and their destructive effects on their victims as well as the victors. One of the greatest plays by Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, begins with the Chorus’ lines about war. Although the Greek army returns victorious from the Trojan War, the Chorus, through the following lines, conveys the realities of the war,

**Chorus:** They came back  
 To widows,  
 To fatherless children,  
 To screams, to sobbing.  
 The men came back  
 As little clay jars  
 Full of sharp cinders, war is a pawnbroker – not of your treasures

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<sup>19</sup> Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Routledge, New York 1992 1992, 53, 201.

<sup>20</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, JHU Press, Baltimore 2001, 190.

<sup>21</sup> Karen Malpede et. al. (eds), *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2011, xxiv.

But of the lives of your men. Not of gold but of corpses.  
Give your men to the war of God and you get ashes.<sup>22</sup>

Although classical plays are mostly informed by the heroic aspects and sacrifices made by the warriors, they also represent the realities that war brought to everyone. Contemporary dramatic works similarly address the aftermath of the wars and the traumas affecting both soldiers and civilians.

Theatre, as a field of literature, has been a fertile arena for the expression and communication of many memorable events, as well as those having traumatic consequences. Thanks to stage's ability to respond to the events promptly with moderate expense, contemporary conflicts have also found expression in a short span of time in British theatre. One of the most active British theatre critics, Alex Sierz points out the dramatic growth of New Writing since the mid-nineties and, states that more than three hundred new plays have made their debuts during the 2000s.<sup>23</sup> Informed by the wound culture of the decade, these plays have represented a chaotic worldview as well as the traumatic lives of people. Most of the plays have been specifically haunted by the idea of war; they attempt to portray the horrors of war and its destructive effects rather than presenting a stereotypical picture.

The present study is concerned with the analysis of contemporary representations of war trauma on the British stage in the light of basic tenets of modern trauma theory, such as belatedness, unspeakability of trauma, acting out and working through, and bearing witness. In addition to determining instances of trauma caused by the war and its impact on characters and society, this study also answer the following questions through selected plays from contemporary British theatre: Should a playwright produce a theatrical piece out of some people's sufferings and the aftermath of their trauma? Is it possible to put traumatic events on stage without doing an injustice to the magnitude of the events and to the victims? What do the dramatic works delineating the trauma offer or aim at? And what is the role of the audience in those trauma-related plays?

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<sup>22</sup> Aeschylus, *The Oresteia*, Ted Hughes (trans), Faber, London 1999, 24.

<sup>23</sup> Alex Sierz, *Rewriting the Nation*, Methuen, London 2011, 1.

Taking the recent growth of interest in war trauma as its point of departure, this study begins with an early genealogy of trauma starting with studies of Charcot, Janet and Freud. This is followed by an outline of how modern trauma studies beginning with the 1990s have been conceptualised, with the ideas of prominent trauma theorists on the trauma paradigm. Subsequently, the relationship between trauma and literature is discussed. The second chapter explores the interplay between war, trauma and theatre, and representations of war and trauma in theatre history are addressed. In the final chapters, four selected plays from contemporary British theatre are analysed by drawing on modern trauma theories.

The study gives place to four distinct yet interconnected plays. They are deliberately chosen from different playwrights presenting war and its effects in order to display a variety of views and approaches on the issue of war trauma. The aim of the study is to discuss the specificity of each of these plays in communicating traumas on different levels, and in representing their impact on different people or groups. Each play portrays different aspects of trauma from individual traumas exemplified through traumatised soldiers or civilians to collective traumas such as war-torn societies, and the Holocaust sufferers.

Although the connection between prominent English playwright Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* (1996) which brings Nazi atrocities to British shores and the rest of the plays engaged in war perhaps seems only chronological, there are other reasons that made the inclusion of this play essential. The play centres on the atrocities of the Holocaust which were committed some sixty years before the incidents discussed in the other plays. However, as a milestone in the history of shame, the Holocaust has always been a prevalent point of reference for trauma discussions. It remains an open wound in the collective memory of the world, and continues to be so regrettably with new catastrophic events. There are a few survivors of the Holocaust remaining but its legacy continues to vicariously traumatise subsequent generations who did not experience it. I have chosen to start with a contemporary dramatic depiction of the Holocaust and its legacy, because it exemplifies the epitome of a trauma event and the compulsive return of trauma which cannot be worked through. Vicarious traumatising and symptoms of trauma are manifested through a non-victim protagonist, Rebecca, and her relation to the past, the recollection of memories, and the burden of remembering. Introducing the tenets of the

inaccessibility or unspeakability of the trauma event and its repetitive returns, the play is discussed as a dramatic haunting by the memory of the Holocaust, drawing on traumatic symptoms and Hirsch's notion of post-memory.

At the heart of many contemporary plays, the image of returning soldiers stands as embodied proof of the gruesome effects of war. Soldiers who were witnesses and perpetrators of unspeakable evils, horrors and the brutality of war zones are liminal figures in two of the plays discussed. The first play, praised for being “the most provocative and gripping piece produced so far in the Royal Court’s 50th anniversary year”,<sup>24</sup> Simon Stephens’ *Motortown* (2006) proffers a fierce portrait of the destructive effects of war upon soldiers who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. The anti-hero Danny’s trauma symptoms, developed during his service in Iraq, make it hard for him to reintegrate into a society that does not really understand him and, provoke Danny to perpetrate further atrocities upon his return home.

Although this study privileges dramatic fiction over fact-based documentary or verbatim theatre, a semi-verbatim play *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* (2012) by Owen Sheers is also included here in order to show war trauma from first-hand sources. Structured by interviews with soldiers discharged from the army after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, the play is performed by these soldiers as well. The play gives voice to actually traumatised soldiers and, in this way, these soldiers testify in their own defence becoming the channels of unheard truths. It also positions its audiences as witnesses to the testimony of the soldiers, and sharers of their trauma. Thus, it creates an empathetic community for working through trauma.

The last play and the only one out of the four authored by a female playwright is Zinnie Harris’ *Midwinter* (2004), a play that portrays the traumatising lives of those living in the war zones by emphasising the degrading sense of a community and identities lost to a war and its subsequent trauma. Contrary to the previous plays discussed, it avoids giving a definite time and place when referring to a certain incident. In doing so, Harris universalises the experience of war and exposes its timeless destructive effects no matter where or when it happens. The play prompts its audience to face the reality that there are

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<sup>24</sup> Paul Taylor, “Review: Motortown”, *The Independent*, 28 April, 2006, 15.

real people suffering from war and disturbed by its trauma somewhere in the world today, and we cannot know where this place of war will be tomorrow.

Overall, I have attempted to explore how theatre—testimonial or fictional—enables us to penetrate the truth of trauma, providing the possibility of an insight and revelation. Tracing the inexhaustible forms of suffering and responses of people to them, theatrical works, alongside many other literary outputs, continue to contribute productively to a discussion of the most painful and serious matters and to the creation of a public forum. By reaching witnesses in the form of audience, these works become particularly significant in communicating trauma, and may actually help the public confront trauma and address the issues that should necessarily be put under the critical lens.



## CHAPTER ONE

### TRAUMA: HISTORY, THEORY AND LITERATURE

#### 1.1. EARLY TRAUMA STUDIES

Credited with founding the field of trauma studies, French physician Jean-Martin Charcot was the first neurologist to investigate the relationship between trauma and mental illness while he was working with traumatised women at Salpêtrière Hospital in Paris during the late nineteenth century. His main focus, hysteria, was a preconceived mental disorder attributed exclusively to women as it was mainly diagnosed in them.<sup>25</sup> Since the majority of the patients suffering from hysteric symptoms were women, the illness was considered to originate in uterus. Charcot, contrary to the accepted beliefs of the time, understood that hysteria was a psychological disorder not a physiological one, as symptoms such as sensory loss, amnesia and convulsions were similar to those of neurological damage. Through drawings and photographs, as well as his exhaustive writings, Charcot documented these characteristic symptoms of hysteria, and during his lectures on hysteria in Salpêtrière, put on display hysterical women who had been exposed to violence, rape and exploitation while presenting his theory to his audiences.<sup>26</sup>

A student of Charcot, Pierre Janet continued to investigate hysteria and discovered a link between the past experiences of his patients and the symptoms of their condition. Recognising traumatic experiences as causes of the illness, he found out that through hypnosis or re-exposure to the traumatic memories, those symptoms could be alleviated. Adopting some of Charcot's ideas, Sigmund Freud, the founding figure in the history of conceptualisation of trauma, proffered to trace hysterical symptoms back to earlier traumatic experiences of sexual seduction or assault both in *Studies in Hysteria* (1895) co-authored by his colleague Joseph Breuer and in "The Aetiology of Hysteria" (1896). His earliest ideas in these seminal works involved dynamics of trauma, repression and

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<sup>25</sup>The term 'hystreia' derives from the Greek word 'hystera' meaning uterus. History of the term can be dated back to 1900 BC in Ancient Egypt, and the fourth and fifth centuries BC in Ancient Greece. In the earliest treatises, hysteria is attributed to starvation or displacement of the uterus, and this theory is repeated by Hippocrates, Plato, Arataeus and Celsus. After the thirteenth century, this theory began to be replaced by the theory of demonical possession, and the patients were treated by exorcist exercises.

<sup>26</sup> Judith L. Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, New York 1997, 11.

symptom formation. Any disturbing experience, such as early childhood sexual abuse and molestation repressed by the subject as it is unacceptable to the consciousness, Freud holds, can be a type of psychological trauma which later surfaces and causes hysteria. According to his theory, trauma is constituted of two separate phenomena which are nevertheless interrelated. The first one, sexual abuse, is not traumatic at the time of happening as it cannot be grasped by the subject who is not sexually mature enough to be aware of the experience; and the second one is another event, not necessarily traumatic in content, but an occurrence that triggers the memory of the original event. Basing his early theory of trauma heavily on childhood sexual abuse, Freud posits that the abuse has no meaning for the child when it happens, but the memory of the abuse is triggered when the victim realises the meaning of the experience and confronts it again later in his/her life. Trauma, then, is constituted by a dialectic between two events which is based on comprehending the nature of the original event through temporal delay or latency. According to Freud and Breuer, unlike conscious recollections, those repressed and forgotten experiences persist in the unconscious and return in the form of psychosomatic symptoms, repetitive behaviours or other intrusive thoughts.<sup>27</sup> By the 1890s Freud, Breuer and Janet all conclude that hysteria is caused by psychological trauma and the altered state of consciousness resulting from unbearable events. This most direct mental response to such extreme traumatic experience, is called ‘dissociation’ by Janet and ‘double consciousness’ by Freud and Breuer.

In 1897, however, Freud distanced himself from his ‘seduction theory’ (suggesting sexual molestation in childhood as the cause of hysteria) as hysteria was as common among the respectable bourgeois women as it was among the proletariat women, and the implication of sexual molestation among the bourgeoisie was unacceptable. Following the rejection of his former seduction theory, he proposed that patients’ accounts of childhood sexual abuses were either untruthful or “only phantasies which [his] patients had made up.”<sup>28</sup> Based on this, he reoriented his study to ‘conflict theory’ in his *Three Essays on Sexuality*, where he concluded that neurotic symptoms were not

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<sup>27</sup> Josef Breuer, Sigmund Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*, (1909), James Strachey (trans. and ed.), The Hogarth Press, USA 2001, 10, 14, 285. Sigmund Freud “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896) in *Standard Edition*, vol. 3, James Strachey (trans.), Hogarth Press, London 1962, 203.

<sup>28</sup> Sigmund Freud “An Autobiographical Study” (1925), James Strachey (trans. and ed.), in *Standard Edition* Vol. 20, Hogarth Press, London 1959, 34.

the result of external traumatic memories, but more often of repressed unacceptable infantile sexual desires and fantasies. This conclusion also served as the basis for his subsequent theory of the ‘Oedipus Complex’. Implication of this theory that hysteric patients embody their subconscious perverse desires prevented women from speaking about their traumatic experiences. Dora, offered by her father to his friends as a sex toy, who was one of the most famous of Freud’s cases, ceased her treatment as a result of Freud’s insistence on exploring her sexual excitement during her experiences with the men she was offered to. Through his theory of dreams again, on which he based his conflict theory, Freud turned to unsatisfied sexual desires. This time, he evaluated dreams as the individual equivalent of neurosis in human beings that allow disguised fulfilment of a repressed wish. To sum up, it is understood that in his early studies, Freud recognises sexual trauma as the major etiological factor in hysteria and the symptoms as attempts to satisfy sexual desires.

### **1.1.1. Traumatic Neuroses and PTSD**

Subsequent to the studies of Charcot and more notably of Janet and Freud having paved the way, psychological trauma came to the fore once again in the Great War (1914-1918) which resulted in deaths of over eight million soldiers and around eight million civilians. Subjected to an unrelenting threat of annihilation whilst confined in the trenches, soldiers, upon returning home, started to act like hysterical women. These kinds of mental breakdown represented 40% of British war casualties.<sup>29</sup> First interpreted as signs of cowardice, malingering or “hereditary taints”<sup>30</sup>, the military authorities attempted to suppress these kinds of psychiatric casualties in order to prevent demoralising effects on the public. The symptoms were generally treated with electric shock, while “some military authorities maintained that these men did not deserve to be patients at all, that they should be court-martialled or dishonourably discharged rather than given medical treatment”.<sup>31</sup> Later, British medical officer Charles Myers identified the psychological cues; attributing the symptoms to the effects of exploding shells and intensive

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<sup>29</sup> Judith Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*, Basic Books, New York 1997, 20.

<sup>30</sup> Elaine Showalter, *Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980*, Penguin Books, London 1987, 170.

<sup>31</sup> Herman, 1997, 21.

bombardments during the war, named the disorder, which manifested variously as panic, weeping, and inability to reason, walk, sleep or talk, “shell shock”.<sup>32</sup> However, it was gradually understood that even soldiers who were not exposed to any kind of physical trauma also showed these symptoms, therefore shell shock was eventually acknowledged to be a result of psychological trauma. Following the acknowledgement of the term ‘shell shock’ which was also referred to as ‘war neurosis’ and ‘combat fatigue’, in the second decade of the twentieth century, trauma theory began to evolve around and be shaped by the collectivised experiences of male soldiers.

Freud started to be interested in trauma theory again with renewed enthusiasm when treating veterans of World War I. Most of the veterans were suffering from uncontrollable weeping, memory loss, physical paralysis and dreams of their wartime experiences in which they repeatedly re-lived the horrors they had witnessed. The returning soldiers’ dreams were disturbing repetitions of their encounter with horrors and death, not wish fulfilments that allow the unconscious desires to find expression as Freud formerly suggested. His former emphasis on the role of sexual fantasies and drives was, then, challenged by the experience of shell shock. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), he revises his theory and introduces ‘traumatic neurosis’ (originally coined by a German doctor Herman Oppenheim) referring to the experience brought about by accidents and wartime trauma, which are exactly and unremittingly re-enacted by the survivor exposed to the emotional stress of a possible violent death. Questioning the reason of the re-enactments of the unpleasant memories, he posits that war neuroses were not a result of the conflict between ego and the sexual drives as he had suggested in his former libido theory, but a conflict between different parts of the ego. According to this theory, human beings crave either reproduction with the instinct for self-preservation or extinction with the instinct for aggression. Human existence, then, Freud suggests, is driven by these two libidinal urges, namely ‘Eros’, the pleasure principle or the life instinct, and ‘Thanatos’, the death instinct which necessitates a tendency toward destruction and return to the state of non-existence. As trauma can be too hard to bear, it incites the death instinct, the urge to return to this inorganic state,<sup>33</sup> which is for Freud,

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<sup>32</sup> Charles Myers, *Shell Shock in France, 1914-1918: Based on a War Diary*, Cambridge University Press, New York 1940, 26.

<sup>33</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), James Strachey (trans.), W.W. Norton & Company, London, New York 1961, 55.

an acknowledgement of the existence of ‘beyond’ pleasure, acting in opposition to the pleasure principle.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also addresses a ‘protective shield’ or ‘stimulus barrier’ whose function is to protect the organism against excessive quantities of external stimuli that can destroy the psychic mechanism of the individual. The traumatic, for Freud is “any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through [this] protective shield.”<sup>34</sup> Trauma is thus defined as a breach in this efficacious protecting barrier and, he asserts, this breach and inevitable exposure to large amounts of stimulus due to the ego’s fright and unpreparedness cause traumatic neuroses provoking the death instinct.

Another figure to embark on a study on the war casualties, American anthropologist and psychoanalyst Abram Kardiner, started to treat U.S. war veterans after World War I, and published his exhaustive clinical and theoretical study, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War* (1941), on war trauma, its treatment and post-war care of those neurotic disturbances. Like Freud, he observes a re-enactment of traumatic memories which he describes as “fixation on the traumatic event” in which “the subject acts as if the original traumatic situation were still in existence and engages in protective devices which failed on the original occasion.”<sup>35</sup> Although the “symptoms were considered signs of weakness, of moral turpitude”<sup>36</sup> at the time, and the soldiers suffering from the symptoms were also “punished with the stigma of cowardice,” Kardiner suggests that any person could be affected by the war and experience those symptoms.

After the war, the long-lasting effects of trauma on numerous soldiers fell into oblivion, and interest in psychological trauma faded once again. However, with the advent of the Second World War, the symptoms of shell shock were observed in Holocaust concentration camp survivors as well as in the war veterans. As prisoners, they received the most brutal treatments in the camps, which resulted in severe psychological disturbances. In tandem with these, Henry Krystal brought trauma into the limelight

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<sup>34</sup> Freud, 1961, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Abram Kardiner, *The Traumatic Neuroses of War*, National Research Council, Washington 1941, 82.

<sup>36</sup> Celia Malone Kingsbury, *The Peculiar Sanity of War: Hysteria in the Literature of World War I*, Texas Tech University Press, Texas, 2002 2-3.

again. In his work he examines the consequences of the enduring traumatising of the survivors, and notes,

the trauma response evolves from a state of hyper alert anxiety to a progressive blocking of emotions and behavioural inhibition [...] without being able to interpret the meaning of what they are feeling. Unable to “know” what they feel, they become prone to undifferentiated affect storms and psychosomatic reactions, which are devoid of personal meaning and cannot lead to adaptive responses.<sup>37</sup>

As Krystal’s findings reveal, the Holocaust survivors’ behavioural and emotional responses were bearing strong resemblances to those of the war veterans. Based on these studies, and centring his focus on the survivors’ difficulty of expressing their experiences, in his work Krystal elaborates on the syndrome ‘alexithymia,’ the inability of chronically traumatised individuals to recognise and describe feelings, which was again also very common among the soldiers fighting in the war.

It was not until the soldiers returning from the Vietnam War showed severe traumatic symptoms on a large scale which developed into chronic problems, that trauma was pushed into the public consciousness again. Contrasting the outward illusion of heroism in American society, soldiers were collapsing psychologically. Upon returning home from the war, many of them started to abuse drugs and alcohol in order to ease their pain and to escape momentarily from distress and painful reality. They began to behave aggressively, becoming homeless and unemployable. As a result of the political climate of the 1970s some anti-war veterans were encouraged to voice their outrage about the severe emotional consequences of their catastrophic experiences and started to create ‘rap groups’ to share and discuss their war experiences and to raise awareness about the effects of war. Their main aim was to draw public attention to the serious psychological injuries of war. By the mid-1970s hundreds of such rap groups were formed and as a result of veterans’ pressure, for psychological treatment of the soldiers, a program called Operation Outreach was launched.<sup>38</sup> All political struggles by the groups, activists and

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<sup>37</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, Alexander C. McFarlane, and Lars Weisaeth (eds.), *Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society*, The Guilford Publications, New York 2007, 60.

<sup>38</sup> Herman, 1997, 27.

mental health professionals to bring these events and their aftermaths into the public consciousness were acknowledged, and in regards to war experiences, for the first time, trauma gained official recognition with the American Psychiatric Association's (APA) inclusion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a diagnosis in the third edition of its *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in 1980.

The APA in the third edition of the DSM defined PTSD's "essential feature" as "the development of characteristic symptoms following a psychologically traumatic event that is generally outside the range of usual human experience."<sup>39</sup> According to the definition, PTSD can arise as a result of a trauma which

may be experienced alone (rape or assault) or in the company of groups of people (military combat). Stressors producing this disorder include natural disasters (floods, earthquakes), accidental man-made disasters (car accidents with serious physical injury, airplane crashes, large fires), or deliberate man-made disasters (bombing, torture, death camps). [...] The disorder is apparently more severe and longer lasting when the stressor is of human design.<sup>40</sup>

APA, in this edition, specifically defines trauma as the direct experience of an event that involves threat to the ones' physical and psychological integrity, and provides a list of potentially traumatic events such as military combat, rape or serious traffic accident.

In the revised edition of *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III-R) published in 1987, diagnostic criteria were significantly expanded, focusing on the traumatic stressors rather than a direct personal experience. According to this revised definition "in some cases the trauma may be learning about a serious threat or harm to a close friend or relative, e.g., that one's child has been kidnapped, tortured, or killed."<sup>41</sup> DSM-IV, on the other hand, emphasised the life threatening nature of traumatic events, limiting trauma to the threats to the physical integrity. In the highly controversial edition, DSM V, published in 2013 and current today, the diagnosis underwent some

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<sup>39</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 3rd ed., American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC 1980, 236.

<sup>40</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 1980, 236.

<sup>41</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, revised 3rd ed., American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC 1987, 248.

further changes. It was reclassified into a new category “Trauma- and Stressor-Related Disorders”, becoming more descriptive and more inclusive. According to its new definition it has come to count in “reactive attachment disorder, disinhibited social engagement disorder, acute stress disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, acute stress disorder, and adjustment disorder”.<sup>42</sup> The new definition suggests that exposure to the traumatic events can occur in more than one way. APA’s Guidelines defines them as,

- 1) direct experiencing; 2) witnessing, in person; 3) learning that the traumatic event(s) occurred to a family member, or someone else in close relationship;
- 4) experiencing repeated or extreme exposure to aversive details of the traumatic event(s).<sup>43</sup>

In the new definition, former criterion of direct experience of the trauma event was replaced by a variety of indirect experiences of trauma, including exposure symptoms of the trauma event. It is also stated that “[h]ighest rates (ranging from one-third to more than one-half of those exposed) are found among survivors of rape, military combat and captivity, and ethnically or politically motivated internment and genocide.”<sup>44</sup> Following the restrictive 1980 definition of traumatic event “that is generally outside the range of usual human experience”, with the new definitions, trauma has become more inclusive and contested phenomena as it is still controversial exactly which events should be characterised as traumatic.

## 1.2. TRAUMA AND THEORY

A century that began with utopian expectations every bit as grand as those of nineteenth-century romantics and idealists is eventually forced to confront the flames of Hiroshima and the ashes of Auschwitz. In the dark light of those flames and the arid dust of

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<sup>42</sup> American Psychiatric Association, *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, 5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, Washington DC 2013, 265

<sup>43</sup> Lynn F. Bufka et al., *Clinical Practice Guideline for the Treatment of PTSD*, 2017, 6. Retrieved 27 August 2016, from <https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/ptsd.pdf>

<sup>44</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 2013, 276.



those ashes, modernism ends and something other begins.

Mark C. Taylor, *Disfiguring: Art, Architecture, Religion*

Trauma received its solid status as a field of inquiry by virtue of its recognition by the American Psychiatric Association, which has opened the door to deeper exploration of the nature, results and healing of human suffering. Nevertheless, this “all-inclusive”<sup>45</sup> phenomenon has not gained a plenary understanding as it has come to embrace a variety of experiences and events. It has also become problematically overused to the limits of banality and meaninglessness in today’s society. Having its roots in clinical medicine and first and foremost ties with psychology, trauma has become a prevalent cultural trope since the 1990s with the theories of prominent scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Dori Laub, Bessel A. van der Kolk, Judith Herman and Dominic LaCapra. In their attempts to define boundaries and suggest cures, these scholars from different disciplines such as psychiatry, sociology, psychoanalysis, literature and history galvanised enormous interest to explain and theorise trauma with their ground-breaking works. They have also triggered significant discussions on the relationship between literature and trauma, enabling articulation of trauma within the limits of literature.

The Greek word for ‘wound’, trauma (τραῦμα) originally refers to serious physical injuries or wounds. In a psychological sense, more particularly in Freud’s studies, trauma amounts to a wound inflicted on the mind rather than the body. In modern medicine, psychological trauma is defined as a reaction to an overpowering event resulting in a serious psychological damage.<sup>46</sup> More generally, trauma is understood by Slavoj Žižek as “the violent intrusion of something radically unexpected, something the subject was absolutely not ready for, something the subject cannot integrate in any way.”<sup>47</sup> Žižek’s definition is heavily indebted to the event-based understanding of trauma that puts a violent and unexpected event in the centre. Commenting on the nature of the events causing trauma American psychiatrist Judith Herman states “traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with

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<sup>45</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, JHU Press, London 1995, 4.

<sup>46</sup> See APA’s definition of the term in DSM III, IV, V.

<sup>47</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *Living in the End Times*, Verso, London 2011, 292.

violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe.”<sup>48</sup> According to the definitions of APA, Žižek and Herman, trauma arises as a direct response to a violent and extremely upsetting event which overwhelms the person’s ability to cope with what has happened, causing extreme emotional shock and pain.

Revisiting Freud’s theories on trauma in her work *Unclaimed Experience* (2006), Cathy Caruth, unarguably one of the key figures in contemporary trauma theory, redefines trauma based on the structure of trauma experience. In Caruth’s terms “[trauma] describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic event in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena,”<sup>49</sup> as “the event is not assimilated or fully experienced at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.”<sup>50</sup> Contrary to the former definitions of trauma that focus on the nature of the event or the immediate response to it, Caruth’s formulation emphasises the suddenness of the event and belatedness inhering in the traumatic moment itself. According to Caruth, traumatic event cannot be fully grasped or acknowledged immediately because of the individual’s unpreparedness to the threat to life; it is only after a certain amount of time that it can be experienced in psychic returns by various repetitions. Rather than being remembered as a past experience, trauma thus becomes a part of a survivor’s life, being compulsively repeated in the present and maintaining its ungraspable nature.

Similarly, American-born historian and critic Dominick LaCapra observes that due to its severity, trauma numbs the senses. For this reason, a traumatic event cannot be registered at the time of its occurrence but is constructed in a post-hoc re-experience of the event.<sup>51</sup> This suggestion, we can say, denotes the structure of the traumatic event and suggests an inherent belatedness again.

Explicating the reason behind what Caruth and LaCapra define as the inability to assimilate the trauma event into consciousness, neurobiologist Bessel A. van der Kolk

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<sup>48</sup> Herman, 1997, 33.

<sup>49</sup> Caruth, 1996, 11.

<sup>50</sup> Caruth, 1995, 4.

<sup>51</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1996, 174.

and Onno van der Hart draw on Janet's studies and identify two forms of memory. They classify them as 'normal' or 'narrative' and 'traumatic' memories.

In contrast to narrative memory, which is a social act, traumatic memory is inflexible and invariable. Traumatic memory has no social component; it is not addressed to anybody, the patient does not respond to anybody; it is a solitary activity. In contrast, ordinary memory fundamentally serves a social function.<sup>52</sup>

While the normal memory is constituted by the memories of experiences that can be articulated, the ones stored in traumatic memory cannot find articulation. In furtherance they state,

what may most complicate the capacity to communicate about traumatic experiences is that memories of trauma may have no verbal (explicit) component whatsoever [...] [They are organised] without any accompanying narrative about what happened.<sup>53</sup>

Because of the lack of this verbal component, both Caruth and van der Kolk stress the elusiveness of traumatic memories in narrative representation. Stored in normal or narrative memory, the usual events can find expression. On the other hand, traumatic memories stored in traumatic memory cannot be expressed and communicated.

After symptoms of hysteria were discovered to be re-enactments of distressing traumatic memories, it was argued by both Freud and Breuer that hysterical symptoms can be alleviated when they are put into words later – a process they called 'catharsis' or 'abreaction', which was later termed as 'psycho-analysis' by Freud. The process was ideally described by Breuer's patient, Anna O., as the "'talking cure', while she referred to it jokingly as chimney sweeping."<sup>54</sup> Freud emphasises the importance of this telling and hearing or narrating the traumatising event process, as it was considered to be essential to the recovery of the patient. In order to solve trauma's 'memory crisis', hypnotism was another popular psychotherapeutic method used to retrieve forgotten,

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<sup>52</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and Engraving of Trauma", *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth (ed), JHU Press, Baltimore 1995, 163.

<sup>53</sup> Bessel A. van der Kolk et al., 2007, 287.

<sup>54</sup> Freud and Breuer, 2001, 30.

repressed or dissociated memories by bringing them into consciousness and putting them into language.

The problem of memory in a traumatised person is perhaps best exemplified in one of Pierre Janet's patients, Irene who lives with her dead mother's corpse as she could not remember she had died, nor could she believe it to be true. However, after retrieving the narrative memory, she gave different accounts of her mother's death. Drawing on Janet's study on Irene, van der Kolk and van der Hart describe the gap between the traumatic memory and the narrative memory as unbridgeable. On the other hand, while they treat trauma as a disorder in the subject's faculty of narration, they also suggest that traumatic experience should be assimilated into a narrative of the past in order to recover from it. They claim that

traumatic memories are the unassimilated scraps of overwhelming experiences, which need to be integrated with existing mental schemes, and be transformed into narrative language. It appears that, in order to occur successfully, the traumatised person has to return to the memory often in order to complete it.<sup>55</sup>

Otherwise, they believe, these intrusive phenomena will continue to manifest themselves and will re-traumatise the victim each time. They also tentatively suggest that by distorting the traumatic memory and "imagining alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror."<sup>56</sup> This means that while narrating the unmitigated catastrophe, the victims can tend towards distortion in order not to face the enormity of the event and be re-traumatized by it.

The fundamental emphasis of van der Kolk and his associate on the importance of the narrative ability in the process of healing trauma was later instantiated by literary trauma theorists. Among them, Jonathan Shay in his work *Achilles in Vietnam* (1994), emphasises the combatants' need to tell their stories to a compassionate audience and achieve cathartic healing to some extent with the communalisation of the grief.

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<sup>55</sup> Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995, 176.

<sup>56</sup> Van der Kolk and Van der Hart, 1995, 178.

Commenting on the nature of trauma that destroys the cohesion of consciousness, Shay suggests voicing the traumatic combat experience in order to be able to grasp an integrity.

When a survivor creates a fully realised narrative that brings together the shattered knowledge of what happened, the emotions that were aroused by the meanings of the events, and the bodily sensations that the physical events created, the survivor pieces back together the fragmentation of consciousness that trauma has caused.<sup>57</sup>

Even though trauma disrupts the consciousness of the subject and shatters his or her understanding of the event, the subject can still achieve intactness by bringing pieces together and forming a complete narration.

Based on Janet's earlier studies on both 'narrative memory', which enables a person to convert normal experiences into a coherent narrative, and 'traumatic memory' in which the person cannot integrate the traumatic event into narrative memory due to its extremely painful nature, Caruth also suggests that traumatic memories resist narration. Even though those painful memories of the traumatic event return, they are mostly nonverbal and forbid a direct access to the traumatic event itself. Commenting on this elusive nature of trauma she contends,

[trauma] is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.<sup>58</sup>

In line with Caruth's definition, traumatic knowledge cannot be accessed until the traumatic event returns to haunt; and these returns do not only testify to the reality of the horrible event but also to the inability to fully understand it. This inability to access the original event produces what Caruth calls, drawing from Shoshana Felman, a "crisis of truth" which, she argues, must "be spoken in a language that is somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding."<sup>59</sup> Literature, hence, for Caruth,

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<sup>57</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and Undoing of Character*, Atheneum, New York 1994, 188.

<sup>58</sup> Caruth, 1996, 4.

<sup>59</sup> Caruth, 1996, 5.

becomes a proper site for voicing trauma which calls for “a new mode of reading and of listening.”<sup>60</sup> The language she refers to in her work, *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013), is the language “of the life drive ... that bear[s] witness to the past by turning toward the future.”<sup>61</sup> Endorsing the testimonial power of literature, she claims that when discursive language fails in the face of trauma, imaginative literature can speak and testify to traumatic horror; through its symbolic language and created fictional narratives, losses, crisis, and troubles can be reread and understood which in turn give voice to the traumatised individuals and societies.

Although confronting what happened and voicing the upsetting event after some time is favoured by many trauma theorists, others have suggested alternative methods for overcoming trauma and its destructive impacts. As mentioned before, van der Kolk and van der Hart put forward the idea that slight distortions in the narrative process would help decrease the intrusive power of trauma-event. Taking this suggestion further, Eric Santner in his “History Beyond the Pleasure Principle” defines his term ‘narrative fetishism’ as the “construction and deployment of a narrative consciously or unconsciously designed to expunge the traces of trauma or loss that called that narrative into being in the first place.”<sup>62</sup> To Santner, another kind of response to loss or a traumatic happening that refuses to go away is Freud’s ‘work of mourning’ which is a process of accepting and integrating the traumatic loss by repeating and remembering it. Unlike mourning, narrative fetishism, Santner writes, is “the way an inability or refusal to mourn employs traumatic events; it is a strategy of undoing, in fantasy, the need for mourning by simulating a condition of intactness, typically by situating the site and origin of loss elsewhere.”<sup>63</sup> This means while mourning necessitates acceptance of the loss and the trauma it causes, narrative fetishism removes the need to mourn. Dominic LaCapra describes this phenomenon as “fetishized and totalizing narratives that deny the trauma that called them into existence by [...] harmonizing events, and often recuperating the past in terms of uplifting messages or optimistic, self-serving scenarios.”<sup>64</sup> Partaking in

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<sup>60</sup> Caruth, 1996, 9.

<sup>61</sup> Cathy Caruth, *Literature in the Ashes of History*, JHU Press, Baltimore 2013, xi.

<sup>62</sup> Eric Santner, “History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma”, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the “Final Solution”*, Saul Friedlander (ed.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 1992, 144.

<sup>63</sup> Santner, 1992, 144.

<sup>64</sup> Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, JHU Press, Baltimore 2001, 78.

narrative fetishism a traumatised person can pretend that he or she is untouched by the trauma by relating the trauma in an untruthful and optimistic way. For this reason, narrative fetishism comes to the fore when one cannot come to terms with the trauma and, this way, he or she avoids facing his or her trauma and working it through.

In deference to abovementioned scholars' remarks on the importance of putting traumatic experience in words after a while to acknowledge the event and leave it behind, the place of narration is undeniable in trauma theory. However, they are all also of the opinion that trauma undermines narration constraining the survivor from telling his/her experiences, as the experience is more than mind can grasp and explain. Despite that, the existence of people talking about the time of a serious traumatic event with details must also be acknowledged, which renders the orthodoxy of unspeakableness of trauma questionable. Based on this fact, the conceptualisation and symptoms of trauma provided by Caruth and those sharing the same views have been subject to salient criticism in the last two decades. Richard McNally in *Remembering Trauma* (2003), for instance, challenges the tenets of trauma theory which were proposed earlier. Unlike Caruth, van der Kolk and Herman's depictions of the amnesic and dissociative quality as well as the unspeakableness of trauma, McNally claims that trauma does not block the formation of narrative memory and, is therefore, memorable and describable. Referring to some documentations of the Holocaust survivor testimonies, he denies the preclusion of the memories.<sup>65</sup> Explaining his three counter-assertions to the orthodoxy of Caruth's conceptualisation of trauma, McNally writes,

First, people remember horrific experiences all too well. Victims are seldom incapable of remembering their trauma. Second, people sometimes do not think about disturbing events for long periods of time, only to be reminded of them later. However, events that are experienced as overwhelmingly traumatic at the time of their occurrence rarely slip from awareness. Third, there is no reason to postulate a special mechanism of repression or dissociation to explain why people may not think about disturbing

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<sup>65</sup> Richard J. McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, The Belknap Press of Harvard, Cambridge 2005, 180.

experiences for long periods. A failure to think about something does not entail an inability to remember it.<sup>66</sup>

Citing some specialists such as Karen Olio, Daniel Brown and Kristine Courtois for support, McNally claims that a traumatised person may refuse to speak about his or her trauma, which means this failure does not invariably point to an inability. Moving away from the theory of traumatic amnesia, McNally emphasises the accessibility of traumatic memory and the possibility of constructing narrative accounts of it, which, in turn, will have a healing power over the victims as it “enables survivors to gain more control over the traces left by trauma... [and] defuses traumatic memory [...] establishing more control over their recalling, and helping the survivor to remake a self.”<sup>67</sup> Contrary to the amnesic quality suggested by Caruth and others, McNally emphasises the communicability of the trauma event as it can be registered in normal memory, therefore remembered. What is problematic in McNally’s discussion is his attempt to generalise the subject. While giving examples of some Holocaust victims who remember what they have experienced, he disregards those who do not remember. He simply evaluates their silence as a sign of unwillingness to think about the memory of the event or as a rare inability to remember.

Similarly, Michael Balaev and his co-authors, in *Contemporary Approaches in Trauma Theory* criticise Caruth’s conceptualisation of trauma, and naming their new approaches the ‘pluralistic model’, challenge the traditional restrictive concept of trauma as the unspeakable. These authors focus on the varying representations of trauma in literature and the capacity of language for conveying extremities. Barry Stampfl, for instance, considers the unspeakableness “as a phase in the process of traumatising, not its predetermined endpoint”<sup>68</sup> and he asks “if we *were* to relinquish rhetorical evocations of the unspeakable, would this not be detrimental to our attempts to investigate, communicate and commemorate traumatic events?”<sup>69</sup> (emphasis in original). In the same

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<sup>66</sup> McNally, 2005, 2.

<sup>67</sup> Susan J. Brison, *Aftermath: Violence and the Remaking of a Self*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 2002, 71.

<sup>68</sup> Barry Stampfl “Parsing the unspeakable in the context of Trauma”, *Contemporary Approaches in Trauma Theory*, Michael Balaev (ed), Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2014, 16.

<sup>69</sup> Stampfl, 2014, 21.



lines with McNally, Stampfl also sees silence as a temporary situation and supports that trauma must be speakable, showing many literary accounts as evidence.

Ruth Leys in *Trauma: A Genealogy* (2000), suggesting that the traumatic event returns already distorted, also criticises Caruth and van der Kolk's characterisation of re-enactments. She posits that their assertions are based on shaky grounds and weak scientific evidence. In opposition to the 'unrepresentability' of a traumatic event, she writes that

if – as van der Kolk and Caruth argue – testimony about the past is necessarily a misrepresentation, then any claim to discover in the traumatic repetition, including the traumatic nightmare and flashback, a content other than that of the literal imprint, has to be viewed as the falsifying effect of a desire to narrate or represent the truth of a traumatic origin that is inherently and constitutively exempt from all such representation – which is also to say that their theory of trauma is immune to refutation.<sup>70</sup> (emphasis in original).

Unlike Caruth and van der Kolk, Leys suggests that while they were transcribed into narrative, those indelible imprints of trauma will necessarily be subject to distortions through embellishments, contaminations and condensation.

There is still no unified definition or a consensus on the nature of trauma although, throughout its history, it has been ascribed differing assumptions and conceptualisations. As LaCapra observes, "No genre or discipline 'owns' trauma as a problem or can provide definitive boundaries for it."<sup>71</sup> Although there are many agreed points among theorists, it still remains a much contested area generating a lot of literature from various disciplines. Due to the fallible and elusive nature of trauma, as Leys comments, trauma theory will continue to be subject to alterations and contradictions.<sup>72</sup>

This study, however, utilises the ideas of Caruth and her fellow theorists who focus on trauma's belated nature and its repetitive intrusions, and the function of literature in communicating trauma. Because in all of the plays trauma symptoms manifest with a

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<sup>70</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2000, 253.

<sup>71</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 96.

<sup>72</sup> Leys, 2000, 307.

belated literal return in form of compulsive repetitions and, they refuse to go away unless they are worked through.

### 1.2.1. Belatedness

Since the disaster always takes place after having  
taken place, there cannot possibly be any experience  
of it.

Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*

The paradox Maurice Blanchot pinpoints in the above epigraph encapsulates the retroactive nature of a traumatic encounter. The idea that trauma is characterised by a temporary amnesia during which the trauma event is unavailable to the trauma sufferer originates in Freud's *Project for a Scientific Psychology* (1895) where he introduces the concept of 'Nachträglichkeit' or 'belatedness' which has also been translated as 'deferred action' or 'afterwardness'. The concept gains its systematic elaboration with one of Freud's most famous case histories, that of Sergei Pankejeff dubbed 'the Wolfman'. At the age of one and a half, Sergei Pankejeff witnesses his parents engaged in sexual intercourse. When he is four, he has dreams about six or seven silent white wolves sitting by a tree outside his window, from which he always wakes in a fright. Later in his life, he suffers from depression and sadomasochistic tendencies in his adulthood. During his analysis, Freud reveals that Wolfman's neurosis is keyed to his wolf dream, which is, in turn, the result of witnessing his parents. This unintelligible sight of 'primal scene' did not make any sense for more than twenty years until Pankejeff was able to grasp the meaning of the event. Based on the case of the Wolfman, Freud suggests that, when the subject does not have enough knowledge about the upsetting event he or she has experienced and, although it does not seem to be besetting, after a period of deferral and an accumulation of new memories, the traumatic memory of the experience resurfaces.<sup>73</sup>

In *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), Freud explains this latency period after the occurrence of the event with reference to the example of a train collision survivor. He argues that the survivor of this shocking event can get away from the accident and the

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<sup>73</sup> Sigmund Freud, *The Wolfman and Other Cases*, Louise Adey Huish (trans.), Penguin Books, London 2003, 206.

venue unharmed. After a few weeks, however, the survivor develops grave motor and psychical symptoms that can only be ascribed to his former shock from the accident. What the survivor develops is called ‘traumatic neurosis’, and the time that elapses between the initial event and the first developments of the symptoms is called the ‘incubation period’, referring to the passage of time during which the memory of the event remains dormant until it resurfaces.<sup>74</sup>

The concept of belatedness occupies a central position in Cathy Caruth’s trauma theory. Caruth, in her conceptualisation of trauma, heavily draws on Freud’s notion of ‘*Nachträglichkeit*’ and, redefines trauma according to the structure of traumatic experience. According to Caruth, in cases of trauma “the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it.”<sup>75</sup> Due to the fact that the original event is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly to be fully known” Caruth writes, “it was precisely *not known* in the first instance [but] returns to haunt the survivor later on.”<sup>76</sup> (emphasis in original). The wound of the event has been lost to the mind which re-surfaces in a belated appearance in the fragmented forms of nightmares, intrusive thoughts, and repetitive re-enactments. In this way, trauma which cannot be grasped by the victim initially, becomes a part of their life only after a latency period by being compulsively repeated rather than remembered as a past event.

As the traumatic knowledge cannot be possessed, it cannot therefore be remembered or narrated. The subject cannot possess the traumatic event but is possessed by it through various returns. As noted before, while Caruth, van der Kolk and Herman consider those belated returns to be absolutely literal, Leys evaluates them as already distorted. Ann Kaplan argues further that trauma functions in a more complex way and observes;

frequently the subject has no memories, or partial memories, of what happened. But at the same time, what one remembers may be influenced

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<sup>74</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, Katherine Jones, (trans.), Garden City Press, Letchworth 1939, 109-110.

<sup>75</sup> Caruth, 1995, 4.

<sup>76</sup> Caruth, 1996, 4.

by fantasies and desires, or by a wish that things had been different. Subsequent events can have an impact on memory.<sup>77</sup>

At that point traumatic memory becomes much more active than what Caruth's dissociative model offers. She suggests that belated traumatic re-enactments are not literal as they can be affected and distorted by the sufferer's fantasies and desires. However, whether the traumatic event is literal or already distorted, it is generally agreed that traumatic events return in one way or another to manifest themselves after a period of time.

### 1.2.2. Acting Out and Working Through

On a social as well as an individual psychological level, the penalty for repression is repetition.

E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture*

Perplexed by the pathological conditions in World War I veterans who re-experienced battlefield events in the form of hallucinations and repetitive nightmares, Freud eventually concludes that these dreams have nothing to do with any wish fulfilment as he formerly suggested. Instead they are “purely and inexplicably, the literal return of the event against the will of the one it inhabits.”<sup>78</sup> The war veterans were unwittingly repeating the horrifying reality of the event through those repetitive dreams. Therefore, sufferers were going back to the original event and reliving them. Discovering that, Freud called this experience of compulsive repetition ‘war neurosis’, and the unremitting and unknowing repetitions ‘acting out’.

As trauma is too overwhelming and shocking, its very occurrence obstructs the normal mechanisms of consciousness, and does not allow the subject an opportunity for intellectual and emotional processing. On the other hand, through traumatic repetitive compulsions, Freud asserts, the trauma is acted out which enables the traumatised person to develop the effect of the event, albeit belatedly. He concludes in “Remembering,

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<sup>77</sup> E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, Rutgers University Press, London 2005, 42.

<sup>78</sup> Caruth, 1996, 59.

Repeating and Working-Through” (1914) that “the patient does not remember anything of what he has repressed or forgotten, but acts it out. He reproduces it not as a memory but as an action; he repeats it, without, of course knowing that he is repeating it.”<sup>79</sup> Although the victim resists remembering it, the memory materially resurfaces.

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud discusses the attempts to master the traumatic situation by staging it with his one-year-old grandchild’s fort/da game which involves another repetitive behaviour. The child repeatedly throws away a wooden reel with a piece of string wound round it and then pulls it back to himself. With the disappearance of the reel, the child declares it to be “o-o-o-o” to mean “fort” (gone) and then pulls the string back and greets its reappearance with a joyful “da” (there). Freud interprets the fort/da game as the child’s mastering of the painful situation of his mother’s leaving and the joy of her return, through re-enactment. In this way, the child also reiterates the trauma of separation via performance and constitutes his ‘self’ as autonomous. Freud postulates that repetitions, as in the fort/da game, can empower the sufferer to handle an unpleasant and uncontrollable event. To Freud, thus, veterans’ compulsive dreams, like the child’s game, re-enact the very memory of the painful event. They, therefore, also attest to unconscious attempts to master the traumatic happenings that they could not own at the time of the happening.

As a good example of re-enacting a painful event, Caruth cites the story of Tancred in Tasso’s poem which summarises the temporal nature of trauma: it is not immediately grasped but has to be repeated later. In the story, Tancred unknowingly kills his beloved Clorinda who is disguised in the armour of an enemy knight. After burying her, he passes a magic forest where he slashes at a tree with his sword and blood streams out, right after which he hears Clorinda’s voice telling him that he has wounded her again. Reading Freud’s example of Tancred, Caruth comments on the story defining it as the exact repetition of the trauma event that occurs unremittingly against the will of the survivor. Tasso’s wounding of Clorinda twice is the repetition of the act that he couldn’t know in the first instance but he cannot leave behind. The unassimilated nature of trauma exemplified in Tancred’s story imposes itself repeatedly later in the life of the survivor

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<sup>79</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Remembering, Repeating and Working-Through”, Standard Edition of *the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, James Strachey & Anna Freud (eds.), Vol XII, London 1962, 150.

and unremittingly against his knowledge, and these repetitions, as illustrated by Clorinda's voice through the wound, bears witness to the truth that is unknown to the survivor himself.

As the verbal memory is blocked by the arousal of extreme fear at the time of the traumatic happening, the victim cannot remember or articulate their experience later on, and yet unarticulated experience will, at some point, emerge and manifest itself in different forms and inexplicable abnormal behaviours. For this reason, most of the trauma victims are disturbed by unwitting flashbacks, hallucinations or nightmares which are in the form of sudden intrusive re-experiences and nonverbal memories of a fragment of the trauma event. Although the victim curtails anything reminding them of the trauma and avoids engaging in any situation related to it, they are, at the same time, compelled to re-enact the experience outside their will and awareness. Flashbacks are one of the most common of these unwilling re-enactments. During them, the victim's mind may be flooded with the emotions and images related to the event and they get overwhelmed by the same emotions that they experienced at the time of trauma. They are likely to occur when the trauma event is triggered by any association to the traumatic event. "The painful repetition of the flashback" Caruth writes, "can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way."<sup>80</sup> They are also attempts to grasp the meaning of the event which was impossible at the time of its happening.

The inability to grasp the experience, according to Caruth is not only due to the destructive effect of the event but more of an "enigma of survival" because "trauma consists not only in having confronted death but in *having survived, precisely, without knowing it* (emphasis in original)."<sup>81</sup> The overwhelming imposition of the horrifying event entails the perplexing experience of survival. The survivor who does not truly know the threat of death is forced to confront it by repeated interruptive reminders "which ultimately may lead to destruction."<sup>82</sup> Contrary to expectations, instead of enjoying the present safety and the luck of surviving the threat of death, the survivor "wakes up in

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<sup>80</sup> Caruth, 1996, 59.

<sup>81</sup> Caruth, 1996, 64.

<sup>82</sup> Caruth 1996, 63.

another fright”<sup>83</sup> and through repeatedly acting the event out claims his own survival. This inherent necessity of repetition and its exteriorisations themselves, however, Caruth suggests, can be re-traumatising as the person has to relive the event every time. This endless repetition of violence may even lead its sufferers to suicide as a manifestation of the ‘death drive’ which, in Freud’s words, can be a tempting short cut when the effects of trauma make life unbearable.

Although repetition compulsion inherent in traumatisation, makes the subject reproduce trauma event against their will through acting out, it is not the only response to trauma. Because trauma generally entails two intersecting modes of representation, namely ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’. The latter, contrary to the former one’s unconscious nature, belongs to the conscious and intellectual processing of trauma. It necessitates unfolding the story of the trauma event through mimesis or diegesis that alternately provides relief. In this way, working through helps the victims to overcome the after-effects of the incidents. The process involves acknowledging, reflecting and understanding the traumatic happenings. Therefore, at this stage, the victims can recognise the traumatic event as a part of their lives learning to live with it.

While discussing the challenging question of how to address and represent issues related to the Holocaust, Dominic LaCapra draws a distinction between ‘acting out’ and ‘working through’ as responses to trauma. He also notes that these two responses are not considered binarily opposed as they can interact in addressing trauma. As Freud and Caruth also contend, LaCapra interprets acting out as compulsive and repetitive re-living of the trauma, which keeps the survivor haunted by the past event and withholds the survivor from re-engagement in life.<sup>84</sup> Working through, on the other hand, is “a kind of countervailing force”<sup>85</sup> in which the traumatised person can take a critical distance to the event they experienced and can distinguish between the past, present and the future.<sup>86</sup> Turning back to traumatic event and constructing a complete narrative, which is strongly

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<sup>83</sup> Caruth, 1996, 65.

<sup>84</sup> LaCapra, 1996, 174.

<sup>85</sup> Amos Goldberg, “An Interview with Professor Dominic LaCapra” Shoah Research Center, June 9, 1998. Retrieved 03 June 2016, from [http://www.yadvashem.org/odot\\_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20203648.pdf](http://www.yadvashem.org/odot_pdf/Microsoft%20Word%20-%20203648.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 22.

supported by the theorists, is one of the most effective working through as it enables a step towards detraumatization.

### **1.2.3. Self and Social Attachment and other Responses to Trauma**

Herman identifies traumatic symptoms in three overarching categories namely ‘hyperarousal’, ‘intrusion’ and ‘constriction’.<sup>87</sup> Traumatic experience impacts the entire life of a person profoundly altering it. After being subjected to a catastrophic event, the victim, in later life, cannot experience positive emotions and, in order to withdraw from upsetting memories and anxiety, they might show symptoms of emotional numbing or, quite the contrary, hyperarousal which is the first cardinal symptom of trauma. Hyperarousal is the body’s way of constantly remaining prepared, as if the danger could return at any moment. For this reason traumatised people tend to “have an extreme startle response to unexpected stimuli, as well as an intense reaction to specific stimuli associated with the traumatic event.”<sup>88</sup> These responses come in forms of hyper-vigilance, persistent fatigue, difficulties in falling asleep or staying awake, and in concentrating after the exposure to trauma.

Although some passage of time passes after the trauma event, the traumatised person cannot easily get away from this experience, hence keeps reliving the trauma event with the same vividness and emotional force as if they are happening in the present time. These intrusive phenomena, as already mentioned, are considered as acting out. Drawing on Kardiner, Janet and Freud, Herman names this continual recurring of the past traumatic events as ‘intrusion’.<sup>89</sup>

The last category, defining reaction to trauma, Herman speculates, is constriction. On constriction, the third cardinal symptom of post-traumatic stress disorder, Herman writes that

When a person is completely powerless, and any form of resistance is futile, she may go into a state of surrender. The system of self-defense

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<sup>87</sup> Herman, 1997, 35.

<sup>88</sup> Herman, 1997, 36.

<sup>89</sup> Herman, 1997, 37.



shuts down entirely. The helpless person escapes from her situation not by action in the real world but rather by altering her state of consciousness.<sup>90</sup>

This can assume the form of emotional numbing, as response to an experienced atrocity in order to banish the memory of the event from the consciousness; in other words, it means detaching emotions from thoughts, behaviours and memories. Herman states that these constrictive states help the victim to keep the experience “walled off from ordinary consciousness”<sup>91</sup>, and “might be regarded as one of nature’s small mercies, a protection, a protection against merciless pain.”<sup>92</sup> It involves avoiding places, activities, or people that are reminders of the traumatic event as well as the inability to remember important aspects of it. Although events evoking traumatic experience continue to register in the consciousness, they are dissociated from their meanings. Because of this, these events do not cause ordinary effects on the victims who feel as though they are not happening to them.

In addition to diagnostic criteria for trauma such as emotional and psychological symptoms, some people may additionally present with somatisation which can manifest itself as headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and various other unexplained bodily pains.<sup>93</sup> However, the victims remain unaware of the connection between their emotions and physical ailments or concerns. Through somatisation, the body speaks and expresses trauma which is otherwise inexpressible.

It is widely accepted that all human beings have a strong instinct for living in safety and dependent on a society and eliminating anything that may be dangerous and unpleasurable. The innate need to attach to other people from cradle to grave is in the social nature of human beings. The attachment to a society begins at very early stages of life in the form of the mother-baby relationship and biological maturation, and the construction of the sense of self is tremendously influenced by these very bonds. The absence or disruption of the mother-baby relationship can traumatise a person causing problems in maintaining healthy relationships with other people. Otto Rank, exploring this bond much further, observes that all human beings, by virtue of being born and of the

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<sup>90</sup> Herman, 1997, 42.

<sup>91</sup> Herman, 1997, 45.

<sup>92</sup> Herman, 1997, 43.

<sup>93</sup> Herman, 1997, 124.

physical and psychological separation from the mother, enter into trauma at the very beginning of their life and suffer throughout it. This earliest painful state of separation, he believes, is the first and foremost reason of all anxieties.<sup>94</sup> After this experience of separation, the individual continues to seek for attachment throughout their life. In a manner similar to Rank, Peggy Phelan proffers, in the introduction to *Mourning Sex*, that we are “amputated” bodies “severed from the placenta and cast from the womb.”<sup>95</sup> She also treats trauma as an already existing state of human beings from the very moment of birth.

Similar to the feeling of being amputated, undergoing a traumatic event may severely destroy meaning, self-significance and the capacity to experience normal attachments and social relations. As Laub and Podell posit the traumatised person experiences as “feelings of absence, of rupture, and of the loss of representation” which result in “failure to preserve an emphatic tie with oneself.”<sup>96</sup> In the face of traumatic experience, the sense of self and subjectivity are annihilated. Correspondingly, after the experience, motivations, goals and a sense of security are destroyed which then causes the individual to lose an understanding of the self. As Leigh Gilmore puts it, trauma “refers to the self-altering, even self-shattering experience of violence, injury and harm.”<sup>97</sup> Unable to grasp the sense of selfhood and cope with the emotional stress, together with the feeling of helplessness, the victim can intentionally inflict self-harm, indulging in self-destructive acts including self-mutilation, drug abuse and eating disorders.

Following the shattering of the sense of self, trauma creates impairments to people’s ability to adapt and make meaningful connections with people around them leading to isolation from society. The prolonged feeling of detachment or estrangement from others eliminates the feeling of love and as a result, the victims cannot commit themselves to any kind of relationship. As Herman asserts,

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<sup>94</sup> Otto Rank, *The Trauma of Birth*, Dover Publications, New York 1993.

<sup>95</sup> Peggy Phelan, *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*, Routledge, London 1997, 5.

<sup>96</sup> Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, “Art and Trauma,” *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 76, 1995, 992.

<sup>97</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Cornell University Press. Ithaca 2001, 6.

Traumatic events call into question basic human relationships. They breach the attachments of family, friendship, love, and community. They shatter the construction of self that is formed and sustained in relation to others. They undermine the belief systems that give meaning to human experience. They violate the victim's faith in a natural or divine order and cast the victim into a state of existential crisis.<sup>98</sup>

The victim mostly withdraws from normal social engagements and leads an excluded life, or becomes unable to connect with others in normal ways. However, it does not only affect the individual; it may have repercussions on the others around the trauma victim. It is known that outbursts of anger are not rare among the traumatised people. Becoming a significant threat to both their and others' well-being, the trauma victim may inflict violent and aggressive behaviours upon others as well as themselves. Sandra L. Bloom describes how the victim of a trauma, who feels helpless and powerless sometimes overcomes these feelings by exchanging the role of victim role for that of a victimiser.<sup>99</sup> In this way the victim assumes the power of the victimiser becomes someone who abuses and terrorises others. The traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity encourage the possibility of victimisation of women as men are too often attributed with courage, power and authority. Many returning soldiers suffering from trauma, as an example, resort to domestic violence, hence losing their ability to construct healthy relationship bonds.

Recognising the paradoxical relation between destruction and survival as well as the incomprehensibility of the traumatic event, Caruth poses the question: "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?",<sup>100</sup> and argues that "trauma is not simply the effect of destruction but also, fundamentally, an enigma of survival."<sup>101</sup> She puts not the encounter with death but the survival of it at the heart of trauma and formulates trauma as a peculiar incomprehensibility of human survival. In addition, the painful repetition and intrinsic latency of the trauma force the survivor to keep confronting the trauma event that was not fully comprehended at the time of

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<sup>98</sup> Herman, 1997, 51.

<sup>99</sup> Sandra L. Bloom "Trauma Theory Abbreviated", Community Works, Philadelphia 1999, 11-12.

<sup>100</sup> Caruth, 1996, 7.

<sup>101</sup> Caruth, 1996, 58.

happening. Caruth suggests “it is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony of the impossibility of living.”<sup>102</sup> Even though some can handle this oscillation between life and death, others cannot and when the victims fail to face the situation and to find answers to their questions, they might consider suicide as the only solution to end their interminable pain.

Additionally, although some people survived a catastrophe, they later face the reality that many people did not. This makes them ask, ‘Why them and not me?’. Added to the impossibility of finding an answer to this question, another problem preoccupying the minds and lives of the survivors is self-reproach for failing to save others. Treating Holocaust survivors, Henry Krystal and his colleague William Niederland coined the phrase “survivor’s guilt”<sup>103</sup> in order to describe the feeling of shame and guilt experienced by the people who suffer great hardships for not having done something to prevent others’ death. Holocaust survivor Primo Levi, who suffered deeply from survivor’s guilt, explained

When all was over, the awareness emerged that we had not done anything, or not enough, against the system into which we had been absorbed ... Consciously or not he (the survivor) feels accused and judged, compelled to justify and defend himself.<sup>104</sup>

In the same vein, war veterans and survivors of other catastrophes, having experienced feelings of powerlessness in controlling the natural order of their and other victims’ lives, continue to feel themselves shamefully inadequate and to blame themselves for that. Some may even develop self-hatred which profoundly impacts their lives in a negative way.

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<sup>102</sup> Caruth, 1996, 62.

<sup>103</sup> Henry Krystal, William Niederland, “Clinical Observations on the Survivor Syndrome”, Henry Krystal (ed) *Massive Psychic Trauma*, International University Press, New York 1968, 327-348.

<sup>104</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Raymond Rosenthal (trans), Summit Books, New York 1988, 57.

### 1.3. SPEAKING THE UNSPEAKABLE: LITERARY REPRESENTATIONS OF TRAUMA

When speaking of the unspeakable there will  
always be moments of silence.

Tony Howard, John Stokes, *Acts of War*

In the beginning there was silence – no  
words. The word itself is a breaking out. The word  
itself is an act of violence; it breaks the silence.

Elie Wiesel, “How and Why I Write”

To survive, you must tell stories.

Umberto Eco, *The Island of the Day Before*

Although many trauma theorists accept the importance of putting traumatic suffering into narration, and many survivors of a catastrophic event believe in the need to verbalise it, others insist that words do not suffice to convey the enormity of their experiences. Alongside the dilemma that victims feel, putting trauma into words has also been the subject of a long-lasting debate among scholars, psychoanalysts and survivors of the atrocities, mainly due to the risk of trivialisation of the experience. Some victims regard evoking unspeakable experiences as showing little respect for them. However, others ardently favour voicing these experiences to let others know what happened and to avoid similar instances in the future as well as bringing about a cathartic effect.

The question whether literature is an appropriate tool for expressing and representing suffering surfaced immediately after the Second World War due to the enormity of real life suffering epitomised by the Holocaust. It has remained a dilemma whether it is possible to represent the sufferings of the Holocaust victims through any means of art without doing the victims and what they went through an injustice. Despite the fact that many poems and novels had already been written in the aftermath of the war, in 1949, Theodore W. Adorno famously asserted that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is

barbaric.”<sup>105</sup> Denying the aestheticising of its pain and trivialisation of the overwhelmingly awful happenings, Adorno thereby summed up the tremendous challenge that art had to face. In “Trying to Understand *Endgame*”, he further amplifies his interdiction stating that

the question [...] ‘Does living have any meaning when men exist who beat you until your bones break?’ is also the question whether art as such should exist at all, [...] the so-called artistic rendering of the naked physical pain of those who were beaten down with rifle butts contains, however distantly, the possibility that pleasure can be squeezed from it [...] By this alone an injustice is done to the victims, yet no art that avoided the victims could stand up to the demands of justice.<sup>106</sup>

Thus, as Adorno implies, representing the suffering of the Holocaust victims via artistic language runs the risks of sensationalising it or failing to reveal the profound intangible experience as well as inciting fascination or indifference toward these sufferings. “Because,” as Mukadder Erkan explicates, “according to Adorno, in every work of art lies the potential to give pleasure and alleviate the horror of the event”.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, due to its highly sensitive nature and dangers of validating the culture that generated it, he ethically defies literary representations of the Holocaust.

Sharing Adorno’s apprehension, Michael Wyschogrod expresses his revulsion for artistic expression of the Holocaust and any experience of catharsis out of the suffering:

I firmly believe that art is not appropriate to the holocaust. Art takes the sting out of suffering. It transforms suffering into a catharsis for which people are willing to pay money to experience [...] Therefore, art is pleasure even if the raw materials it works with are not. But no such catharsis can be derived from the holocaust. It must remain life and not art

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<sup>105</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Cultural Criticism and Society”, *Prisms*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1981, 34.

<sup>106</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Trying to Understand *Endgame*”, *Notes to Literature*, S. Weber Nicholsen (trans), vol. 2, Columbia University Press, New York 1991, 87-88.

<sup>107</sup> Mukadder Erkan, “Auschwitz’den Sonra Şiir: Theodor W. Adorno, Jacques Derrida Dolayımında Bir Paul Celan Okuması”, *Ayraç*, Mart 2010, 6, 35.

[...] Any attempt to transform the holocaust into art demeans the holocaust and must result in poor art.<sup>108</sup>

From Wyschogrod point, art both for purging the feelings and making money out of particular events is not a suitable arena to talk about the Holocaust. Promoting the inefficacy of language and any literary attempt in response to the Holocaust reality, Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi notes that “No symbolic universe grounded in humanistic beliefs could confront the Holocaust without the risk of being shaken to its foundations.”<sup>109</sup> Ezrahi, thus, reiterates the impossibility of conveying the Holocaust suffering appropriately through any form of art. Even though Wyschogrod and Ezrahi’s assertion about the impossibility of an artistic representation is debatable, the mere possibility of taking pleasure in and deriving profit out of human suffering does an injustice to the victims of any extreme events let alone the Holocaust. From the perspective of these scholars the possibility of causing injustice or empowering the perpetrator necessitates silence rather than artistic expressions.

Despite a strong belief in the need for maintaining silence and critics’ admonitions that language is an inadequate tool for conveying the catastrophic extent of the Holocaust and that literature can trivialise the matter, there are also some others who support writing about it. Taking a contrary view, Alvin Hirsch Rosenfeld, defies Adorno and others and believes in the necessity to talk for the sake of others. He writes “If it is a blasphemy, then, to attempt to write about the Holocaust, and an injustice against the victims, how much greater the injustice and more terrible the blasphemy to remain silent.”<sup>110</sup> The Holocaust, then, needs to be testified, and its victims must be heard, because described as “an event without witness”<sup>111</sup>, most of the Holocaust sufferers ended up dead or speechless. Only in this way, can the victims regain their subject position and start to leave the past behind. A Holocaust survivor and strong proponent of silence, Nobel winner Elie Wiesel wrote many Holocaust narratives although he, too, found language

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<sup>108</sup> Michael Wyschogrod, “Some Theological Reflections on the Holocaust”, *Response: A Contemporary Jewish Review* 25, Spring 1975, 68.

<sup>109</sup> Sidra DeKoven Ezrahi, *By Words Alone: The Holocaust in Literature*, University of Chicago Press, London 1980, 1.

<sup>110</sup> Alvin Hirsch Rosenfeld, *A Double Dying: Reflections on Holocaust Literature*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and London 1980, 14.

<sup>111</sup> Dori Laub, “An Event Without a Witness: Truth, Testimony and Survival”, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 75-92.

helpless in the face of this overwhelming experience. Pointing out the inability of language in the Holocaust case, Wiesel writes, “by its uniqueness, the holocaust defies literature”<sup>112</sup> as the enormity of the suffering is more than literature or any kind of art can suffice to fathom or describe. Wiesel appreciates some writers staying away from the subject of the Holocaust as a way of showing respect to the Holocaust victims.<sup>113</sup> However, he also acknowledges the existence of the witnesses who desperately need to testify. Therefore, through the responsibility of bearing witness as well as this urge to testify, he attempted to convey these inexpressible experiences and horrors in his works by aptly using silence. In the preface to his most acclaimed autobiographical novel *Night*, based on his days in concentration camps at Auschwitz and Buchenwald, Wiesel writes,

Convinced that this period in history would be judged one day, I knew that I must bear witness. I also knew that, while I had many things to say, I did not have the words to say them. Painfully aware of my limitations, I watched helplessly as language became an obstacle. It became clear that it would be necessary to invent a new language. But how was one to rehabilitate and transform words betrayed and perverted by the enemy? Hunger—thirst—fear—transport—selection—fire—chimney: these words all have intrinsic meaning, but in those times, they meant something else. Writing in my mother tongue—at that point close to extinction—I would pause at every sentence, and start over and over again. I would conjure up other verbs, other images, other silent cries. It still was not right. But what exactly was “it”? “It” was something elusive, darkly shrouded for fear of being usurped, profaned.<sup>114</sup>

Words gained new connotations with the Holocaust. The experiences in the camps ascribed meanings to these words which never sufficed to convey those experiences. That is why language fails when it comes to voice the inexpressibly catastrophic incidences. And when it fails, silence and pauses prevail.

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<sup>112</sup> Elie Wiesel, *One Generation After*, Lily Edleman, (trans.) Random House, New York, 1970, 10.

<sup>113</sup> Elie Wiesel, “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration”, *Dimensions of the Holocaust*, Elliot Lefkowitz (ed.), Northwestern University Press, Illinois 1996, 5-19.

<sup>114</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night*, Marion Wiesel (trans.), Penguin Books, London 2006, viii-ix.



Keeping a silence in memory of the dead is a prevalent practice in many world cultures. Accordingly, we are requested to keep silent when we visit concentration camps, memorials or other venues of atrocities in order to respect the memory of the victims and their sufferings. “Silence,” as Anna Richardson says, “is the realm of the dead, who are literally rendered voiceless by the fact of being no longer alive.”<sup>115</sup> As the dead cannot speak, the survivors’ revelation of their experiences in the form of speech or writing can betray their memories. However, the urge to testify renders language as the only agent to haven; while voicing the unspeakable, a discursive silence can speak powerfully. For that reason, some twentieth century authors extensively have had recourse to silence in their attempts to refer to the events of their times. Ihab Habib Hassan, exemplifying Samuel Beckett’s and Henry Miller’s works, propounds a new literature, addressing Dachau and Hiroshima: a literature of silence where silence is profoundly pervasive.<sup>116</sup> In their works, silence signifies the possibility of an unmediated communication as well as exposing and magnifying the inadequacy of language. Their literary works take on the burden of conveying to the audience a reality that is incomprehensible in fictionalised or symbolised versions. No matter how difficult it is to express the Holocaust experience, the literary outputs, to some extent, may attempt to reflect it and educate their audiences who are unfamiliar or naive about the subject. In this respect, they encourage the audiences to confront this suffering and share the responsibility. Adorno himself, motivated by Nelly Sachs and Paul Celan’s remarkable Holocaust poetry, recanted in his *Negative Dialectics* (1966), writing that “[t]he enduring suffering [that] has as much right to expression as does the tortured man to scream; therefore it may have been wrong that after Auschwitz poetry could no longer be written.”<sup>117</sup> He also asserted in “Commitment” that “[i]t is now virtually in art alone that suffering can still find its own voice, consolation, without immediately being betrayed by it.”<sup>118</sup> Unable to resist the urge to express this pain Adorno ultimately admits the possibility of poetry after what happened in Auschwitz, and sets art and literature as the severe imperative of finding ways of expression to represent the

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<sup>115</sup> Anna Richardson, “The Ethical Limitations of Holocaust Literary Representation”, issue 5: Borders and Boundaries, *eSharp*, Summer 2005, 4.

<sup>116</sup> Ihab Habib Hassan, “Literature of Silence”, *Encounter*, vol.20, no.1, January 1967.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*, Routledge, New York and London 1999, 8.

<sup>118</sup> Theodor W Adorno, “Commitment”, *Aesthetics and Politics: The Key Texts of the Classic Debate Within German Marxism*, Ronald Taylor (trans. & ed.), Verso, London 2002, 188.

unrepresentable. Even if Auschwitz did not de-authorise literature completely, with all its unprecedented atrocities, it challenged and radically altered the nature of literature. As Wiesel succinctly informs, “If the Greeks invented tragedy, the Romans the epistle, and the Renaissance the sonnet, our generation invented a new literature, that of testimony.”<sup>119</sup> Literature has become a site for speaking what is unspeakable, a site for bearing witness to what has happened.

Although unspeakability of trauma is first and foremost connected with the Holocaust and its legacy, all other sufferings causing trauma especially those in the times of war or similar catastrophes are not distinctly different from the Holocaust case. These experiences may not be equal to the experience of a Holocaust victim witnessing their parents’, siblings’ or others’ death by being beaten, gassed, or shot; however, the experiences of the ones—either civilians or soldiers—being raped, shot or tortured, and seeing others killed violently are also extremely difficult, which is similarly hard to narrate or represent. They all encounter the cold and frightening face of death and fall speechless in the face of trauma. It is troublesome to the same degree to portray their suffering without fuelling pleasure with their suffering. It is, however, equally important to make their voices heard. Because, turning a blind eye to what is going on in the world and what people living in the middle of war are experiencing is not the solicited response. As Elie Wiesel puts it “(s)ilence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.”<sup>120</sup> Looking away from the sufferers and abdicating them does not alleviate their pain but exacerbates it as their wound ‘cries out’ seeking expression.

The conflict between the inexpressibility of the trauma and the need for articulation is also central in trauma theory. It defies the ability to talk about the event as it is not possible to fully grasp it; yet, alongside this defiance, it seeks for voice and acknowledgement. Judith Herman succinctly expresses this predicament which she describes as the ‘central dialectic of trauma’ as “a conflict between the will to deny horrible events and the will to proclaim them aloud.”<sup>121</sup> She posits narrative as a powerful and empowering therapeutic tool that enables this proclamation and the integration of the

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<sup>119</sup> Wiesel, 1996, 9.

<sup>120</sup> Elie Wiesel, “Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech”, 1986. Retrieved on 16 March 2017, <[http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel\\_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-acceptance.html](http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/peace/laureates/1986/wiesel-acceptance.html)>

<sup>121</sup> Herman, 1997, 1.

traumatic experience. Even though trauma is anti-narrative with the initial shock, it later generates the production of retrospective narratives that attempt to explicate trauma event. These narratives, in this way, may make the trauma perceivable and audible.

In its widely accepted definition, trauma is referred to as an event or experience that resists language and representation. Modern trauma literature, concordantly, points to the problems of referentiality posed by trauma. Caruth, for instance, focuses on the inherent unrepresentability of the trauma event, but without ruling out the reference altogether. While denying the possibility of direct representation she argues for a belated and indirect referentiality and writes that “understanding of trauma in terms of its indirect relation to reference, does not deny or eliminate the possibility of reference but insists, precisely, on the inescapability of its belated impact.”<sup>122</sup> Because of this, after a period of latency, trauma can be expressed and understood, but only through literary and symbolic language which provides access to history and memory. Moreover, most of the trauma theorists from Freud to Caruth and Fellman to LaCapra turned to literature for “literary readings [...] add something, or speak something that theory cannot say.”<sup>123</sup> Besides, the increasing interest in trauma studies in the last three decades has resulted in prolific publishing of both fictional and non-fictional trauma narratives. This growing relationship between trauma and literature has established trauma theory as an important critical category of literary studies. Various contemporary authors have had so great an insight into modern trauma theory, which brought about a new evolving genre, referred to as ‘trauma fiction’ “in which each [trauma theory and literature] speaks to and addresses the other.”<sup>124</sup>

Due to its overwhelming, amnesiac and incomprehensible nature, a new representational approach has been necessary to interpret trauma. Although using real experiences is more striking and believable for the audience than non-realistic, figurative representations, many critical theorists favour fictional representations of trauma, because, through their symbolic language and experimental styles, fictional narratives can appropriately convey the experience of trauma and those narratives can “incorporate the rhythms, processes, and uncertainties of trauma within the consciousness and structures

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<sup>122</sup> Caruth, 1996, 7.

<sup>123</sup> Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2004, 4.

<sup>124</sup> Whitehead, 2004, 4.

of these works.”<sup>125</sup> Employing techniques such as figurative language, authors can represent shattered identities, dissociations, fragmented memories and make traumatic experience more real and accessible to its audience. Whitehead argues that “traditional literary realism may not be suited for rendering traumatic events.”<sup>126</sup> “Trauma fiction,” she observes, “often demands of the reader a suspension of disbelief and novelists frequently draw on the supernatural” to suggest “that there has been a rupture of the symbolic order” and that hence “[t]he real can no longer appear directly or be expressed in a conventional realist mode.”<sup>127</sup> As traditional narrative is inadequate to represent the exceptional nature of trauma, “the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection.”<sup>128</sup> Ronald Granofsky, on the other hand, termed a new subgenre, “trauma novel”<sup>129</sup>, to categorise novels that appeared after 1945 such as those written by Margaret Atwood, J. M. Coetzee, Doris Lessing and William Golding, depicting the impacts of collective and individual traumas and the protagonists’ reaction to them through figurative language. Likewise, playwrights such as Samuel Beckett, Sarah Kane and Harold Pinter, attempted to stage fictional representations of trauma events making use of techniques that depart from conventional linear sequence and narrative forms in order to depict the nature and experience of trauma conveniently.

The power of fictional narratives through symbolic language in representing trauma is undeniable. It is, however, impossible to ignore the use of the realistic mode as it is equally as effective as non-realistic modes in representing trauma. As an example of this tendency to use realities in expressing trauma, I will discuss verbatim theatre in the next chapter, a category to which one of the plays, explored in this thesis, belongs.

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<sup>125</sup> Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction*, University of Virginia Press, Charlottesville VA 2002, xiv.

<sup>126</sup> Whitehead, 2004, 87.

<sup>127</sup> Whitehead, 2004, 84.

<sup>128</sup> Whitehead, 2004, 3.

<sup>129</sup> Ronald Granofsky, *Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster*, Peter Lang, New York 1995.

## CHAPTER TWO

### TRAUMA, WAR AND THEATRE

#### 2.1. TRAUMA AND THEATRE

All theatre ... is a cultural activity deeply involved  
with memory and haunted by repetition.

Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage*

Inspired by Solomon Anski's Yiddish theatre classic, *Dybbuk* (1920), Julia Pascal in the third play of her *Holocaust Trilogy* with the same title, *The Dybbuk* (1992), revisits the myth of dybbuk which means the soul of a person who dies prematurely. The play opens with a description of a visit to Germany by Judith, a British Jew, who cannot banish the memories of the generation lost to the Nazis, so is haunted by her own dybbuks. The next scene changes to a ghetto during World War II, revealing Judith as one of five Jews waiting for the Nazis to come and take them. Anticipating their harrowing doom, these Jewish people start to tell tales and act out some parts of the tales. One shocking aspect of the play is that we witness people telling stories when they are about to face an incomprehensibly evil end. They do not have a fear of death; they neither cry over their terrible fate nor remain silent. Laub says "the survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories, they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive."<sup>130</sup> Characters in the play choose to tell stories and perform as a way of displaying a stance against death. Besides their cathartic function, the stories and enactments also empower them over life. They do not only function after the horrible event but also during the event itself. As trauma narratives by the survivors help them to avoid the terrible effects of the events, they also protect them before and during those events. They keep their minds busy by providing a kind of 'protective shield' between the victim and the catastrophic reality.

Although scholars posited close connections between trauma and literature and concentrated on literary trauma narratives, relatively little attention has been paid to the role of drama in relation to trauma despite the common grounds they share. There is a

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<sup>130</sup> Laub, 1992, 78.

relative scarcity of texts on the subject. Patrick Duggan's *Trauma Tragedy* (2015), in which Duggan investigates the extent to which theatre and performance can represent the unrepresentable, is one of the few texts concentrating on trauma and theatre. Addressing the performances of trauma, Duggan focuses on how those representations of trauma can be achieved and if they can help us understand trauma on personal and social levels. Christina Wald's *Performance Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama* is another influential text on the subject. Treating trauma as a cultural trope, Wald is mostly predominantly concerned with trauma related to domestic violence and sexual abuse. She discusses how contemporary plays embody the concepts of hysteria, trauma and melancholia, offering an in-depth reading of representative works by contemporary playwrights. Another work bringing trauma and performative studies into conversation is *Visions and Revisions: Performance, Memory, Trauma*, edited by Trezise Bryoni and Caroline Wake. It is comprised of various scholars' articles informed by the crucial themes of testimony, witness, trauma and spectatorship, investigating how performance and trauma studies "'envision' and 'revision' one another."<sup>131</sup> In addition to these texts, *Performance Research* dedicated the first issue of its Volume 16, which was edited by Patrick Duggan and Mick Wallis, to trauma and performance. The issue provides an important source for gaining insight into explorations of trauma in theatre with a range of academic articles mapping various affiliations between trauma, memory and performance. There are, as yet no sources that examine war trauma and its representations on stage, despite the many references to wars and their effects on the individual and on society.

In the earliest extant literary treatise on dramatic theory, *Poetics*, Aristotle firmly established 'mimesis', which carries connotations of 'imitation' and 'representation', as the principal source of theatre, and defined tragedy as "mimesis of an action that is complete, whole, and of magnitude."<sup>132</sup> Since then, imitation has remained its main purpose, and theatre has always been one of the most popular and highly concentrated sites for representing and resolving tragedies and contradictions of social existence through its imitative quality. The phenomena affecting societies deeply such as wars,

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<sup>131</sup> Bryoni Trezise, Caroline Wake, *Visions and Revisions: Performance, Memory, Trauma*, Museum Tusculanum Press, Copenhagen 2013, 13.

<sup>132</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics*, Stephen Halliwell (ed. and trans.), Harvard University Press, Cambridge 2014, 54.

diseases and political upheavals have found particular expression through plays at any period of theatre history. In this way, theatre has been an arena for the discussion of important incidents and it has also enabled memory of the past to stay alive with various plays, which served as outlets of traumatic and other forms of memories.

Freddie Rokem in *Performing History* evaluates Marcellus' question "What, has this thing appear'd again tonight" in Shakespeare's *Hamlet* as deeply evocative of the operations of the theatre itself. Emphasising the theatrical representations of the past, he says, "On the metatheatrical level, this question implies that the repressed ghostly figures and events from that ("real") historical past (re)appear on the stage in theatrical performances."<sup>133</sup> Drama, among all other literary forms, retells again and again the stories of the past, because of this, as Marvin Carlson comments, "The physical theatre, as a site of the continuing reinforcement of memory by surrogation, is not surprisingly among the most haunted of human cultural structures."<sup>134</sup> "All theatre" Carlson further argues as quoted in the above epigraph "is a cultural activity deeply involved with memory and haunted repetition."<sup>135</sup> By means of re-enacting, the stage activates the memory, and resurrects the past and its ghosts. It can be further claimed that just like traumatic visions haunting their survivors, the past and its figures repeatedly haunt the theatre stage, as intrusive ghosts, in order to find expression by re-enacting what has happened earlier.

Taking the basic tenets of theatre and the definitions of trauma by established trauma theorists into account, it is compelling to draw parallels between trauma and theatre as trauma symptoms themselves are inherently performative. The symptoms, just like memories of the past returning to be staged, are belated repetitions and re-enactments of a traumatic event. The act of repetition, then, obviously lies at the very core of both trauma theory and theatre. Caruth asserts that trauma cannot be understood or defined but can be repeatedly 're-enacted' through delayed returns of the traumatic event in the form of intrusive returns.<sup>136</sup> Felman, on the other hand, defines testimony as "the performance

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<sup>133</sup> Freddie Rokem, *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa City 2000, 6.

<sup>134</sup> Carlson, 2004, 2.

<sup>135</sup> Carlson, 2004, 11.

<sup>136</sup> Caruth, 1995, 4.

of a story.”<sup>137</sup> Another influential name in trauma theory who focuses on the performative elements in trauma, LaCapra points out the indispensable repetitive ‘acting out’ of the traumatic event that can only be eschewed by ‘working through’ which itself “is (also) undoubtedly a repetition.”<sup>138</sup> Considering these definitions and comments, trauma’s reliance on theatre and performance cannot be overlooked, and it will not be wrong to suggest that theatre is the best and most fertile context in which to represent and communicate trauma because of its inherent capacity to re-enact and imitate.

If we turn back to the beginning of the trauma genealogy, it can be seen that the history of trauma theory itself was marked by its inherent theatricality and performability. Producing a very disturbing example for the discourse of theatricality of trauma, it is an unfortunate fact that one of the greatest neurologist of his time, Charchot gave his lectures through applied practices. The lectures in *Salpêtrière* were held in form of theatrical shows using hypnotised and, when required, naked hysteric women as models in front of a large audience. During those theatrics, Charchot was inducing hysterical episodes using techniques such as exploding packages under patients’ noses and masturbating them in order to investigate, understand and cure hysteria. These practices, however, more than staged repetitions; were new traumas for the patients as they were more like torture than therapy. Similarly, Freud’s grandson’s for/da game for mastering his traumatic parting was again utterly theatrical. As these examples show, theatricality inhabits the field of trauma from very early beginnings, which demonstrates the connections between trauma and theatre.

Focusing on the common characteristics of trauma and performance, Duggan claims that the intrusive repetitions after a painful experience “amount to an internal mimetic, representational restaging of the trauma-event.”<sup>139</sup> To Duggan, “trauma, then, can be seen to rehearse, repeat and re-present itself in performed ‘ghosts’ that haunt the sufferer.”<sup>140</sup> All nightmarish re-enactments are performatively acted and watched by the actual experiencer of the traumatic event. As a result of these parallels, Duggan contends,

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<sup>137</sup> Shoshana Felman, “The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*”, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 206.

<sup>138</sup> LaCapra, 1996, 209.

<sup>139</sup> Patrick Duggan, *Trauma Tragedy: Symptoms of Contemporary Performance*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2015, 24.

<sup>140</sup> Duggan, 2015, 5.



“theatre/performance, more than any other art form, is perfectly placed to attempt a dialogue with, and even a representation of, trauma.”<sup>141</sup> Besides, Trezise and Wake evaluate “performance studies as a lens for trauma, trauma studies as a lens for performance”<sup>142</sup> recognising the mutual relationship between them. Just like a survivor who re-enacts the event affecting and haunting his life, drama has its own subjects and ghosts that come back asking to be performed. Because of this common nature of trauma and theatre, and thanks to its immediacy of representation, theatre provides a perfectly suited field for trauma representation and discussions as well as providing an opportunity to move away from it.

In the Preface to his *Plays Pleasant* Bernard Shaw plainly asserts “no conflict no drama”<sup>143</sup> underlining the indispensability of conflict in a play. Before that, Aristotle in his *Poetics* treats conflict as one of the key elements of drama. The conflict in theatre as Aristotle suggests can occur between humans, the human and society, the human and the environment, and in forms of inner conflict within the human himself. In a world which has suffered from countless wars and atrocities in the near past and is still suffering from ongoing conflicts, the stage cannot be expected to be apathetic. There are plenty of contemporary playwrights who recognise the effects of these problems and attempt to embody them in their works. The main conflict of the contemporary stage, as a response, has unarguably become war and its effects on individual, social and global levels. Duggan posits that “there is a modern/contemporary tragic theatre which might adequately and/or profitably engage with these traumas.”<sup>144</sup> Addressing these performances and plays and shedding light on the traumatic, Duggan coins the term ‘trauma tragedy’ which in his words is “a contemporary structure of feeling which is embodied in a performance mode that is acutely concerned with addressing the traumatic.”<sup>145</sup> Exemplifying ‘trauma tragedy’, many contemporary plays are devoted to highlight the existence of traumatic events of the era and to embody them. Those plays at the same time bridge the gap between these events and the audiences who are distanced by space and time.

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<sup>141</sup> Duggan, 2015, 8.

<sup>142</sup> Trezise and Wake, 2013, 13.

<sup>143</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Plays Pleasant*, Penguin Books, Middlesex 1987, 8.

<sup>144</sup> Duggan, 2015, 38.

<sup>145</sup> Duggan, 2015, 7.

“With respect to traumatic loss,” LaCapra notes, “acting out may well be a necessary condition for working through.”<sup>146</sup> Theatre, by acting traumatic out events, can gradually approach working through by enabling a view of trauma from a distance for the victims as well as the audience who experience trauma by proxy. It should be noted, however, that it is equally impossible for theatre of trauma to offer resolution or closure to the sufferings as that would be an utter underestimation of the traumatic event and a misunderstanding of the function of theatre in engaging trauma. At that critical point, we should revisit the functions of theatre. Instead of depicting a situation and suggesting solutions, while offering a simulation of the real, dramatic performances that are engaged with the traumatic happenings, can create a constant sense of traumatic presence. This “presence-of-trauma effect”, as Duggan puts it, can disturb and move the audience and lead them to re-examine the ways we think about the world, taking a stance and ethical action against these extreme happenings befalling others. Kaplan writes; “‘Witnessing’ thus involves a stance that has public meaning or importance and transcends individual emphatic or vicarious suffering to produce community.”<sup>147</sup> Theatre texts and performances, while enabling this community by inviting their audience as witness to those happenings and injustices, encumber them with a responsibility for future occurrences. Through the arguments they raise, they keep the audience’s capacity of judgement active and endow them with the opportunity to respond.

Based on exposure to media images of catastrophes, Kaplan asserts the likelihood of vicarious traumatising, which in the case of theatre, may also mean that it is possible for the audiences to be vicariously traumatised. Enabling empathy and forming a responsible society (by creating awareness of their relationship to the events and of their power to respond) may be the intended goal of theatrical representation of catastrophes, but it is still possible to be vicariously traumatised by what has been witnessed on the stage. Thanks to digital technologies, we have got used to being exposed to images of others’ suffering. They have become so prevalent that most of us are now numbed by the images. As Kaplan suggests, these images without content, continuity or background knowledge such as photographs from Iraq war can only elicit “empty empathy.”<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 70.

<sup>147</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 23.

<sup>148</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 100.

However, the immediacy and authenticity of the live event with a content on stage can have a more profound effect on its audience. The audience of a play is invited to confront some disturbing realities of the world and other people' suffering rather than glossing over them. The reality of being physically present and bearing a more immediate witness to trauma can destroy the spatial and emotional distance between the audience and the event by leading to an over-identification with the subject matter, and can even cause the experiencing of trauma symptoms. Particularly the texts or the performances of the relatively new documentary plays drawing from exact life experiences can cause extreme empathy and confusion to the point of blurring the distinction between what is real and what is not. In contrast to the mediated images of catastrophes and their effects on people, those plays give a broader picture and can go deeper into the inner lives of the protagonists portraying the profound wounds of traumas. Quoting an incident during a production of the tribunal play *Nuremberg*, co-edited by Nicholas Kent, Richard Taylor-Norton writes;

In *Nuremberg*, which I edited from transcripts on the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the war crimes trials, Hermann Göring makes a final speech in his defence. In the middle of it, one night, an elderly woman in the audience who had friends who perished in Auschwitz, shouted out, "Don't listen to him, it's all lies, lies, he's just telling lies." She then realised she was in the theatre and sat down and cried. That, Kent remarked later, encapsulated the power of this sort of theatre.<sup>149</sup>

When a member of the audience has memories related to the event, it is understandable that she might overreact, and others watching the realities about war and other atrocities, who do not have any memory of such kind of experience, can be vicariously traumatised.

The plays examined in this thesis, are either based on genuine testimonies of real veterans or fictive narratives. They invite their audiences to confront what has happened or is still happening in the world, bringing out inescapable traumatising, and aim to stimulate a sense of thought and action. As noted earlier, theatre, as a site of acting out,

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<sup>149</sup> Richard Norton-Taylor, "Richard Norton-Taylor: Verbatim Plays Pack More Punch than Papers", *The Guardian*, 22 Oct 2014. Retrieved 17 February 2017, from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/oct/22/richard-norton-taylor-verbatim-tribunal-plays-stephen-lawrence>

seeks to depict various real life experiences and situations, and thanks to this capacity and performative quality, it can embody trauma. However, it should be stated that theatre can never claim to replicate the experience of trauma. As trauma is a phenomenon which cannot be totally grasped or depicted by its own survivors, it will never be possible to do so through symbolic means in theatre or any other literary agency. It can solely attempt to portray the effects of the experience on the individual and society within the limits of language and performance, thus enabling a communication of trauma between victims and society.

Kaplan offers a succinct explanation of the capacity of art to address and alleviate the effects trauma saying;

Trauma can never be “healed” in the sense of a return to how things were before a catastrophe took place, or before one witnessed a catastrophe: but if the wound of trauma remains open, its pain may be worked through in the process of its being “translated” via art.<sup>150</sup>

With the acknowledgement of the impossibility of going back to the pre-catastrophic times, and healing trauma, plays discussed in this thesis, as Kaplan propounds, attempt to communicate the open wounds with their audiences while representing the traumas of war-torn lives.

## 2.2. WITNESSING TRAUMA AND VERBATIM THEATRE

Refusing to participate in what I will describe as the  
process of trauma creation, social groups restrict  
solidarity, leaving others to suffer alone.  
Jeffrey Alexander, “Toward a Theory of Cultural  
Trauma”

Give sorrow words: the grief that does not speak  
whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it break.

William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*

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<sup>150</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 19.

The twentieth and the beginning of the twenty-first centuries were marked by historical catastrophes, such as genocides, wars, political upheavals, and terrorist activities, have thus shaped the contemporary history. Testimony, as a primary response to all those traumatic events, has emerged in order to give voice to the people's suffering and to seek justice. As Gilmore observes, an abundance of testimonial narratives in public spheres has created a "culture of testimony."<sup>151</sup> Accordingly, this period is proposed as "an age of testimony"<sup>152</sup> or "the era of the witness."<sup>153</sup> In parallel with this, many approaches for understanding testimony and its links with trauma across many disciplines have developed.

In order to break the repetitious cycle of an intrusive past and to proceed from acting out to working through, a victim speaking about his experience of trauma has been considered essential. The role of the listener, equally, in the process of recovering from trauma, has a crucial place in the process of testimony. Besides articulating the impact of trauma on individuals and on entire cultures and nations, Kaplan, Caruth, Laub, and Felman also emphasise the need to translate these traumatic impacts into linguistic spheres and to share them with other people no matter how arduous the process might be. Asserting that "the history of a trauma, in its belatedness, can only take place through the listening of another"<sup>154</sup>, Caruth foregrounds a model of transmission through which the listener/witness is implicated in the traumatic sufferings of others. While appreciating Caruth's insistence on the unspeakability and unrepresentability of trauma, Kaplan suggests that narratives can partly achieve a working through as well as permitting an "emphatic sharing" that can move the victim forward if only by inches.<sup>155</sup>

In his research on the Holocaust, Laub, emphasises the function of talking about one's trauma, asserting that one cannot face these experiences alone and the recovery can become possible within the context of relationships. In this imperative process of telling, Laub notes, the listener acts as "the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed

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<sup>151</sup> Leigh Gilmore, *The Limits of Autobiography: Trauma and Testimony*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2001, 2.

<sup>152</sup> Shoshana Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*, or A Monument to Witnessing", *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 113.

<sup>153</sup> Annette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness*, Jared Stark (trans), Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2006.

<sup>154</sup> Caruth, 1995, 10-11.

<sup>155</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 37.

for the first time”<sup>156</sup> and at the same time “the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic event: through his very listening [...].<sup>157</sup> Speaking of their trauma, the victim becomes the witness who lived through the event and gives testimony while the listener becomes the secondary witness of the trauma, who validates what has happened. The presence of a listener, in this regard, makes the repetitive behaviour known to the victim by providing a sight of the event from a certain distance, and afterwards, turns trauma into an acknowledged part of the victim’s life.

Even though the presence of a listener is one of the indispensable constituents of testimony and has a powerful effect on the recovery period, it alone cannot be enough for progress, as it can still be problematic to create a complete account of what has happened. Elizabeth Jelin, addressing such issues involved in testimony, points out the obstacles and hindrances to the production of testimonies, due to the extreme nature of the situation that was lived through. People may fall silent because of their inability to express what they have lived and how they feel due to “semiotic incapacity”<sup>158</sup> as well as the fallible nature of the experience that is full of lapses and voids. She observes that this impossibility of a complete narration may also involve deliberate silence. Besides the sufferer’s incompetency, in all likelihood, testimony itself can be characterised by these very voids and lapses, what can and cannot be said, and what does or does not make sense for both the narrator and the listeners.<sup>159</sup> This can manifest itself in forms of fragmented, distorted and nonsensical verbalisms as reflections of the very nature of the event itself.

Taking the nature of the trauma event into consideration, it is understandable for a traumatised person to choose silence when confronted with the difficulty of putting that elusive content into words. It is, however, probable that the victims, either because of the breaches in the traumatic memory or the fear of reliving the traumatic incident, seek shelter in silence. Laub, opposing this voluntary choice of silence, warns the survivors of

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<sup>156</sup> Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening”, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 57.

<sup>157</sup> Laub, 1992, 58.

<sup>158</sup> Elizabeth Jelin, *State Repression and the Labors of Memory*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2003, 67.

<sup>159</sup> Jelin, 2003, 61.

the possible future dangers caused by incessant operations of the trauma in the victim's psyche:

None find peace in silence, even when it is their choice to remain silent. Moreover, survivors who do not tell their story become victims of a distorted memory, that is, of a forcibly imposed "external evil," which causes an endless struggle with and over a delusion. The "not telling" of the story serves as a perpetuation of its tyranny. The events become more and more distorted in their silent retention and pervasively invade and contaminate the survivor's daily life. The longer the story remains untold, the more distorted it becomes in the survivor's conception of it, so much so that the survivor doubts the reality of the actual events.<sup>160</sup>

The longer the trauma is kept inside untold, the more distorted it becomes and therefore it becomes urgent that it be told in order to get it out of one's system.

If we get back to the importance of being heard and, the role of a listener, the distance of the listener to the event and to the victim is another critical point worth considering. Formulating his findings on the matter of listening, LaCapra identifies two forms of listening. The first one involves empathy which is defined by LaCapra as "an affective relation, rapport, or bond with the other recognized and respected as other."<sup>161</sup> Empathic listening has a dual structure: it involves understanding and sharing the suffering of the survivor, without taking his place. This intended form of listening, which does not involve full identification with the victim, he calls "emphatic unsettlement."<sup>162</sup> It becomes dangerous, however, when the listener cannot keep a distance from the trauma and over-empathises with the victim, leading to "vicarious victimhood"<sup>163</sup> as LaCapra terms it. In the case of vicarious victimhood, he contends, "empathy with the victim seems to become an identity"<sup>164</sup> which runs the risk of "the indiscriminate generalisation of historical trauma into the idea of a wound culture or the notion that everyone is a somehow a victim."<sup>165</sup> This problematic identification and vicarious traumatising does

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<sup>160</sup> Laub, 1995, 64.

<sup>161</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 212-213.

<sup>162</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 78.

<sup>163</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 47, 2004, 125.

<sup>164</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 47.

<sup>165</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 77.

not only arise through listening; emphatic unsettlement can additionally be experienced while reading a written trauma narrative. Naming this type of narrative “life-testimony”, Felman asserts that these textual testimonies can “penetrate us like an actual event.”<sup>166</sup> Subsequently, they become a part of our lives, disturbing everyday actions and thoughts, and disrupting the operations of the psyche. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to retain a level of objectivity and to preserve the alterity of the victim, as well as offering an effective response while acting as a secondary witness to the trauma.

In the field of theatre, a new theatre form has emerged in tandem with the need to voice the sufferings of the victims and endow others with immediate and objective information. Although the tendency to use authentic documents and other materials in plays has generally been grouped under the umbrella term of documentary theatre, plays mostly based on verbal testimonies of people interviewed have been subcategorised as verbatim theatre. Frequently used interchangeably with documentary theatre, verbatim theatre, has found its widest expression in Britain and has been practised there since the 1970s. Opposing the equation of verbatim and documentary theatre, and emphasising the distinction between them, Stephen Bottoms argues that “where the latter might be said to imply the foregrounding of documents, of texts, the term ‘verbatim’ tends to fetishise the notion that we are getting things ‘word for word,’ straight from the mouths of those ‘involved’.”<sup>167</sup> As Bottoms contends, and its name suggests, verbatim theatre is heavily predicated upon the exact words of real people collected from interviews, speeches, news, and testimonies. The aim of these plays as Richard Norton Taylor suggests, is “to uncover and establish the most accurate version of events”<sup>168</sup> and, as David Lane puts it, “verbatim theatre often carries a promise to present the unmediated truth...a promise that it cannot hope to achieve.”<sup>169</sup> Derived from this desire for an authentic and more direct access to factual lived experience, David Hare uses the term “factual theatre”<sup>170</sup> for verbatim

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<sup>166</sup> Felman, 1992, 2.

<sup>167</sup> Stephen Bottoms, “Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?”, *The Drama Review*, 50(3), 2006, 59.

<sup>168</sup> Will Hammond, Dan Steward, *Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, Oberon Books, London 2008, 114.

<sup>169</sup> David Lane, *Contemporary British Drama*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2010, 43.

<sup>170</sup> David Hare, “On Factual Theatre”, *Talking to Terrorists*, Robin Soans, Oberon, London 2005, 111-113.



theatre which encourages a preoccupation with “authenticity” and equates to truthfulness and a correspondence to reality.

Although verbatim theatre is a relatively new practice which is becoming increasingly popular in the twenty-first century, the first emergence of verbatim in any form dates back to ‘Living Newspapers’ – first performed in Britain in 1935 with performances intended to communicate the “truth behind the headlines.”<sup>171</sup> Later the term appeared Derek Paget’s 1987 article “‘Verbatim Theatre’: Oral History and Documentary Techniques”. In his article, Paget traces Peter Cheeseman’s theatre practices, in the 1960s at the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent, which were based on interviews with local people and video-taped records. Recently, Will Hammond and Dan Steward in *Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre* (2008) explain the term and the process of creating a verbatim play as follows.

The term verbatim refers to the origins of the text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by a dramatist during an interview or research process, or are appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts in an official enquiry. They are then edited, arranged or recontextualised to form a dramatic presentation, in which actors take on the characters of real individuals whose words are being used.<sup>172</sup>

Devoted to telling the real stories of real people, especially those who have suffered or have been marginalised, this theatre, due to its role as witness, is renamed by some scholars as “theatre of testimony”<sup>173</sup> or the “theatre of witness.”<sup>174</sup> The use of verbal testimony and, accordingly, the rise of testimonial theatre, have proliferated in response to the terror attacks on the London Underground on 7 July 2005, the Pentagon and the Twin Towers on September 2001, and the following Iraq and Afghanistan Wars.

Due to the global unrest and increasing traumatic experiences across the world in the new millennium, verbatim plays enjoyed public recognition as well as a remarkable

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<sup>171</sup> John W. Casson, “Living Newspaper: Theatre and Therapy”, *The Drama Review*, Vol. 44(2), Summer 2000, 113.

<sup>172</sup> Hammond and Steward, 2008, 9.

<sup>173</sup> Melissa Salz, “Theatre of Testimony: The Works of Emily Mann, Anna Deavere Smith and Spalding Gray”, PhD Diss., University of Colorado, Boulder 1996.

<sup>174</sup> Karine Schaefer, “Theatre of Witness: The Challenges of Testimony in Contemporary Drama”, PhD Diss., New York University, New York 2003.

increase in the UK and USA. In the USA with the works of Emily Mann, Anna Deavere Smith, Eve Ensler and Tectonic Theatre Project, and in Britain with the productions of Tricycle Theatre, 7:84 Theatre Company, Liverpool Everyman and Out of Joint, verbatim theatre gained prominence. Twenty-first century stage, in parallel, witnessed an upsurge in verbatim plays reflecting the effects of trauma and social suffering as a result of the upheavals of the time. Luckhurst, commenting on the resurgence of the interest in testimony following September 11 writes:

The reasons for the apparent ‘explosion’ of verbatim theatre in the west are complex and seem to be bound up with widespread suspicion of governments and their ‘spin’ merchants, a distrust of the media and desire to uncover stories which may be being suppressed, and a western fetishization of representations of ‘the real’.<sup>175</sup>

In a world where there are strong suspicions about the governments and the objectivity of the media, those plays have become alternative sources of information and the documents they use have become, in Peter Weiss’ words, “segments of reality” which “are the only weapons against an untrustworthy news media.”<sup>176</sup> Some of the plays edited or compiled with a yearning for actuality and reality in Britain are Robin Soan’s *Talking to Terrorists*, Guardian reporter Richard Norton-Taylor’s *Nuremberg* (1996), David Hare’s plays such as *Via Dolorosa* (1998), *The Permanent Way* (2003), and *Stuff Happens* (2004), and Gregory Burke’s quasi-verbatim play *Black Watch*. Two of the plays that will be explored in the following chapters, and Owen Sheers’ *Two Worlds of Charlie F.* are among others concerned with the effects of war on British soldiers who went to Iraq and Afghanistan. Based on the authentic testimonies of real war veterans, these plays portray the traumatic effects of war on former soldiers’ lives during and afterwards.

As well as standing as a reaction to misinformation and the mass media, as David Hare asserts, verbatim theatre aims to give “voice to voiceless.”<sup>177</sup> Thanks to this capacity, enabling a site for performing personal testimony and witnessing, verbatim

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<sup>175</sup> Mary Luckhurst, “Verbatim Theatre, Media Relations and Ethics”, *A Concise Companion to Contemporary British and Irish Drama*, N. Holdsworth and M. Luckhurst (eds.), Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2008, 200.

<sup>176</sup> Gary Fisher Dawson, *Documentary Theatre in the United States: An Historical Survey and Analysis of Its Content, Form and Stagecraft*, Greenwood Press, London 1999, 15.

<sup>177</sup> Deirdre Heddon, *Autobiography and Performance*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire 2008, 128.

plays seem to be one of the perfect fields for giving voice to the silenced by the virtue of their sufferings and exploring trauma. On the other hand, while verbatim theatre relies on direct language, trauma is, by its very nature, incomprehensible and unspeakable, which means there is an incongruity between verbatim theatre and trauma. Highlighting this issue, Amanda Stuart-Fisher writes “the challenge trauma places upon verbatim theatre, then, concerns the problem of how a dramaturgical strategy, constituted on the promise of direct communicable experience, can authentically engage with that which stands radically beyond language.”<sup>178</sup> As it is explained before, trauma experience can never be fully portrayed or communicated through means of language. Using authentic testimonies to illustrate social, political and psychological violence suffered by people, verbatim plays encourage a critical engagement and communication with the audience, rather than duplicating the experience of trauma which is beyond the limits of language and any means of expression. As will be discussed, exemplifying verbatim theatre, *Two Worlds of Charlie F.* includes amnesiac memories and repetitive flashbacks and fragmented scenes from trauma events rather than attempting to reflect trauma in a holistic and linear way. Putting traumatic experiences of the victims on the stage these plays aim at raising awareness while enabling a relief for the sufferers represented on the stage as they are heard and able to share their pain. While analysing the plays and their depictions of trauma, instead of sticking to the claims of authenticity such as replicating the fragmented traumatic experiences of veterans, I will take into consideration those plays’ capacity to reflect the real effect of war on real subjects and to create a space for communication of the real sufferings which enables healing to a certain extent. Because, as Laub asserts “for only when the survivor knows he’s being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to himself” and he further observes,

Bearing witness to a trauma is, in fact, a process that includes the listener. For the testimonial process to take place, there needs to be a bonding, the instrument and total presence of an other—in the position of one who hears. Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The

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<sup>178</sup> Amanda Stuart-Fisher, “Trauma, Authenticity and Limits of Verbatim”, *Performance Research*, Volume 16, issue 1, 2011, 114.

witnesses are talking to somebody: to somebody they have been waiting for a long time.<sup>179</sup>

Plays studied here, engaging with the traumatic consequences of war on people provide this essential listener with the real testimonies on stage making the testimonial process possible. In so doing, they reshape cultural memory through personal context and while bearing witness, they attempt to prevent such repetitive horrors.

### 2.3. STAGING WAR

In order to orient ourselves into the present and the future, we utilise experiences and recollections of the past; this is how memories promote meaning. Twentieth century literature, in parallel with the concerns of the era, abounds in accounts and memoirs of wars, catastrophes and millennial fears through plays, poems and novels, composing part of a national literary consciousness. Ever since Homer's *Illiad*, war has been a prominent subject of all literary genres. Hegel sees theatre as the best medium for representations of wars and conflicts. Being a quintessential site for staging conflict, theatre history, accordingly, seethed with representations of various kinds of war and conflict. Following the Great War, London West End witnessed a drastic fall in the production of experimentalist and realist plays partly due to the expectations and tastes of the audience who were seeking 'escapist nights out' with revues, music-hall sketches and farces as a resistance to the realistic representations of fear and suffering of the war.<sup>180</sup> Productions related to the phenomenon of war were celebrating the courage and self-sacrifice of the common soldiers, idealising the war and allowing audience to identify themselves with the characters through patriotic propagandas. Ninety per cent of the theatre-goers at that time, according to Clive Barker and Maggie Gale, were soldiers.<sup>181</sup> Similarly, British playwright Bernard Shaw suggested that war changed the theatre but "the change [was] not in the theatres, not in the management of them, nor in the authors and actors, but in the audiences. For four years the London theatres were crowded every night with

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<sup>179</sup> Laub, 1992, 70, 71.

<sup>180</sup> Mary Luckhurst, *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880-2005*, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford 2006, 302.

<sup>181</sup> Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds.), *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2000, 11.

thousands of soldiers on leave from the front.”<sup>182</sup> Addressing the needs of the audience, many plays, then, were written on themes of war. The war was such a prevalent subject in the plays that between the Great War and the outbreak of the Second World War “there was not a single year without a war play of one kind or another.”<sup>183</sup>

Many of the earlier plays such as J. E. Harold Terry and Lechmere Worrall’s *The Man Who Stayed at Home* (1914) and Terry’s *General Post* (1917) were patriotic propaganda simply praising gallantry and celebrating sacrifice. Many other plays on war had the same concerns. “Conventional dramas expressing opposition to the war, however, generally did not get past the censor or the theatre producers.”<sup>184</sup> This is the reason why London stages were full of heroic portrayals of war during those times. On the other hand, despite strict censorship at the time, one of the fervent opponents of the war, Shaw, repeatedly rebelled against censorship, and in his preface to *Heartbreak House* (1920) pointing out the futility of war and emphasising the need for revealing the true nature of it through theatre, wrote that

War cannot bear the terrible castigation of comedy, the ruthless light of laughter that glares on stage. When men are heroically dying for their country, it is not the time to show their lovers and wives and fathers and mothers how they are being sacrificed to the blunders of boobies, the cupidity of capitalists, the ambition of conquerors, the electioneering of demagogues, the Pharisaism of patriots, the lusts and lies and rancors and bloodthirsts that love war because it opens their prison doors, and sets them in the thrones of power and popularity. For unless these things are mercilessly exposed they will hide under the mantle of the ideals on the stage as they do in real life.<sup>185</sup>

Believing that people die for insane causes, Shaw exposed the realities of war instead of romanticising it in some other works such as *O’Flaherty V.C* (1915), *The Inca of Perusalem* (1917), and *Annajanska*, and *The Bolshevik Empress* (1918) and outspokenly

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<sup>182</sup> Bernard Shaw, *Heartbreak House, Great Catherine, Playlets of the War*, Brentano’s, New York 1919, xii.

<sup>183</sup> Heinz Kosok, *The Theatre of War: The First World War in British and Irish Drama*, Palgrave Macmillan, London 2007, 4.

<sup>184</sup> Luckhurst, 2006, 304.

<sup>185</sup> Shaw, 1919, liv.

criticised war and the people profiting from it while some people are dying for their bloodthirstiness.

However, despite censorship and antipathy aroused in the audience, who sought to escape from trauma and losses of war through these conventional entertainments, war glorifying propagandas and cravings for national heroes in establishing a national identity left their places to criticisms. At the time a number of plays appeared negotiating and reflecting anti-war themes without taking any precaution to distance the audience from the very realities of war. The most famous among them extending to the present day and keeping its resonance with the anti-war messages was R. C. Sherriff's *Journey's End* (1928). William Aubrey Darlington commented on the play as "one of the most completely absorbing plays ever written"<sup>186</sup> because its unheroic and questioning nature brilliantly reflected the degradation of war. After its first performance at the Apollo Theatre, it soon transferred to the West End and ran for 594 performances over two years. Even after the Second World War, the First World War was the subject of many plays, as in Joan Littlewood's political documentary of the war, *Oh What a Lovely War* (1963), which took a critical stance and revealed the horrors of war through a common soldier's eyes.

In September 1939, theatres in Britain plunged into darkness following the declaration of the Second World War. In London, the Little Theatre, Shaftesbury and Queen's Theatre were bombed by the Germans; the Royal Court, the Old Vic and the Duke of York were also badly damaged. After a very short closure, however, all theatres were to reopen, and were again crowded with large numbers of soldiers on leave who were seeking entertainment. The motivation behind the opening of theatres was not only to distract audiences from the effects of war, but more importantly it was because the theatre was seen as a means of asserting the values of the civilised world against the cruel world of Nazism.<sup>187</sup>

Partly because they realised the theatre's propaganda potential, and hoped to use it during the war, the British government began to support the performing arts. In 1943,

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<sup>186</sup> William Aubrey Darlington, *Six Thousand and One Nights*, Harrap, London 1960, 154.

<sup>187</sup> Anselm Heinrich, "Theatre in Britain during the Second World War", *New Theatre Quarterly*, 26 (1), 2010, 62.

with the primary purpose of entertaining the British military, The Entertainments National Service Association (ENSA) was founded by Basil Dean and Leslie Henson. Soon after that, in order to support and preserve the British culture, the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA) was set up, which, in 1945, became the Art Council of Great Britain. Thanks to the introduction of state subsidies and support, performing arts flourishing and “for the first time in history the state recognized the drama as one of the sinews of the national soul, and this was the most important thing that had happened to the British theatre since the birth of Shakespeare.”<sup>188</sup>

However, theatre, from then on, was not free from state intervention. For the purpose of reminding people of Britain’s great cultural heritage and perfectly corresponding to the state’s concept of entertainment, first of all, classical drama was revived and many Shakespearean classics started their runs during the course of the war. As Heinrich stresses, the “entertainment for the forces and the civilian population was of the highest importance”<sup>189</sup> as it was a good way of keeping people’s minds busy without being political. Another immense success was enjoyed by popular comedy. According to Tony Howard and John Stokes, “the largest number of financially successful war plays belong to the category of farce, the genre in which, by tradition, death is overcome”<sup>190</sup> and that was what the society needed most. Some of the great comic successes of the time were R. F. Delderfield’s *Worm’s Eye View* (1945), Hugh Hasting’s *Seagulls over Sorento* (1949), and Colin Morris’ *Reluctant Heroes* (1950).

Toward the end of the century, the Second World War was definitely not the only subject to write about. Peter Brook’s documentary drama *US* (1966), for instance, deals with the US intervention in Vietnam in 1966. Similarly, Louise Page’s *Falklands Sound* (1983), composed of letters and personal interviews as documentary evidences, represented the Falklands War. Inspired by wars in former Yugoslavia, David Edgar wrote his play *Pentecost* (1994), and John McGrath wrote *Events While Guarding Bofors Guns* (1966) on the timely subject of the Cold War. Sarah Kane’s *Blasted* (1995), on the other hand, was written in response to the war in Bosnia. Her contemporaries, who are

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<sup>188</sup> Bernard Miles, *The British Theatre*, Collins, London 1948, 44.

<sup>189</sup> Heinrich, 2010, 62.

<sup>190</sup> Howard and Stokes, 1996, 8.

members of a new writing so called in-yer-face drama, also continued to refer to wars and terrorism around the world in their works.

Edward Bond in his trilogy *The War Plays* (1985) examined the trauma and destruction of war, and another trilogy *Chair Plays* (2012) is again related to war and its effect on people. One of the greatest living values of the British theatre, Caryl Churchill, frequently referred to wars and criticised them in her plays such as *This is a Chair* (1999), *Far Away* (2000) and *Seven Jewish Children* (2009). Many other contemporary playwrights, acknowledging the ongoing role of war in shaping the British identity, as their predecessors did, filled their plays with predictions of future wars and conflicts as well as the present ones, and portrayed their possible scales and consequences. They aptly used stage to recreate events in history, generally aimed at provoking painful confrontations rather than stopping wars.

In the new millennium war and terrorism continued to be a compelling topics and many contemporary playwrights have also written powerfully against war. The incidents of 9/11, the subsequent Iraq, Afghanistan Wars and their traumatising effects on the public consciousness have become one of the most ubiquitous and abiding subjects in literature, and film as well as on the internet. Multiple and long deployments of military personnel, witnessing the death of their peers and many civilians, have taken incidences of trauma to a high level. The traumatising experiences, both during the war and after returning home, and their relationships back in their home country and difficulties in adapting to civilian life have become one of the central themes of contemporary plays. An array of fictional and nonfictional works related to traumatic experiences and their representation have emerged. In the following chapters some of these plays concerning war and its traumatic effects informed by contemporary trauma theories will be analysed.



## CHAPTER THREE

### DISTURBING REMAINS ON STAGE

#### 3.1. A NARRATIVE OF TRAUMATIC HAUNTING AND THE IMPENDING LEGACY OF THE HOLOCAUST: HAROLD PINTER'S *ASHES TO ASHES*

No one / bears witness for the / witness.

Paul Celan, "Ash Glory"

Even in this place one can survive, and therefore one  
must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear  
witness.

Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

We, the survivors, are not true witnesses [...] we are  
those who by their prevarications or abilities or good  
luck did not touch bottom. Those who did so, those  
who saw the Gorgon, have not returned to tell about  
it.

Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*

Directed by Claude Lanzmann, the 9 hour and 26-minute-long documentary *Shoah* (1985) starts with an interview with Simon Srebnik, one of the two Holocaust survivors of Chelmno in Poland where the Jews were for the first time exterminated by gas. Srebnik goes back to where he witnessed the suffering and death of many people including his parents during the Nazi genocide. In the opening scene, when they arrive at the former camp yard in which stoves and gas chambers were situated, he declares:

No one can describe it.

No one can... recreate what happened here.

Impossible! And no one can understand it. Even I, here now.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Claude Lanzmann (Writer and Director), *Shoah* [Documentary], New Yorker Films, USA 1985.

Just as Primo Levi proposes in the epigraph above, and similarly as the survivor Srebnik puts it, the horrific experience of the Holocaust has defied description due to its gruesome uniqueness. All in the same breath, at the same time, as the second epigraph above from *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986) asserts, these inexpressible experiences have claimed expression. These two contradicting assertions by the same author evoke one of the most quoted sayings by Adorno, that “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”<sup>192</sup> which he later revised into the thought that the suffering has right to be expressed by the very art it defies.<sup>193</sup> Adorno, for the fear of aestheticising this unspeakable pain and Levi, pointing out the impossibility of describing what happened to the Holocaust victims, expressed their suspicion about the inability and impossibility of an authentic depiction. Yet, at the same time, they could not resist the need for a literary verbalisation of this pain, and therefore, emphasised the need for articulating it in art and literature as a means of bearing witness.

One of the playwrights who could not resist the need for the articulation of the Holocaust’s pain has been Harold Pinter. Starting his playwriting career during the absurdist boom in the 1950s and 1960s, one of the most challenging, controversial, and world-wide influential British dramatist and screenwriter Pinter was born to a lower middle class Jewish family in 1930. His father was a tailor, and young Pinter grew up in the East End, a working class area in London. Although he started out as an actor, after briefly studying at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, he wrote his first short play, *The Room* in 1957 and his playwriting career ultimately spanned some fifty years. Being inspired by Samuel Beckett, and considered as “heir to some of Ibsen’s theatrical and thematic innovations”,<sup>194</sup> Pinter created his own distinctive style. His plays are particularly renowned for their use of understatement, reticence, small talk and deep silences to convey characters’ thoughts and feelings.

In a 1993 interview with Mel Gussow, when asked whether he would ever write a play on the subject of the Holocaust, 2005 Nobel Prize winner for literature Pinter replied, “I don’t know. There’s something in me that wants to do something about it. It’s

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<sup>192</sup> Adorno, 1981, 34.

<sup>193</sup> Adorno, 2002, 188.

<sup>194</sup> İbrahim Yerebakan, “Ibsen’s Importance to Harold Pinter”, 10th International Ibsen Conference, Long Island University, Brooklyn, New York 1-7 June 2003.

<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.694.9910&rep=rep1&type=pdf>

so difficult".<sup>195</sup> Even though Pinter was aware of the almost impossible nature of writing on this gruesome event, he later, in 1996, embarked on this challenging subject and penned *Ashes to Ashes*, arguably one of the most stunning examples of English theatre about the Holocaust. The impulse for this play, Michael Billington informs us in his biography of Pinter, came after Pinter's reading of Gitta Sereny's book on the life of Albert Speer who was Hitler's Chief Architect (1933-45) and Minister for Armaments and War Productions (1942-45).<sup>196</sup> Written in one act, *Ashes to Ashes* had its world premiere production by Toneelgroep, a repertory company based in Amsterdam. The play was first presented in the UK by the Royal Court at the Ambassadors theatre in London on 12 September 1996, directed by Pinter himself.

Attempts to categorise Pinter's oeuvre have always been problematic, as his plays have resisted any clear-cut categorisations. Theatre critic Martin Esslin, prior to the production of *Ashes to Ashes*, makes a broad distinction between two phases of Pinter plays:

Whereas all his previous work was enigmatic, multi-layered, relying on pauses, silences, and a subtext of far greater importance than what was actually said, these later pieces operate unambiguously on the surface, even relying on voice-overs to make characters' thoughts crystal clear and proclaiming a message of blinding simplicity, a message which is a call to political action.<sup>197</sup>

*Ashes to Ashes* both is and isn't compatible with these previous dramatic modes of Pinter. It signals a slight shift from the private worlds of his previous plays as he again makes use of the private life of a couple but amalgamates it with the more public terrain of politics. Starting ostensibly with a couple's private relationship and their memories of a former love affair, the play all of a sudden delves into memories of the Holocaust and links a collective memory of it with the private memories of a woman who has no experience of the Holocaust. Gradually the distinction between the relationship and the

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<sup>195</sup> Mel Gussow, *Conversations with Pinter*, Nick Hern Books, London 1994, 137.

<sup>196</sup> Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter*, Faber and Faber, London 2007, 374.

<sup>197</sup> Martin Esslin, "Harold Pinter's Theatre of Cruelty", *Pinter at Sixty*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1993, 27.

Holocaust, as well as between reality and fantasy are blurred, and the present becomes acutely intermingled with the legacy of a recent past that does not obviously include the characters.

Unfortunately, the first performances of the play did not get positive reactions since many theatregoers had difficulty in understanding what the play is about. Unlike his earlier plays, the time and characters were recognizable but none of them were incompatible with the subjects they were discussing. And even though the play is about the Holocaust, they could not find any explicit reference or mentioning the Holocaust or Nazis. Therefore, the audiences were puzzled and left theatres unsatisfied. Hence, they criticised the play, commenting that the show was not worth the money they paid. However, it was not only the theatregoers who were puzzled, theatre critics also were perplexed by the elusiveness of the play. Charles Spencer in his review of the play in *The Daily Telegraph* similarly expressed his discontent stating, “*Ashes to Ashes* often comes across as a pale imitation of [Pinter’s] own earlier – and better – work ... the suspicion grows that this time the emperor really might not be wearing any clothes.”<sup>198</sup> Pinter was also aware of the negative criticisms and comments. In an interview with Mark Taylor-Batty, Lindsay Duncan, one of Pinter’s trusted female actors says that before one performance, aware of this public dissatisfaction, Pinter himself told them “you know that a lot of people hate my work. I mean really hate my work and you’re going to be in the firing line”.<sup>199</sup> Pinter did not try to explain the subject matter but simply left this complex case to be slowly understood and digested by his audiences.

Providing insight into Pinter’s works, Mark Batty observes, “Opening the door to Pinter’s plays involves sitting through them, not simply reading the black ink on white paper of their text.”<sup>200</sup> He accepts Pinter’s plays’ enigmatic structures as an intrinsic part of their theatrical fabric and further elaborates that the audience can recognise its “own motives, behaviour or fears in the on-stage incarnations presented.”<sup>201</sup> Similarly, *Ashes*

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<sup>198</sup> Quoted in Yael Zarhy-Levo, *The Making of Theatrical Reputations: Studies from the Modern London Theatre*, University of Iowa Press, Iowa 2008, 199.

<sup>199</sup> Mark Batty, *About Pinter: The Playwright and the Work*, Faber & Faber, London 2005, 198.

<sup>200</sup> Mark Batty, *Harold Pinter*, Northcote House, Devon 2001, 4.

<sup>201</sup> Batty 2001, 4.

*to Ashes* demands an active engagement from its audience and hides several layers of meaning within an ostensible story.

Despite the fact that *Ashes to Ashes* is most abstruse in its representation of the Holocaust, it nevertheless remains Pinter's most direct investigation of the Nazi genocide. The subject of the Holocaust also resonates across some other plays by Pinter, but not as strongly as in *Ashes to Ashes*. Harold Bloom in the introduction to *Harold Pinter* remarks that "His art has some undefined but palpable relation to the holocaust"<sup>202</sup>. As a representative of his (the twentieth) century which is tainted with war and the Holocaust, it is not surprising to see reverberations of these catastrophes in his plays. In an interview with Mark Taylor-Batty, Pinter himself accepts that besides *Ashes to Ashes* where he deliberately addresses the Holocaust, his first full-length play, *The Birthday Party* (1958), is unintentionally informed by his post-holocaust consciousness:

Well by the time I got to *Ashes to Ashes* I was certainly conscious of it, it would be stupid to say I wasn't. But *The Birthday Party* – I think it was much more ... unconscious [...] The idea of two men coming into a room and subjecting a third man to what they subject him to I'm sure I was affected by my knowledge of the Holocaust.<sup>203</sup>

In *The Birthday Party*, Pinter assigns Nazi-like qualities to the Jewish character Goldberg, and similarly to the characters Ben and Gus in *The Dumb Waiter* (1960). Exemplifying his political theatre, *The Mountain Language* (1988), likewise, focuses on the brutalities of a society that forbids a minority of its population to speak their own language. He wrote *The Mountain Language* after he paid a visit to Turkey with Arthur Miller in 1985, and was affected by the political prisoners,<sup>204</sup> yet he later refused that the play is about Turkey, but about any country where human rights are violated.<sup>205</sup> If the play is considered as a universal play addressing violations of human rights, the subjugation of the mountain people for their ethnic differences can be understood as an echo of the Nazis' ethnic

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<sup>202</sup> Harold Bloom, *Harold Pinter*, Chelsea House Publishers, New York 1987, 1.

<sup>203</sup> Batty, 2005, 87.

<sup>204</sup> İbrahim Yerebakan, Yılmaz Göktekin, "Suskunluğun Oyun Yazarı Harold Pinter'in Türkiye Serüvenleri", *Atatürk Üniversitesi Güzel Sanatlar Fakültesi Dergisi*, No. 3, 2010, 48-49.

<sup>205</sup> Yerebakan, 2010, 51.

cleansing again. Besides his stage plays, some of his screenplays too, for instance *Reunion* (1989), *Remains of the Day* (1993) and *The Quiller Memorandum* (1966), have indirect references to the Holocaust. In addition to these, Pinter's first directing achievement related to the Holocaust was Robert Shaw's *The Man in the Glass Booth* in July 1967, for which he also helped to rewrite the script during the rehearsals. And shortly before writing *Ashes to Ashes*, in May 1995, he directed Ronald Harwood's *Taking Sides* (1995) which also addresses Nazi Germany.

*Ashes to Ashes* opens in a typically Pinteresque way, 'in medias res', while the only two characters of the play Rebecca and Devlin are engaged in a nebulous conversation. The setting is a ground-floor drawing room of a country house where furniture is sparse, and there is a window showing the garden beyond. Rebecca, who does not seem well, is sitting on a chair; her partner or husband Devlin is standing and he appears to be questioning her. Devlin, sometimes like a therapist, sometimes as an interlocutor is trying to obtain information from Rebecca about an obscure masochistic love affair with an enigmatic former lover:

**Rebecca:** Well... for example...he would stand over me and clench his fist. And then he'd put his other hand on my neck and grip it and bring my head towards him. His fist...grazed my mouth. And he'd say, 'Kiss my fist.'

**Devlin:** And did you?

**Rebecca:** Oh yes. I kissed his fist. The knuckles. And then he'd open his hand and give me the palm of his hand... to kiss... which I kissed.

*Pause.*

And then I would speak.<sup>206</sup>

Even though his further question "So your legs were opening?"<sup>207</sup> repeated twice suggests the jealousy of a husband or a partner feverishly enquiring about his partner's sexual history, from the general attitude of Devlin in provoking the flow of information, we get the feeling that he, just like a therapist, is trying to heal a hysteric woman exposed to a

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<sup>206</sup> Harold Pinter, *Ashes to Ashes*, Grove Press, New York 1997, 3.

<sup>207</sup> Pinter, 1997, 7.

(presumably sexual) trauma. In a way, through his questioning, he attempts to bring her repressed traumatic experiences into consciousness by putting them into language—an act that Breuer’s patient Anna O. would call “chimney sweeping”.<sup>208</sup> He even asks Rebecca if she is feeling hypnotised at the time of questioning:

**Devlin:** Do you feel you’re being hypnotised?

**Rebecca:** When?

**Devlin:** Now.

**Rebecca:** No.

**Devlin:** Really?

**Rebecca:** No.

**Devlin:** Why not?

**Rebecca:** Who by?

**Devlin:** By me.

**Rebecca:** You?

**Devlin:** What do you think?

**Rebecca:** I think you’re a fuckpig.<sup>209</sup>

Although she rejects the suggestion that she is feeling hypnotised, based on the information Pinter provides, we can never be sure throughout the play whether Rebecca is speaking under the effect of hypnosis, or not. However, the way she narrates the events through constant shifts of the topic, the increasing tension of her memories, long silences and pauses all suggest a pattern of hypnosis which persists from the beginning till the very end of the play.

Although Rebecca seems to talk nonsense, all her references prove to be relating the atrocities of the Holocaust and its after-effects. As Caruth suggests, the trauma concept is not straightforwardly referential, and as its experience overwhelms the victim, it resists language and representation. Nevertheless, while denying a direct referentiality she does not completely rule it out, rather emphasises a belated reference. She contends that “understanding of trauma in terms of its indirect relation to reference, does not deny

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<sup>208</sup> Breuer, Freud, 2001, 30.

<sup>209</sup> Pinter, 1997, 9.

or eliminate the possibility of reference but insists, precisely, on the inescapability of its belated impact.”<sup>210</sup> In *Ashes to Ashes*, the traumatic memories similarly manifest themselves quite belatedly and indirectly. In line with Caruth, Inga Clendinnen eliminates the possibility of a direct reference and proposes that “The most effective imagined evocations of the Holocaust seem to proceed either by invocation [...] or, perhaps more effectively, by indirection.”<sup>211</sup> Pinter was somehow aware of this power of indirect reference to the Holocaust and, therefore, in *Ashes to Ashes*, utilises this method of indirection in representing it. In fact, Pinter has been labelled one of the prominent exponents of the Theatre of the Absurd, and his earlier plays in particular have been rather enigmatic, lacking direct references. He mostly avoids specifying a place or time for his plays. *Ashes to Ashes*, contrary to his previous works, does have a referent, even though it is never overtly expressed. First, the time of the play is ‘the present’ and, after a passage of time we can understand Rebecca’s recounting the Nazi atrocities as Pinter refers to them allusively in the register of memory.

Although neither the Holocaust nor any atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis are ever directly mentioned throughout the play when Devlin questions her about her former lover’s job, Rebecca says that he was working as a guide in a kind of travel agency where he had quite a high status with lots of responsibilities. However, her answer proves evasive when she later asserts that he was working at a factory where people “were all wearing caps... the workpeople... soft caps... and they took them off when he came in, leading me, when he led me down the alleys between the rows of workpeople”<sup>212</sup> and those people “had such a great respect for him.”<sup>213</sup> Those details increase our suspicion about the real job of the former lover. In fact, as Manuela M. Reiter informs us, the German term for guide, “führer”, is also ascribed to high-ranking Nazis just like Albert Speer who was responsible for the railway system and travel, including deportations of the Jews.<sup>214</sup> Besides the lover’s obscure profession, the factory that he runs appears peculiar because Rebecca says it was “exceedingly damp”<sup>215</sup> and workpeople weren’t

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<sup>210</sup> Caruth, 1996, 7.

<sup>211</sup> Inga Clendinnen, *Reading the Holocaust*, Text Publishing, Melbourne 2004, 185.

<sup>212</sup> Pinter, 1997, 23.

<sup>213</sup> Pinter, 1997, 25.

<sup>214</sup> Manuela M. Reiter, “Old Times Revisited: Harold Pinter’s *Ashes to Ashes*”, *Arbeiten aus Anglistik und Amerikanistik*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 1997, 187.

<sup>215</sup> Pinter, 1997, 25.



dressed for the weather. The detail of the soft caps,<sup>216</sup> people who doff their heads in great respect, dampness in the factory, inadequate working attire all suggest Nazi concentration camps. Pinter may have been inspired here by the biography of Albert Speer, who was responsible for the slave factories, as well as many other popular representations of the Holocaust in literature and television. Rebecca also claims those people would even sing for her lover if he asked them to. In Lanzmann's documentary *Shoah*, the survivor Srebnik says during his years in the camp he was tasked with singing in order to cheer up the German officers. This task helped him survive the camp. Pinter was perhaps conscious of the fact from the film or various other resources addressing Jews' singing for the Nazis, and he thus chose to evoke this practice in *Ashes to Ashes* as well.

Moreover, the factory where Rebecca's lover worked in some capacity or other, did not have a bathroom, as she recounts:

**Rebecca:** And there was one other thing. I wanted to go to the bathroom. But I simply couldn't find it. I looked everywhere. I'm sure they had one. But I never found out where it was.

*Pause.*<sup>217</sup>

This reference to absent bathrooms also has associations connected to Nazi labour camps where the sanitary conditions of the workers were very poor. Besides, in the actual camps and factories, there were no bathrooms but only latrines in the form of holes in stones which inmates were supposed to use simultaneously in very large groups. Rebecca's reminiscing about the lack of bathrooms can also be read as a reference to Jews who were taken to the so-called bathrooms for a shower but were herded instead into gas chambers and murdered. This is one of the most common images used in referring to the Holocaust either in books or films and is heavily engraved on public memory. All those images Pinter alludes to are recognisable for the post-holocaust generation who have grown up in the shadow of the Holocaust through stories they have heard or watched: transportations in trains to the camps, babies torn away from their crying mothers, people in coats carrying their baggage with them in heavy winter, the factories and working Jews

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<sup>216</sup> Skullcaps worn by the Jews during prayers and also in the camps.

<sup>217</sup> Pinter, 1997, 27.

with caps and in striped pyjamas. These haunting images are clear signs of a collective trauma of the Holocaust in the post-holocaust generation.

As Rebecca provides further description of the lover's job, it gets easier to recognise the images and events as Nazi atrocities. She says "He did work for a travel agency. He was a guide. He used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers".<sup>218</sup> As psychological trauma emerges as a result of being possessed by a particular image or an event<sup>219</sup>, Rebecca is severely traumatised by this image of babies being torn from their mothers' arms, since she obsessively repeats this painful image in the play. This is, indeed, one of the most unbearable images related to the cruel Nazi practices during the Holocaust. Pinter admits that he has also "been haunted by the image of the Nazis picking up the babies on bayonet-spikes and throwing them out of windows."<sup>220</sup> Traumatized by this heart-breaking picture of babies being forcefully separated from their mothers, Pinter compulsively revisits the image and plagues Rebecca with it in the play. This compulsive repetition proves that both the playwright and Rebecca, act out this traumatic image by constantly remembering it, as they seem unable to get these images out of their minds. When Mireia Aragay asks Pinter if the play is about Nazism, he replies that

[it is] about the images of Nazi Germany; I don't think anyone can ever get that out of their mind. The Holocaust is probably the worst thing that ever happened because it was so calculated, deliberate and precise and so fully documented by the people who actually did it. Their view of it is very significant. They counted how many people they were murdering every day, and they looked upon it.<sup>221</sup>

From this statement, it is understood that just like Rebecca, who is haunted by the disturbing images that have also plagued the consciousness of millions who did not have a first-hand experience of the Holocaust, Pinter himself was a victim of those traumas by

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<sup>218</sup> Pinter, 1997, 27.

<sup>219</sup> Caruth, 1995, 4.

<sup>220</sup> Billington, 2007, 375.

<sup>221</sup> Mireia Aragay, Ramon Simo, "Writing, Politics and Ashes to Ashes", 6 December, 1996, *Pinter in the Theatre*, Ian Smith (ed), Nick Hern Books, London 2005, 98.

proxy. As he also points out in the interview with Aragay, he was brought up listening and being exposed to the images and horrors of the Second World War and the Holocaust. “They’ve been with me all my life, really,” he says, “you can’t avoid them, because they’re around you simply all the time. That’s the point about *Ashes to Ashes*. I think Rebecca inhabits that.”<sup>222</sup> Rebecca, as the narrator of the memories, becomes the voice of a collective memory of the Holocaust. And in the chronotope of the play these memories of the past ceaselessly repeat themselves in the present time by creating “a scenic time of suffering”.<sup>223</sup> In this particular context, Pinter’s repeated allusions account for an acting out of this vicarious traumatising which haunted the playwright throughout his life and writing career. Although, in the interview with Gussow he states that it is hard to talk about the Holocaust and its devastating effects, as a result of the overwhelming impositions of the horrific legacies of the event that plagued him constantly, with *Ashes to Ashes* he dramatizes what has been haunting his consciousness for many years. The play, thus, can be evaluated as an attempt to work through the trauma that kept haunting him, in order to get rid of this incessant nightmare and make the silence of the Holocaust audible once again.

As traumatic events have no precedent most of the time, language with its signs and symbols falls short of articulating them. Trauma that hinders linguistic representation however also claims expression. For this reason, any narration formed by this immediate urge lacks chronological and logical sequence. In Rebecca’s case, this intrinsic quality of trauma while she attempts to put it into words makes itself very clear. While the first impression of the conversation between the couple suggests the memories of a dead relationship with a former lover which probably left some scars on her mind, new images start to haunt Rebecca as the conversation progresses, evoking completely different memories. Her use of phrases such as “did I ever tell you...?”,<sup>224</sup> “oh yes, there is something I’ve forgotten to tell you”,<sup>225</sup> “by the way”,<sup>226</sup> “don’t you want to know

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<sup>222</sup> Aragay and Simo, 2005, 98.

<sup>223</sup> Elisabeth Angel-Perez, “*Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter’s Dibbuku”, *Viva Pinter: Harold Pinter's Spirit of Resistance*, Brigitte Gauthier (ed.), Peter Lang, Oxford 2009, 151.

<sup>224</sup> Pinter, 1997, 21.

<sup>225</sup> Pinter, 1997, 47.

<sup>226</sup> Pinter, 1997, 71.

why?”<sup>227</sup> or “there’s something I’ve been dying to tell you”<sup>228</sup>, as well as the way in which she constantly shifts topic, and her desire to share them are all evocative of her being haunted by certain memories of a traumatising past that compulsively intrude into her consciousness. Van der Kolk proposed that people experiencing vehement emotions as a result of being exposed to trauma can have great difficulty in forming a coherent narrative that captures the essence of what has happened, because narrative memory is blocked at the time of the traumatic happening. Nevertheless, due to the traumatic nature of these memories, traditional narrative falls short of expression and this renders a coherent verbalisation impossible. In this case, as Anne Whitehead argues “the impact of trauma can only adequately be represented by mimicking its forms and symptoms, so that temporality and chronology collapse, and narratives are characterised by repetition and indirection.”<sup>229</sup> Rebecca, as an example, cannot give an orderly account of her memories; she falls into repetition, and throughout the tense dialogue between her and Devlin, jumps from one image to another without any comprehensible connection. As the language is formed by the qualities of trauma, its use in the play, therefore, posits the ungraspable and fragmented nature of her traumatic memories. For instance, as she talks about her lover’s job, she suddenly switches to talking about a siren fading away:

**Rebecca:** [...] He used to go to the local railway station and walk down the platform and tear all the babies from the arms of their screaming mothers.

*Pause.*

**Devlin:** Did he?

*Silence.*

**Rebecca:** By the way, I’m terribly upset.

**Devlin:** Are you? Why?

**Rebecca:** Well, it’s about that police siren we heard a couple of minutes ago.

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<sup>227</sup> Pinter, 1997, 29.

<sup>228</sup> Pinter, 1997, 33.

<sup>229</sup> Whitehead, 2004, 3.

**Devlin:** What police siren?<sup>230</sup>

As the memories make her uncomfortable, she talks about them unwillingly as if she is forced by an invisible hand. That clearly attests to the unconscious intrusions of the events that traumatised Rebecca. And as the traumatic memory resist articulation, she cannot give a complete, ordered narration.

Furthermore, Rebecca's claim of hearing the wail of a police siren and its slowly fading away leaves her "terribly upset",<sup>231</sup> "terribly unsecure"<sup>232</sup>, possibly evokes familiar authoritarian police states, that are overtly dramatised in Pinter's political plays, such as *One for the Road* (1984), *Mountain Language* (1988), *Party Time* (1991) and *The New World Order* (1991).<sup>233</sup> In *Ashes to Ashes* the siren may be considered as a signification of the Nazi rule and repression. Gene Plunka also witnesses to the Holocaust survivors mentioning police sirens,<sup>234</sup> which may suggest Rebecca's association of the sirens with the traumatic events in camps. Rebecca says that the siren's fading away and echoing for somebody else makes her feel insecure.

**Rebecca:** I hate it fading away. I hate it echoing away. I hate it leaving me. I hate losing it. I hate somebody else possessing it. I want it to be mine, all the time. It's such a beautiful sound. Don't you think?

**Devlin:** Don't worry, there'll always be another one. There's one on its way to you now. Believe me. You'll hear it again soon. Any minute.<sup>235</sup>

Here the sirens seem to evoke the time when Rebecca was with her lover who was probably one of the Nazi perpetrators. She seems to associate the sound of a siren with her lover and the atrocities Nazis committed; therefore, the sound triggers her memories. Devlin, on the other hand, soothes her assuring her that she will never be without a police

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<sup>230</sup> Pinter, 1997, 29.

<sup>231</sup> Pinter, 1997, 29

<sup>232</sup> Pinter, 1997, 31.

<sup>233</sup> Marc Silverstein, "'You'll Never Be without a Police Siren': Pinter and the Subject of Law", *The Art of Crime: The Plays and Films of Harold Pinter and David Mamet*, Leslie Kane (ed.), Routledge, London 2004, 22.

<sup>234</sup> Plunka, 2009, 322.

<sup>235</sup> Pinter, 1997, 31.

siren, again possibly, referring to an ever-present state repression, present atrocities or upcoming ones to be committed and suffered.

In a similar way, she unexpectedly starts talking about living in Dorset where perhaps she has not lived before.

Oh yes, there's something I've forgotten to tell you. It was funny. I looked out of the garden window, out of the window into the garden, in the middle of summer, in that house in Dorset, do you remember? Oh no, you weren't there. I don't think anyone else was there. No. I was all by myself. I was alone. I was looking out of the window and I saw a whole crowd of people walking through the woods, on their way to the sea, in the direction of the sea. They seemed to be very cold, they were wearing coats, although it was such a beautiful day. A beautiful, warm, Dorset day. They were carrying bags. There were... guides... ushering them, guiding them along. They walked through the woods and I could see them in the distance walking across the cliff and down to the sea. Then I lost sight of them. I was really quite curious so I went upstairs to the highest window in the house and I looked way over the top of the treetops and I could see down to the beach. The guides... were ushering all these people across the beach. It was such a lovely day. It was so still and the sun was shining. And I saw all these people walk into the sea. The tide covered them slowly. Their bags bobbed about in the waves.<sup>236</sup>

It is not difficult to recognise that the herds of people Rebecca talks about are the people deported to the Nazi concentration camps, literally to their death. The images remind the scenes from *The Schindler's List* or from Elie Wiesel's *Night* (1956) in which people are forced to walk long ways in cold winter days and nights to get to the camps. Rebecca claims that she was the only person to see them denoting the silence of the world when these atrocities were being committed. On the other hand, by the device of bringing these deportees to Dorset, Pinter universalises the visions of the Holocaust. He pinpoints the

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<sup>236</sup> Pinter, 1996, 47-49

fact that, Holocaust is not limited to the 1940s and the countries it has been committed. In an interview, Pinter underlines the universal message of *Ashes to Ashes* and says that

it's not only Nazis I'm talking about in *Ashes to Ashes*, because it would be a dereliction on my part to simply concentrate on the Nazis and leave it at that (...) I am talking about us and our conception of our past and our history, and what it does to us in the present."<sup>237</sup>

As Pinter argues, not only the Nazis and the atrocities that they perpetrated but how they are being received in today's world is the subject of the play. In this particular context, Yerebakan argues

Considering contemporary facts of life, it is not too difficult to establish a connection between gruesome images of the past presented in *Ashes to Ashes* and what is happening in the Balkans, in Latin American countries, in the Middle East, in Africa, in East Timor where the worst crimes against humanity have been committed on a daily basis with impunity.<sup>238</sup>

The point Yerebakan argues is the blurred distinction between the Nazis and us and the past and the present, because "human potential for the possibility of atrocities of the nations is still vividly alive today."<sup>239</sup> Referring to the indelible effects of the Holocaust in modern consciousness and not limiting the atrocities happening around the world to the Holocaust, after the public reading of his play in New York in 1996, Pinter also says "what we term "atrocities" and "catastrophes" throughout the world—by the way, not, by any means, limited to what happened in the Holocaust—there is a Holocaust more or less every day of the week."<sup>240</sup> Pinter suggests that the twentieth and the twenty-first century are both disrupted by various forms of man-made atrocities and catastrophes. They continue to injure the modern consciousness as the Holocaust did, not so very long ago. In this way, he both suggests the possibility that similar catastrophes can occur anywhere, anytime. The distance Rebecca emphasises to the people taken to their death, on the other hand, refers to the distance that we take before the atrocities happening

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<sup>237</sup> Aragay and Simo, 1996, 99-100.

<sup>238</sup> İbrahim Yerebakan, "Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*: The Holocaust Revisited", *Evil in English Literature Proceedings*, Istanbul University, Istanbul 2003, 148.

<sup>239</sup> Yerebakan, 2003, 148.

<sup>240</sup> Qtd in Merritt, 74.

around the world. First Rebecca looks at them from the window then climbs to the top getting far away. As she goes further, the people get closer to their doom, because they walk into the sea and are drowned. It suggests that the absence of a witness or the distance the people take before the cruelty perpetrated on others. While Rebecca is close enough to touch and to save the victims, she moves away just to see them better, therefore guarantees their death. Pinter, in this way, induces his audiences to undertake a world citizen attitude, because when society stays away from these catastrophes, they become complicit in the others' suffering. Therefore, the play suggests only by identifying with these sufferings and enforcing a resistance, can we avert similar ones and expect a better future.

While Devlin further questions her about living in Dorset and what happened there, Rebecca starts talking about a condition she calls 'mental elephantiasis' rather than answering his questions:

**Devlin:** What do you mean, 'somebody told you'? What do you mean, 'the other day'? What are you talking about?

**Rebecca:** This mental elephantiasis means that when you spill an ounce of gravy, for example, it immediately expands and becomes a vast sea of gravy. It becomes a sea of gravy which surrounds you on all sides and you suffocate in a voluminous sea of gravy.<sup>241</sup>

'Mental elephantiasis' that Rebecca mentions highlights again the individual responsibility before an atrocity such as the Holocaust. The sea of gravy denotes a traumatic image or a memory of the event that expands in the consciousness of the individual to a point of suffocation. As in Rebecca's case, the memory of the event becomes a vast sea of atrocities penetrating her life and not allowing her to ignore what has happened and what might happen in the future. Commenting on the way Rebecca depicts what has happened and her position as a non-victim, in his Nobel speech Pinter says that

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<sup>241</sup> Pinter, 1997, 50-51.



*Ashes to Ashes* ... seems to me to be taking place under water. A drowning woman, her hand reaching up through the waves, dropping down out of sight, reaching for others, but finding nobody there, either above or under the water, finding only shadows, reflections, floating; the woman unable to escape the doom that seemed to belong only to others.<sup>242</sup>

Rebecca is flooded by the legacy of an unsettling past and desperately looking for someone to listen to her. Instead, what she finds are the shadows of the past that refuse to go away and unrelentingly haunt her.

As Pinter informs us in the stage directions, *Ashes to Ashes* takes place in the present, which could have several different meanings. If we consider 1996, when the play was written, as the present time, and the characters to be in their forties, it is impossible for Rebecca to have experienced the genocide as the Holocaust had taken place before she was born. Pinter in his Nobel Prize lecture states that he always starts writing plays naming his characters as A, B and C which are “people with will and an individual sensibility of their own, made out of component parts you are unable to change, manipulate or distort.”<sup>243</sup> That means his characters are as autonomous as they can be and their individual characteristics are clearly rounded, even for the playwright himself. He cannot manipulate their thoughts and feelings. If we take into account the characters’ possible backgrounds and Pinter’s habit of naming his characters with a purpose, he must have named Rebecca based on some criteria. Rebecca is a name commonly given to Jewish girls as, in the *Hebrew Bible*, Rebecca is, the second matriarch of the Jewish nation, the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau. This suggests a high possibility that Pinter’s Rebecca is a Jewish woman, and probably has ancestors who suffered in the Holocaust. She was born into a world tainted by new atrocities as well as by her ancestors’ sufferings which return to haunt her. In this respect, in *Ashes to Ashes*, Pinter dramatises, not the real experience of the Holocaust—which indubitably requires a greater

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<sup>242</sup> Billington, 2007, 433.

<sup>243</sup> Harold Pinter, “Art, Truth and Politics”, 8 December 2005. Retrieved 27 August 2016, from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2005/dec/08/theatre.nobelprize>

challenge—but the way the Holocaust with its imagery haunts the subsequent generations.

Laub suggests that the Holocaust is so catastrophic that “the event produces no witness”<sup>244</sup> because it either exterminated its victims or rendered the survivors speechless due to its dreadfulness. However, there are many arguments suggesting that the trauma of one generation can be transmitted to following ones through their indirect recall. This transgenerational trauma is a still-debated phenomena. Among the first to theorise transgenerational trauma, Nicolas Abraham and Maria Torok observe that “the dead do not return, but their lives’ unfinished business is unconsciously handed down to their descendants.”<sup>245</sup> In this view, trauma that is too serious and large in extent does not stay confined to its real victims but can be transferred to the next generations. Marianne Hirsch calls this poignant instance of trauma’s continuing effect across generations ‘postmemory’. Post-memory occurs in a generation who did not experience a traumatic event directly as opposed to the generation before. When the perpetual trauma and its second-hand memories are very powerful, they also become traumatic for the next generation. Hirsch in her article argues that in case of postmemory, descendants of survivors (of victims as well as of perpetrators) of massive traumatic events connect so deeply to the previous generation’s remembrances of the past that they need to call that connection memory and thus that, in certain extreme circumstances, memory can be transmitted to those who were not actually there to live an event.<sup>246</sup> In an era of ‘posts’ which continue to proliferate, akin to the “post” in postmodernism or post-colonialism, postmemory shares their belatedness, and looking backwards defines the present moment in relation to a troubled past. It alludes at the same time to a continuity and a rupture. Hirsch defines it as “a structure of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience”.<sup>247</sup> Rebecca’s relationship to the Holocaust, as well as Pinter’s and many others’ whose lives have been informed by it, is also defined by this post-ness. Our knowledge of the Holocaust is mediated and, therefore, the experience is indirect. Rebecca’s life is overshadowed and overwhelmed by traumatic experiences that

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<sup>244</sup> Laub, 1995, 65.

<sup>245</sup> Nicolas Abraham, Maria Torok, *The Shell and the Kernel: Renewals of Psychoanalysis*, Nicholas T. Rand (ed. and trans.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1994, 167.

<sup>246</sup> Marianne Hirsch, “The Generation of Postmemory” *Poetics Today*, Duke Journals, Vol 29, No. 1, 2008, 105-6.

<sup>247</sup> Hirsch, 2008, 106.

she can only know by means of stories, images, memoirs and other mediated knowledge. It means she too is not a real victim but a victim of the postmemory of the Holocaust.

Emphasising the timelessness of trauma and its effect on people even after many years, literary and trauma theorist Michelle Balaev, likewise, writes that

the concept of trauma as timeless, repetitious, and infectious supports a literary theory of transhistorical trauma by making a parallel causal relationship between the individual and group, as well as between traumatic experience and pathologic responses. The theory indicates that a massive trauma experienced by a group in the historical past can be experienced by an individual living centuries later who shares a similar attribute of the historical group, such as sharing the same race, religion, nationality, or gender due to the timeless, repetitious, and infectious characteristics of traumatic experience and memory. [...] [It] collapses boundaries between the individual and group, thereby suggesting that a person's contemporary identity can be "vicariously traumatized" by reading about a historical narrative or due to a shared genealogy that affords the ability to righteously claim the social label of "victim" as part of personal or public identity.<sup>248</sup>

This vicarious experience, in consequence, leads both real victims and following generations to be haunted by the same traumatic memories. The vicariously traumatised people exhibit similar responses to the real victims and thus Rebecca, in *Ashes to Ashes*, represents the voice of her ancestors whose memory has been transferred to her. As Primo Levi in *The Drowned and the Saved* asserts, the real witnesses of the Holocaust cannot bear witness; that is why their ghosts continue to haunt those who are living to speak on their behalf, and to tell their stories. In view of this, it is possible to suggest that Rebecca voices the real victims' stories. Even though she is not one of those who "saw the gorgon"<sup>249</sup>, she claims responsibility and shares their pain. Although LaCapra with the

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<sup>248</sup> Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory", *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, Vol. 41 No. 2, 2008, 152-153.

<sup>249</sup> Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Raymond Rosenthal (trans), Summit Books, New York 1988, 83.

notion of “empathic unsettlement” which entails “being responsive to the traumatic experiences of others,”<sup>250</sup>, points out this empathetic understanding of the others, he warns against an excessive appropriation. Because excessive empathy with the victims may become identity.<sup>251</sup> Growing up with such overwhelming inherited memories that profoundly affect her that she seems to appropriate them as her own and becomes a surrogate victim. At the end of the play, whilst Rebecca refers again to the people who are taken to trains, she feels so strongly for them that she identifies herself with those suffering Nazi perpetrations. While she talks about the woman whose baby was taken away, she shifts from third-person to first-person point of view. Hence, abandoning her role as a witness, she assumes the subject position of the victim and all the atrocities become her immediate experience:

**Rebecca:** [...] She stood still. She kissed her baby. The baby was a girl.

*Pause.*

[...] The baby was breathing. *Pause.* I held her to me. She was breathing. Her heart was beating.

**Devlin:** *goes to her. He stands over her and looks down at her.*

[...] Kiss my fist.

*She does not move.*

*He opens his hand and places the palm of his hand on her mouth.*

*She does not move.*

[...]

**Rebecca:** They took us to the trains

**Echo:** the trains<sup>252</sup>

Caruth posits that trauma “is never one’s own” and “we are implicated in each other’s traumas.”<sup>253</sup> Enabling us to embrace our ethical and political relationship to history, listening or reading about the atrocities may also cause indelible effects regardless of having a first-hand experience. This ethical sharing, in turn, burdens the listener with an

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<sup>250</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 41.

<sup>251</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 47.

<sup>252</sup> Pinter, 1997, 75.

<sup>253</sup> Caruth, 1996, 25.

ethical responsibility for the real victims. Rebecca claims this responsibility to bear witness to the history that she inherited if not directly experienced. Pinter, acknowledging this ethical responsibility and the necessary burden of testimony, challenges us, with Rebecca's testimony, to confront the existing trauma of the world which is implicated in our memory too. Although the Holocaust is long gone, its legacy continues to plague contemporary consciousness and Rebecca's situation attests to her close emotional association with the trauma of the Holocaust.

Emphasising the enormity of the experience of the trauma, Tal asserts that "only the experience of trauma has the traumatizing effect."<sup>254</sup> Suggesting, therefore, that only victims can and should narrate the traumatic event, she repudiates the second-hand or witness accounts of trauma as being inauthentic. Aware of the impossibility of giving a complete account of what happened and how it felt, Pinter does not directly approach the experience of the Holocaust restricts himself to memories and the vicarious effects of it. Rebecca, in the same way, rejects any claim to participation or experience of any of the events and states

**Devlin:** Now let me say this. A little while ago you made... shall we say... you made a somewhat oblique reference to your blokes... your lover? ... and babies and mothers, et cetera. And platforms. I inferred from this that you were talking about some kind of atrocity. Now let me ask you this. What authority do you think you yourself possess which would give you the right to discuss such an atrocity?

**Rebecca:** I have no such authority. Nothing has ever happened to me. Nothing has ever happened to any of my friends. I have never suffered. Nor have my friends.<sup>255</sup>

Through this dialogue, Pinter underlines the challenge of moral engagement. Referring to the ethical considerations related to the Holocaust, Rebecca denies claiming the authority to comment on or define its experience. This conversation also evokes Adorno's predicament, questioning how one can express this suffering, and how life can still be

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<sup>254</sup> Tal, 1996, 121.

<sup>255</sup> Pinter, 1997, 41.

possible for those that were spared extinction.<sup>256</sup> Even though Rebecca was one of those who were spared death, her life is incessantly perturbed. Pinter manifests the difficulty of going on to live after Auschwitz and the problem of representing it with existing means of art and language, but at the same time acknowledging the need to speak it out attempts to reflect this dilemma.

The history of the falling pen that Rebecca and Devlin argue about is also evocative of moral investigation, not only of personal responsibility and personal guilt but also of the collective memory of the Holocaust:

**Rebecca:** This pen, this perfectly innocent pen.

**Devlin:** You can't know it was innocent.

**Rebecca:** Why not?

**Devlin:** Because you don't know where it had been. You don't know how many other hands have held it, how many other hands have written with it, what other people have been doing with it. You know nothing of its history. You know nothing of its parents' history.

**Rebecca:** A pen has no parents.

*Pause.*

**Devlin:** You can't sit there and say things like that.

**Rebecca:** I can sit here.

**Devlin:** You can't sit there and say things like that.

**Rebecca:** You don't believe I'm entitled to sit here? You don't think I'm entitled to sit in this chair, in the place where I live?

**Devlin:** I'm saying that you're not entitled to sit in that chair or in or on any other chair and say things like that and it doesn't matter whether you live here or not.

**Rebecca:** I'm not entitled to say things like what?

**Devlin:** That that pen was innocent.<sup>257</sup>

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<sup>256</sup> Adorno, 1991, 87-88.

<sup>257</sup> Pinter, 1997, 37.

The pen may be seen as a metaphor for both Rebecca and her history, involving a relationship that Devlin is unaware of, and also the history of a recent past which is written in blood. On the other hand, Pinter's ascribing the notion of guilt to an inanimate object can be treated as criticism of those who are, sometimes intentionally, unaware of the atrocities committed. Even though they claim to be innocent Pinter implies that everybody, even if not directly involved in these crimes, are guilty due to their silence, ignorance and inaction.

Rebecca, as one of the thousands of people who are all haunted by the painful memory of the Holocaust, becomes an embodiment of collective unconscious memory. Through Rebecca, Pinter reminds us once again of the unexplainable event and its legacy for the following generations, and while doing this, he opens an old wound and calls the audience forth as witness to the atrocities haunting everybody's consciousness. The play forces its audiences to confront some of the most challenging moral and ethical issues of modernity, the notion of individual and collective responsibility. Pinter, by tasking Rebecca with the ethical responsibility to bear witness to history and vicarious trauma, rebukes his audience for becoming involved in this collective trauma, not feeling the guilt but by being agents for 'never again'. Rebecca, suffering from Holocaust memories by empathetically identifying herself with the others but, on the other hand not being touched by it in reality, becomes "innocent victim and guilty survivor".<sup>258</sup> She, aware of the fact that everyone's life is connected with everyone else's, claims the responsibility of bearing witness and commemorating the dead. By doing so, she speaks on their behalf and becomes a mouthpiece for their unarticulated trauma.

Billington, striking the right note, regards Pinter's attempt as a hope for change: "[the play] implies that we all have within us the capacity for resistance and for imaginative identification with the suffering of others. Therein, implies Pinter, lies the only hope for change".<sup>259</sup> Ultimately, what I contend is that *Ashes to Ashes*, as a product of the postmemory of the Holocaust, attests to the legacy of this act of human rights violation with its gruesome realities. It also articulates the challenges and ethical stakes involved in the representation of the Holocaust. At the same time, by testifying our recent

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<sup>258</sup> Susan Hollis Merritt, "Harold Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes*: Political/Personal Echoes of the Holocaust", Francis Gillen and Steven H. Gale, eds. *The Pinter Review*, 1999-2000, Tampa, Florida, 82.

<sup>259</sup> Billington, 2007, 383.

past and bringing it into the limelight, the play both commemorates the victims of the Holocaust and attempts a working-through from this grievous event for its playwright as well as for the generations haunted by its ghosts.

### **3.2. THE TRAUMA OF WAR COMES HOME: SIMON STEPHENS' *MOTORTOWN***

One of the most notable playwrights of the New Writing, Simon Stephens is originally from Stockport, Greater Manchester. After studying history at University of York, he worked as a teacher for a few years before turning to playwriting, and began his theatre career at the Royal Court Theatre where he taught in its Young Writers' Programme. Stephens is now Artistic Associate at the Lyric Hammersmith in London. His first theatrical success came with *On the Shores of the Wide World* (2005) that won an Olivier Award for best new play in 2005. Writer of some thirty-three plays, Stephens' oeuvre includes *Bluebird* (1998), *Country Music* (2004), *Motortown* (2006), *Pornography* (2007), *Harper Regan* (2007), *Sea Wall* (2008), and *Punk Rock* (2009).

In contrast to the early representations of war in Greek classics and in the early twentieth century which are primarily concerned with the frontline, and present soldiers as heroes (epitomised by Sarah Kane's highly controversial play *Blasted* (1995)), the aestheticisation of soldiering has been rejected from the second half of the twentieth century, and replaced by the representation of atrocities perpetrated at the time of war, including murders, rapes, torture and infanticide. Many contemporary theatrical representations in the UK focus, as well as on the horrendous face of war, on its aftermath and on the ever intruding experiences of trench warfare in the form of hallucinations and flashbacks, and present soldiers as victims and pure embodiments of trauma. Most of those written in the twenty-first century were dramatic productions touching on the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. Some of these successful productions offer a fresh insight into the consequences of modern warfare, such as Roy William's *Days of Significance* (2007), set in a military hospital and telling the heart-breaking story of an injured soldier who comes back home and the family on whom his injuries have devastating consequences; Jonathan Lichtenstein's *The Pull of Negative Gravity* (2004), putting at its centre a female soldier returning from Afghanistan; Morgan Lloyd Malcolm's *Belongings* (2011), a darkly comic



examination of an ex-serviceman's attempts to adapt to civilian life and family; Cat Jones' *Glory Dazed* (2013), commissioned by The Tricycle Theatre as a part of Nicholas Kent's project "The Great Game: A series of Plays about Afghanistan" and Simon Stephens' *Canopy of Stars* (2014).

Stephens' *Motortown* (2006), directed by Ramin Gray, with its premiere at the Royal Court, and later adapted to the screen for Film4 in 2009, is one of the most celebrated plays dealing with the Iraq war and its traumatising horrors. Written in only four days, starting the day before the London bombings in July 2005,<sup>260</sup> as Stephens informs us, the play is one of the controversial responses to war and anti-war movements in Britain and around the world. After its premiere, the play received admiring reviews from the critics and the public. Charles Spencer found it "a deeply unsettling piece" that "gets under your skin."<sup>261</sup> *The Guardian* critic Lyn Gardner summed up her experience of watching it "like being run over by a 10-tonne truck that doesn't bother to stop to check that you are still breathing. It is in no way a pleasant experience, but is, I think, an essential one."<sup>262</sup> Notwithstanding its harrowing, and brutally visceral effect, *Motortown* remains one of the most memorable plays in theatre history bringing PTSD into question with its unflinching look at the nature of war.

*Motortown* has resonances of Büchner's *Woyzeck* (1879) and is also clearly indebted to the 1976 Martin Scorsese film *Taxi Driver* in which a mentally unstable veteran works as a taxi driver in New York where the decadence immorality fuel his rage for violent acts. The play similarly tells a former soldier's story in eight tight-knit scenes that run in a chronological order in stark contrast to Stephens' other plays such as *One Minute* (2003) and *Pornography*. In Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck*, a tragic tale of a former military barber, the protagonist Woyzeck is an illiterate soldier who suffers from PTSD and isolation. Unable to express himself and tormented with hallucinations, he resorts to violence and stabs his wife to death for infidelity. In *Motortown*, the anti-hero of the play, Danny, who formerly served in Basra, comes back to an England which is volatile and morally corrupted. The traumatising impact of war is encoded in the character of Danny

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<sup>260</sup> Simon Stephens, *Plays 2*, Methuen, London 2009, xvii.

<sup>261</sup> Charles Spencer, "The Horror of War Comes Home", *The Daily Telegraph*, 26 April 2006, 26.

<sup>262</sup> Lyn Gardner, "Soldier's Tale that Brings War Home: *Motortown*", *The Guardian*, 25 April 2006, 34.

who fails to adjust to his civilian life much like Woyzeck. He feels alienated and is full of anger. He stays at his autistic brother Lee's flat. His girlfriend Marley jilted him while he was still in Basra, as Danny's letters "were frightening her"<sup>263</sup> and, Lee's opening lines "She doesn't want to see you. She told me to tell you"<sup>264</sup> dispels Danny's hope for a future more when he was already alienated from it. Despite that he knows he should not visit Marley, he ends up doing so only to hear again that she does not want to see him anymore. Later, he buys a replica pistol from a former friend Tom, and gets it re-engineered for real ammunition with the help of Paul, a middle-aged man who lives with his girlfriend Jade, a black girl of fourteen. Having got his pistol, he pays another visit to his ex-girlfriend:

**Danny:** I've got something for you. I went out, into town, up London, this afternoon and got a present for you. I've not decided whether you're gonna get it yet.<sup>265</sup>

Contrary to expectations, he does not shoot Marley but, instead, later kidnaps Jade and takes her to Foulness Island which accommodates the military base he was trained at. On the island he tortures Jade and finally murders her. The play ends back at Danny's brother's apartment as it started. Lee knows what Danny has done, yet it is not certain whether he is going to denounce him to the police or not.

Even though Danny announces, "I don't blame war. The war was alright. I miss it. It's just you come back to this",<sup>266</sup> as Charles Spencer, in his review of the play for *The Daily Telegraph*, writes, "To say that this is a work that defends the war in Iraq is a bit like saying that *Macbeth* is a play that justifies serial killing."<sup>267</sup> Because these lines do not exactly suggest that Danny likes war; they rather imply that he hates the country he came back. In the introduction to his *Plays Two*, Stephens states that all of the five plays in that volume have been informed by two major ruptures: the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre and the London Underground Bombings.<sup>268</sup> *Motortown*, in particular, has been written as a response to the War on Terror discourse following these ruptures. In the

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<sup>263</sup> Stephens, 2009, 143.

<sup>264</sup> Stephens, 2009, 143.

<sup>265</sup> Stephens, 2009, 177.

<sup>266</sup> Stephens, 2009, 209.

<sup>267</sup> Spencer, 2006, 26.

<sup>268</sup> Stephens, 2009, xi.

play, with only a few characters, Stephens creates a panorama of contemporary England by portraying their stance against these wars and terrorism around the world. Through his protagonist Danny, on the other hand, he describes the deleterious effects of the war in Iraq on the soldiers deployed there.

Herman suggests that, in order to protect itself from facing the traumatic event again, the ego or the conscious I, when exposed to trauma, either chooses to deny what has happened and projects it on to others or resorts to some other defence mechanisms. At the most basic level, the victim keeps a distance from the traumatic event by refraining from talking about it. In *Motortown*, despite the fact that Danny has spent a long time in Iraq and is disenchanted with war, he avoids all questions related to the war and, asserts that it is all fine. He even goes so far as to say “it was easy”<sup>269</sup>, although it certainly was not, and that he came home because he “just got bored.”<sup>270</sup> His stance implies at the very beginning that he is not ready to process or accept whatever he witnessed or did back there. That is why he evades questions about Basra and his life there. Not allowing Danny any opportunity to verbalise his trauma, this state of ‘silencing the combat experience’ continues until the end of the play.

Although Danny denies victimhood pretending to be unaffected by the war in Iraq, his situation proves quite the contrary. The traumatic experience of war makes its way into his consciousness and daily life through a series of symptoms. His hands keep shaking without any reason; most probably disturbed by the dreams related to his war experiences; he sleeps with a frown on his face; and cannot relate to the people around him, even to the ones closest to him. His family and friends, who watched him on television while he was in uniform in Basra, think he looked very different then:

**Lee:** We saw you on telly. On the news. On *Newsnight*. I went round to Mum and Dad’s. They videotaped it. (*He drinks his tea.*) It didn’t look anything like you.

**Danny:** I’ve not seen it.

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<sup>269</sup> Stephens, 2009, 158.

<sup>270</sup> Stephens, 2009, 158.

**Lee:** Well, go round then. Ask Mum and Dad. They'd definitely let you watch it. You'll be astonished. It's like you're a completely different person.<sup>271</sup>

It later turns out that Lee and his parents are not the only ones who consider the way he looks as a soldier different. His friend Tom also states that other people thought he looked a bit strange.

**Tom:** I saw you on the telly. With Paxo. I thought you looked all right. I thought you came off fairly well, as it goes.

**Danny:** Thanks Tom.

**Tom:** Other people said they thought you looked a bit odd.

**Danny:** Did they?

**Tom:** Said it looked nothing like you.<sup>272</sup>

However, no one really describes how Danny looked on TV. They can only describe him as different or odd even though they must all be aware of what Iraq and the war did to him. This also indicates the extent of rupture between him and his loved ones. It sounds like his appearance has changed in a way it no longer looks familiar to his family and friends, which suggests that his physical appearance now reflects his inner world which is informed by the Iraq War.

The truth of Danny's traumatised look on TV is discovered when Danny asks Marley whether she saw him on the television and Marley tells him what she has heard about his appearance:

**Danny:** Did you see me on the telly, by the way? ...

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<sup>271</sup> Stephens, 2009, 147.

<sup>272</sup> Stephens, 2009, 160.

**Marley:** I heard you could barely speak. Didn't look anything like you.  
You look terrible, Danny. What have you been doing?<sup>273</sup>

Marley becomes the first person to notice his miserable situation, but she comments on his condition without showing any form of sympathy. At the end of the play, after Danny murders Jade, Lee also confesses how pathetic he looked on TV stating, "I was incredulous. You couldn't even finish your sentences."<sup>274</sup> People, who are dear to him, overlook his suffering or, like Marley, show no sympathy and these two attitudes manifest the unbridgeable divergence between someone who fought in the war and someone who did not. Unable to sympathise, nobody seems willing to help Danny feel better about the trauma he goes through inside by expressing it verbally.

As trauma can produce indelible scars on the victim's psyche, it can also disfigure his memory, self-recognition and relational life. In spite of the human capacity to survive and adapt to the environment, trauma can alter these abilities as the traumatic experience spoils the zeal for life and making new memories. The tyranny of the past thus interferes with the present, rendering Danny's life colourless and foregrounding his marginalisation. Although he spent a long time in Basra without seeing his parents, and many people tell him to visit his parents, he refuses to see them especially his drunken father whom he particularly hates.

**Tom:** ... You not going see your folks?

**Danny:** I don't think so, Tom, no.

...

**Tom:** How come you're not gonna go and see them?

**Danny:** 'Cause they do my fucking head in, Tom.<sup>275</sup>

Having survived very harsh conditions in Basra, Danny stubbornly rejects connecting with his family again while he is now lucky to be with his family and friends, and chooses

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<sup>273</sup> Stephens, 2009, 176.

<sup>274</sup> Stephens, 2009, 206.

<sup>275</sup> Stephens, 2009, 159.

retreating into solitude. His prolonged detachment from a social life during the war causes this estrangement upon his return as well as serious problems in getting involved in society again.

As if to prove the fact that war corrupts human character and social interactions, Danny experiences a dislocation of the boundaries between his self and the external world. However, manifestation of war trauma is not only limited to his reclusion. His suppressed verbalisation of trauma assumes a disguise in the form of invented stories: Danny makes up stories, never mentioning the reality of his service in Iraq. Even in his fabricated stories he refers to the army and what it turns soldiers into. First, he tells Paul and Jade that France is the furthest place he has ever been to. Then he says he had a wife called Jade who was shot in the chest by a 'squaddie' in a robbery.<sup>276</sup> Later in the conversation he claims to have done special effects for films for his job, working on gun scenes in some of the Bond films. While these fabrications can be read as a foreshadowing of Jade's doom, they can also be seen as Danny's projection of his own actions and trauma on to an imaginary person. Whatever he mentions are associated with his own life: the gun he bought, the squaddie he had been and murdering Jade by shooting her in the chest.

From another perspective, Danny's stories also suggest his desperate attempt to mask the chaotic flux of his own life, therefore they can be equated with Santner's 'narrative fetishism' <sup>277</sup>, an escapist strategy to reconstruct one's identity and vitality in the wake of trauma. This reconstruction, however, includes a denial of trauma and an imaginary intactness. In this way, those narratives release the victim from the burden of facing the trauma and re-constituting a self in post-traumatic conditions. As Santner explains, in narrative fetishism the "post" is indefinitely postponed"<sup>278</sup> that is to say, it brings forward repudiation of any confrontational afterwards. Danny too, by ignoring the traumatic reality, simulates a state of intactness and salience, even though he most definitely needs to work through the traumatic past by acknowledging it and talking about it. He evades this urgency through constructing these narratives that strengthen the false

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<sup>276</sup> Stephens, 2009, 163.

<sup>277</sup> Santner, 1992, 144.

<sup>278</sup> Santner, 1992, 144.

idea that he is fine and untouched. As a corollary, however, the violence and trauma he inherited from the army perpetuate as a part of his civilian life.

Rene Girard, in his work *Violence and the Sacred* on Euripides' tragedy *Heracles* writes, "The returning warrior risks carrying the seed of violence into the very heart of his city."<sup>279</sup> Here Girard refers to the hero Heracles, who is tainted with the slaughter of the war he has been to, returns home and brings the violence with him. Shay, similarly writing on the changes that war brings to the soldier's psyche, points to 'berserk', a "Norse word for the frenzied warriors who went into battle naked, or at least without armour, in a godlike or god-possessed—but also beast-like—fury."<sup>280</sup> In his discussion, Shay includes a Vietnam veteran's confession that "I got very hard, cold, merciless. I lost all my mercy..."<sup>281</sup> concluding that "the *berserk* state is ruinous, leading to the soldier's life-long psychological and physiological injury if he survives. I believe that once a person has entered the *berserk* state, he or she is changed *forever*."<sup>282</sup> (italics in original). In Stephens' *Canopy of Stars*, Jay Watkins who is on the verge of becoming berserk, cannot adapt to his life. He constantly sits in the house drinking tea while watching football matches and longs for his days of war. Stephens, through Danny, similarly and implicitly suggests that after serving in the army, gratuitous cruelty and violence become an inevitable part of a soldier. Danny's statement "The war was alright. I miss it."<sup>283</sup> and, his haste to obtain a gun as soon as he comes back, cannot be explained by anything but being used to war, carrying a gun and the need he feels to protect himself, as well as the idea of annihilating the unwanted. His murder of Jade in cold blood attests to his 'berserk' state that causes him to lose his humane feelings. The act of killing and causing agony to others becomes an inseparable part of his personality as he also admits "This is what I am trained to do."<sup>284</sup>

Caruth formulates the structure of trauma as a disruption of time or temporality. Hence the traumatic event cannot be experienced immediately but only belatedly in its

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<sup>279</sup> René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (1988), Patrick Gregory, (Trans.) Bloomsbury, New York 2013, 46.

<sup>280</sup> Shay, 1994, 77

<sup>281</sup> Shay, 1994, 82.

<sup>282</sup> Shay, 1994, 98.

<sup>283</sup> Stephens, 2009, 209.

<sup>284</sup> Stephens, 2009, 177.

insistent return. While commenting on the intrusive nature of trauma, Herman argues that the unassimilated traumatic experience has an intrinsic tendency to repeat and, because of that, some traumatised people

feel impelled to re-create the moment of terror, either in literal or in disguised form. Sometimes people re-enact the traumatic moment with a fantasy of changing the outcome of the dangerous encounter. In their attempts to undo the traumatic moment, survivors may even put themselves at risk of further harm. Some re-enactments are consciously chosen.<sup>285</sup>

Trauma victims cannot integrate what happened and in order to work through the trauma they should face and understand the trauma event. The mind, while attempting to understand what has happened, forces the victim to act out the traumatic event. Stephens endeavours to expand our awareness of trauma by engaging with the personal trauma of Danny. At the same time, he also highlights the possibility that trauma can reproduce itself if unattended and can cause further harm for the victim and the other people around. Danny's traumatic war experiences seem to be frozen in time or repressed, but they linger in the present and do not stay buried permanently. Triggers or associative conditions cause the troubling nature of wartime violence to show up again. Contrary to other victims who are disturbed by the symptoms in the form of literal dreams or hallucinations, trauma revisits Danny by getting him to commit the very same act. Murdering Jade denotes the repetition of the atrocities he was involved in or witnessed, and it becomes one of the most obvious ramifications of Danny's unresolved trauma.

Despite the fact that Danny's behaviours are fairly unstable, taking Jade to the island and shooting her there is rather unexpected because he doesn't seem to have any agenda to murder her. He buys a gun, yet never mentions killing anybody, and contrary to expectations, leaves Marley unhurt. With ingrained violence, however, he shoots Jade pitilessly. Stephens' depiction of such a psychopathic soldier undoubtedly aims to show the inhumane effects of war on a soldier. His de-sensitisation towards other people's

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<sup>285</sup> Herman, 1997, 39.



suffering seems to be a natural result of his training as an aggressor, and it is also because the individual's capacity to feel pain is suspended while traumatic occurrence overwhelms the senses. Attributing the murder to these motives, the reasons behind the choice of Jade as his victim are crucial. Wars in Iraq and Afghanistan were fought with an elusive and rarely-seen enemy. Most of the time those who were murdered by airstrikes and drone attacks were helpless, innocent civilian families, including a large number of children. The one Danny chooses as his victim is, again, the most helpless person in the play. Although almost all the other characters have immoralities, are gun sellers, swingers, people disappointing him etc., Jade is the only one who has not involved with any of those things, and she also happens to be the most vulnerable. She has no family and, is different from all the others because she is black. From this perspective, she may be symbolising the Iraqi civilians, suggesting a continuation of the victimisation of the innocent, and this identification might in turn be seen as the trigger for the violence of war to come back and berserk Danny.

Unattended and compelling memory of trauma, thereby, leads to a perpetuating cycle of abuse and violence. Upon abducting Jade to the island, Danny harshly criticises her, makes fun of her hair, forces her to play 'What's the capital of...?' and to sing a Britney Spears song 'Baby One More Time'. It is also strange that Danny occasionally wants to photograph Jade.

**Danny:** I wanna take a photograph of you. On my phone.

Would you mind if I took a photograph of you, Jade? Here. Take your, your jacket off, will ya? That's better. There. That's lovely. Gissa smile.

Lovely.<sup>286</sup>

Sontag observes the diminishing effects of the images following the Second World War in her collection of essays *On Photography* (1977), and argues that the proliferation of the photographic images increases voyeuristic tendencies in people. Taking photographs, according to Sontag, can be a way of

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<sup>286</sup> Stephens, 2009, 184.

encouraging whatever is going on to keep on happening. To take a picture is to have an interest in things as they are, in the status quo remaining unchanged (at least for as long as it takes to get a “good” picture), to be in complicity with whatever makes a subject interesting, worth photographing – including, when that is the interest, another person’s pain or misfortune.<sup>287</sup>

Taking photographs, from this viewpoint, becomes a symbolic possession of the person photographed, who is turned into an object. Danny’s authority over Jade even before taking her photographs is ostensible. Rather than only objectifying Jade through the act of photographing, he wants to document her pain and takes a sadistic pleasure out of it.

The images of the “events in excess of our frames of reference”,<sup>288</sup> thanks to technology, have become a normal experience, as one can be exposed to a plethora of them in a day. Sontag criticises and debunks the idea that photographs can reflect the world and help us understand it as, she suggests, they only give voyeuristic pleasure and dull our senses, because modern photography, she believes, is “devoted to lowering the threshold of what is terrible”.<sup>289</sup> In her article, “What have we Done?” (2004), as an initial response to the notorious Abu Ghraib photos, she later challenges her own view and, states “the horror of what is shown in the photographs cannot be separated from the horror that the photographs were taken.”<sup>290</sup> Although the prison that was used for the Iraqi detainees during the Iraq war and introduced the world to the violent infrastructure of terror, was closed in 2014, its horrendous legacy lives on in the infamous photos documenting unspeakable acts exercised there. One of the foremost artists of his generation, Thomas Hirschhorn exhibited his work “The Incommensurable Banner”, which, at 18 metres long, was comprised of the most disturbing photographs and media coverage of the Iraq and Afghanistan Wars circulating online. They are images of the torture, killing and mutilation of Iraqi prisoners and the photographs speak for

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<sup>287</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Anchor Books, New York 1977, 12.

<sup>288</sup> Shoshana Felman, “Education and Crisis or Vicissitudes of Teaching”, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 5.

<sup>289</sup> Sontag, 1977, 40.

<sup>290</sup> Susan Sontag “What have we Done?”, 24 May 2004. Retrieved 10 August 2017, from [http://www.serendipity.li/iraqwar/susan\\_sontag\\_what\\_have\\_we\\_done.htm](http://www.serendipity.li/iraqwar/susan_sontag_what_have_we_done.htm)

themselves. The exhibition was one of the series “Memory of Fire: The War of Images, Images of War”<sup>291</sup>. This disturbing art work was intended to implicate its audiences in the realities of a war that is said to have been waged on their behalf. Fabrica, a centre for contemporary art in Brighton, makes a statement for the publicising of the exhibition on the website:

The Incommensurable Banner stood at four metres high and eighteen metres long. It read as an endless parade of utter destruction, depicting bodies blown apart by modern weapons, weapons designed not just to kill but to obliterate. Created with reference to a tradition of protest, Hirschhorn’s confrontational and controversial work was intended to fully implicate the viewer in the realities of war waged on our behalf. In doing so he invited visitors to consider, and above all not to avoid, the much larger questions at the heart of humanity.<sup>292</sup>

Thanks to these kinds of responses and the uncontrollable circulation of the digital images taken in Abu Ghraib prison, that were hitherto hidden from the world, photography became foregrounded after the invasion of Iraq, and the images produced an intensely traumatic response. Just like the unflinching legacy of the Holocaust as specified in *Ashes to Ashes*, the photographs of U.S soldiers inflicting pain and abuse on the Iraqi prisoners, and their taking sadistic pleasure from these tortures remain as one of the most traumatic collective memories of humanity haunting the world’s consciousness.

The photography scene between Danny and Jade conjures up photographs of Abu Ghraib with oblique references. Danny’s treatment of Jade echoes the abuses committed by American soldiers upon the prisoners. The most memorable and disturbing ones show soldiers torturing naked prisoners and taking photographs of them or grinning next to them or giving thumbs up to the camera. Danny too terrorises Jade and attempts to take her photograph. While Jade is trying to strike a pose for him, claiming she cannot do it properly, he lights a cigarette and puts it out on her hand. When she screams and cries, he

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<sup>291</sup> The Incommensurable Banner by Thomas Hirschhorn was presented by Fabrica between 3 October-16 November 2008 for the 2008 Brighton Photo Biennial. As many of his recent works, Hirschhorn’s this art work drew on photographs of contemporary warfare.

<sup>292</sup> Fabrica, “Thomas Hirschhorn The Incommensurable Banner”. Retrieved 10 August 2017, from <https://www.fabrica.org.uk/incommensurable-banner>

cheers and bursts into a laugh. Afterwards, giving orders to Jade, he starts to talk about a sergeant he used to work with in Basra and what he was doing to the Iraqis.

**Danny:** Here take your shoes off. Take your socks off.

We had. There was. Our sergeant major. He was a funny man. I quite liked him, as it goes. You hear all these stories, don't you? Attention! But, no, he was all right. He'd get drunk. Do this to you.

*He hits the soles of her feet with the butt of his gun.*

With a hammer. Never did it to me. Hurts, doesn't it? And when he shouts at you. SIT FUCKING STILL, JADE! The feeling of spittle on yer face. Here I'll wipe it off.

*He wipes her face.*

And you can't tell anybody. You can't pull rank. You can't do that. Get a bucket of shit and piss from the slops of the drains there. Get some little geek cunt. Pour it over their head.<sup>293</sup>

Although he has never referred to these acts before, it is obvious that he is severely traumatised by what he has witnessed there. As those memories lack verbal narrative and context, initially he cannot talk about them. Rather, these memories are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images. Here the memories come back and expose themselves in fragments. They attest to an acting out of Danny's trauma rather than a healthy working through process. Because Danny does not attempt to get them out of his mind by talking with somebody. On the contrary, unable to get rid of these memories he compulsively remembers and repeats them on Jade again.

Herman states that the highest risk of post-traumatic stress disorder occurs when "the survivor has been not merely a passive witness but also an active participant in violent death or atrocity. The trauma of combat takes on added force when violent death can no longer be rationalized in terms of some higher value or meaning."<sup>294</sup> As can be

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<sup>293</sup> Stephens, 2009, 185.

<sup>294</sup> Herman, 1997, 54.

surmised from his statements, Danny was both a witness and active participant in the atrocities. For example, while talking about searching female Iraqis to find out whether they were suicide bombers, he describes how he resorted to abusive violence. In the meantime, he suddenly goes back to those times and relives the moments that afflict him again. He starts shouting and giving orders as if he was searching the women in the present moment of the play.

**Danny:** ... Some of the things we did, down in Basra... Get that down yer throat, yer raghead cunt... Fucking fourteen-year-old girl? Don't matter. Could've strapped herself. Underneath her fucking burka... Take your burka off. This is a body search. I've seen boys with their faces blown off. Skin all pussied up and melted. Eyeballs hanging out on the cartilage. Yer helmet holds it all together. Bits of yer skull held in.<sup>295</sup>

Trauma is not caused by a single traumatic event but by the gradual erosion of the victim's psychological defences over a prolonged period of time. For Danny too not only the physical reality of war but its casualties bring about trauma. Although he is now removed from the distressing scenes, and despite his subsequent efforts to banish unpleasant thoughts and memories, these "unheroic" memories and the harrowing images taint Danny's life in the civilian sphere, evoking trauma symptoms. During his speech he identifies Jade with the Iraqi teenage girls that they used to search and yells at her. It becomes evident that time loses its chronological sequence and the past compulsively inhabits the present. As a result of that temporal break, turning into a soldier again, he suddenly shoots Jade.

Sontag, in her book on war in Iraq *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003), writes "Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another country is a quintessentially modern experience"<sup>296</sup>, and this modern experience, according to Sontag, is mediated and enabled through photographic images. One of the main focuses of Stephens in *Motortown* is the experience of war and terrorism, and the reaction of the British people to it. Paul

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<sup>295</sup> Stephens, 2009, 186.

<sup>296</sup> Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Farrar, Straus and Giroux, New York 2003, 18.

sees the 9/11 attacks as “the best heist film Hollywood ever made.”<sup>297</sup> He further creates associations between viewing war and terrorism on television and the consumption of food and pornography:

The notion of a War on Terror is completely ingenious. It is now possible to declare war on abstraction. On an emotional state.

*He continues to work.*

God. Law. Money. The left. The right. The Church. The state. All of them lie in tatters. Wouldn't you be frightened?

*He continues to work.*

The only thing we can do is feast ourselves on comfort foods and gobble up television images. Sport has never been more important. The family unit seems like an act of belligerence. All long-term relationships are doomed or ironic. Therefore, sexuality must be detached. But detached sexuality is suicidal. So everybody goes online

Hardcore black fucking MPEG porn... junky lesbian breast torture... bondage fantasies, hardcore pics...free bestiality stories, low-fat diet, free horse-sex, torture victims zoo...

Marvellous stuff!<sup>298</sup>

Although Paul's speeches seem gratuitous and somewhat incoherent, they are all in fact substantial debates espoused by Stephens. Paul mimics the function of truth-telling lunatics, and harshly criticises the ways in which wars and terrorist incidents are downsized, economised and turned into a form of entertainment in the dominant media. They are like sex and food, commodified to be consumed by the people in the West.

Danny turns back to this England which is now filled with all the stinking attractions that Paul addresses. As he puts it, “I came back home. It's a completely foreign

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<sup>297</sup> Stephens, 2009, 169.

<sup>298</sup> Stephens, 2009, 170-71.

country”<sup>299</sup>, but a country that he “fought a war for”.<sup>300</sup> His town is turned into a ‘supermarket for drugs’, men criticising the morality of people are paedophiles and the anti-war marchers he meets are middle class swingers who have no idea what is really going on in Iraq. With an anecdote he unfolds the moral turpitude ingrained in everyday life in England:

**Danny:** Here, you’ll like this. I saw, one time, a group of guys, at Pirbright, get another lad- no listen to this, this is right up your street. They get him. Hold him down. Get a broom handle. Fucking push it, right up his rectum. Right up there... and we all watched that. Joined in.<sup>301</sup>

It is not difficult to equate Danny’s story to the tortures perpetrated in Abu Ghraib. Like war, home has also become a disillusionment for him. There is no difference between what is going on in the war zones and the countries at peace. That is why he cannot differentiate between the front line and the home front. This, in turn, makes the war hard to rationalise and explains why Danny states missing war. Through a critical analysis of the war in Iraq and people in the West, Stephens combines the moral conflicts Danny undergoes with the symptoms of his unsettling war experiences and creates a nuanced portrait of a traumatised man.

On the ten-year anniversary of the harrowing 7/7 Bombings, the *Huffington Post* published Steven Hopkins’ article entitled “7/7 London Bombings: How London Bravely Carried On after a Harrowing Day of Trauma” encapsulating official statements related to the stoicism and resilience of the British people after the bombings. The article cites Her Majesty the Queen who stated, during her visits to the hospitals, that “Those who perpetrate these brutal acts against innocent people should know that they will not change our way of life”, and Prince Charles, who said “What I can never get over is the incredible resilience of the British people who have set us all a fantastic example of how to react to these tragedies.”<sup>302</sup> At the time another defiant response was from the Prime Minister,

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<sup>299</sup> Stephens, 2009, 200.

<sup>300</sup> Stephens, 2009, 188.

<sup>301</sup> Stephens, 2009, 200.

<sup>302</sup> Steven Hopkins, “7/7 London Bombings: How London Bravely Carried On after a Harrowing Day of Trauma”, *Huffington Post*, 7 July, 2015. Retrieved 2 November 2016, from [http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/07/07/77-bombings-london-victims-what-happened\\_n\\_7612010.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/07/07/77-bombings-london-victims-what-happened_n_7612010.html)

Tony Blair, who paid “tribute to the stoicism and resilience of the people of London who have responded in a way typical of them.”<sup>303</sup> These discourses however, soon brought about the discussions of trauma when impacts of the attacks were started to be felt among the victims and later on the soldiers who went to war. Chris Hedges, criticising clichés used by politicians at any point of the world to justify wars and to receive public support, writes in his foreword for *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays* (2011):

War exposes the lies we tell ourselves about ourselves. It rips open the hypocrisy of our religions and secular institutions. Those who return from war have learned something which is often incomprehensible to those who have stayed home. We are not a virtuous nation. God and faith have not blessed us above others. Victory is not assured. War is neither glorious nor noble and we carry within us the capacity for evil we ascribe to those we fight.<sup>304</sup>

Rather than glorifying war and the soldiers and the civilians who face up to its difficulties, Hedge pins down the futility of war and hypocrisy of the people in the face of the so called War on Terror. In *Motortown* as one of the most unflinching anti-war plays, Stephens voices Hedges’ point. He sees society, as an extension of the army and the war. That seems to be why he “wanted to write a play which inculcated more than it absolved”<sup>305</sup> its audiences. In an interview commenting especially on the soldiers who informed his plays, Stephens says

If those boys are violent, chaotic and morally insecure, it is because they are product of a violent, chaotic and morally insecure culture. It’s inaccurate to dismiss them as being part of something else.<sup>306</sup>

Stephens thus attributes Danny’s violent and traumatic existence both to war and to the society that generated war. Throughout the play he supports his point exemplifying this

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<sup>303</sup> “Blair: We will not be intimidated”, *Daily Mail*, 7 July 2005. Retrieved 2 November 2016, from <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-355032/Blair-We-intimidated.html>

<sup>304</sup> Malpede, 2011, vii

<sup>305</sup> Simon Stephens “Why I Wrote *Motortown*”, Education Pack by Royal Court Theatre, 2006, 4.

<sup>306</sup> Nadia Abrahams, “Simon Stephens: Interview”, *Time Out*, 19 April 2006. Retrieved on 23 October 2016, from <https://www.timeout.com/london/theatre/simon-stephens-interview>



moral corruption within his characters. It should also be noted that probably because it does not condemn the attacks and rather criticises the invasion of Iraq and the tortures in Abu Ghraib, the play was previously turned down by theatres in London, and as a result, it premiered in Edinburgh.

The lack of any real social support becomes one of the explicit trauma variables in *Motortown*. Even though Danny lives in a society indifferent to him, it is again the only agent to process and work through his trauma, because only by connecting and communicating with the others, can the trauma victim start the meaning-making process. Kaplan, underlining the utmost importance of narrating the traumatic memories, calls the exchange between a listener and trauma survivor “emphatic sharing.”<sup>307</sup> Laub, on the other hand, equally insisting on the imperative process of telling, notes that the listener acts as “the blank screen on which the event comes to be inscribed for the first time.”<sup>308</sup> Besides, “it is the encounter and the coming together between the survivor and the listener which makes possible something like a repossession of the act of witnessing.”<sup>309</sup> This joint responsibility of helping the victim to see that he is not alone and to acknowledge the traumatic happening enables a healthy working-through. In Danny’s case, however, it is not that possible to find this emphatic listener to realise ‘emphatic sharing’. Throughout the play, Stephens demonstrates the relationships between other people and the already traumatised soldier, which are further problematised because of the painful and psychic defences of the victim. Danny needs to talk about the memories to reconnect to life. However, the trauma of the war precludes communication with others who have not experienced or witnessed it, and the subsequent indifference of the people augments his silence ultimately completing the process of his alienation. Roberta Culberston in her article on recounting the trauma of the survivors and reconstructing a self, evaluates members of society as “cultural silencers”<sup>310</sup> hinting at an imposition of censorship on trauma victims by societal and discursive mechanisms. In fact, what Culberston centres

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<sup>307</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 37.

<sup>308</sup> Dori Laub, “Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Listening”, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub (eds), Routledge, New York 1992, 57.

<sup>309</sup> Dori Laub, “Truth and Testimony: The Process and the Struggle”, *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, Cathy Caruth (ed), JHU Press, Baltimore 1995, 69.

<sup>310</sup> Roberta Culbertson, “Embodied Memory, Transcendence, and Telling: Recounting Trauma, Re-establishing the Self”, *New Literary History*, 26, 1995, 170.

her discussion upon is rape-related trauma cases in which society's stigmatisation and imposition of silence on rape victims are the leading reasons behind women's reluctance to speak. The British society depicted in *Motortown* becomes Danny's silencing mechanism rendering him speechless and more estranged. He loses his ties with everybody around him as none of them addresses his needs and provides him with listening ears. This, in return, precipitates his traumatic state of liminality that already resists articulation.

As a corollary of Danny's reluctance to share, working through his trauma becomes impossible. Danny's need to talk and the importance of the support of others is revealed by Danny himself in the last scene of the play when he finally tells his brother "You don't have the slightest idea what I'm going through."<sup>311</sup> In the closing lines, Danny also says that he never participated in the vile actions in Basra, although he had witnessed them all and, now he wishes he had talked about them and shared the experiences with others, as what he has witnessed rather pains him. Unable to decide how to get away from these horrible memories he even states he could have joined them and perhaps he would feel better than he does now,

**Danny:** In Basra, when it all kicked off with the prisoner, I didn't do any of it. I never touched nobody. I had the rules pinned above my head. My idiot's guide to the Geneva Convention pinned to the head of my bed. They used to call me a pussy cunt. It never used to bother me. I wish I told somebody. I might, still. I wish I'd joined in. I would've liked that.<sup>312</sup>

What Danny needs is to talk and testify to his past, according to Felman and Laub, who hold that "testimony is the narrative's address to hearing; for only when the survivor knows he is being heard, will he stop to hear—and listen to—himself."<sup>313</sup> Unfortunately as Danny is not heard, he just keeps listening to himself. On his adaptation of the play for

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<sup>311</sup> Stephens, 2009, 205.

<sup>312</sup> Stephens, 2009, 209.

<sup>313</sup> Felman and Laub, 1991, 71.

television, Stephens says, highlighting Danny's desperate loneliness and his need to reconnect to society:

One of the things I realised about Danny in the adaptation, although I think this still holds water for the play, is that a lot of his sense of alienation was exacerbated by a desire to belong to a collective identity, and a dissolution of the possibility of that.<sup>314</sup>

At the very end, he steps into a communal action and embarks on a working-through by connecting to his brother.

In conclusion, alongside its harsh attack on societies and cultures that have created wars and violence *Motortown* also carries seeds of hope in it. Sierz says that “*Heron*s (2001), *Port* (2002), *One Minute* (2003), *Christmas* (2004), *Country Music* (2004) and *Motortown* (2006) together look at life's brutal losers and desperate victims but always with hope, honesty and humour.”<sup>315</sup> As Stephens likewise states in an interview with Sierz, “every individual has the capacity for redemption.”<sup>316</sup> Echoing the ending of Edward Bond's *Saved* (1965) where Len mends a broken chair thus suggesting a hope for the estranged family, Danny is seen ready to redeem himself and willing to start a new life with the help and support of his brother. Regardless of what he has done and suffered, he looks capable of breaking through his physical isolation and stepping into life.

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<sup>314</sup> Quoted in Christopher Innes, “Simon Stephens”, *The Methuen Drama Guide to Contemporary British Playwrights*, Martin Middeke, Peter Schnierer and Alex Sierz (eds.), Methuen Drama, London 2011, 454.

<sup>315</sup> Alex Sierz (ed), *The Methuen Drama Book of Twenty-first Century British Plays*, Methuen Drama, London 2010, xv.

<sup>316</sup> Innes, 2011, 455.

### 3.3. SERVICEMEN AND WOMEN STAGING THEIR TRAUMA: OWEN SHEERS' *THE TWO WORLDS OF CHARLIE F.*

In an era ruled by theatricality, the theatre is  
rediscovering its true role...: exposing the truth.

Mark Espiner, "Between the Lines"

Being a spectator of calamities taking place in another  
country is a quintessentially modern experience.

Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*

Born in Fiji in 1974, the playwright, poet, author and TV presenter Owen Sheers was brought up and educated in Abergavenny in South Wales, before attending the University of East Anglia where he completed his MA in Creative Writing. Better known for his poetry, Sheers was chosen as one of the Poetry Society's 20 Next Generation Poets and as one of the top 30 Young British Writers with his first collection of poetry *Blue Book* (2000). His debut prose work, *The Dust Diaries* (2004) won the Wales' Book of the year in 2005, and his first novel *Resistance* was published in 2007 and translated into many languages as well as being shortlisted for the Writers' Guild of Britain Best Book Award 2008. His poetic works informed by the wars led *The Independent* to hail Sheers as "the war poet of our generation."<sup>317</sup>

Being a truly eclectic writer, Sheers also wrote plays for the stage. In 2014, the National Theatre of Wales produced his World War I play *Mametz*. Sheers also wrote a verse drama for television *Pink Mist* which was first broadcast by BBC 4 in 2014, winning the 2014 Welsh Book of the Year and staged at Bristol Old Vic in 2015. *Pink Mist* is based on thirty interviews with returned servicemen and women. It is about three boys who join the army and are sent to Afghanistan, and presents a highly poetic elegy about loss in modern warfare as seen through the eyes of the soldiers and their families.

In 2012, two years before the production of *Pink Mist*, Sheers also wrote a semi-verbatim war play *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* which was staged at the Theatre Royal,

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<sup>317</sup> Sophie Morris, "The 50 Best Winter Reads", *The Independent*, 25 October, 2013. Retrieved 3 March 2016, from <http://www.independent.co.uk/extras/indybest/arts-books/the-50-best-winter-reads-8897358.html>

London the same year. This play prefigured *Pink Mist*, and was based on the testimonies of twenty-two professional servicemen and women who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. As Stephen Rayne, the director of the play, put it, they did not so much have a play as twenty-two people telling their stories on stage. The play was meant to emerge organically from the recollections of these people. In fact, not only was the play based on the real accounts of these servicemen and women as planned, but the characters were also performed by the soldiers the stories were collected from. Only five of the performers were professional actors, supporting the other twelve former soldiers on stage. The performances sold out and garnered both public and critical acclaim. The play then embarked on a UK tour in the same year, winning the Amnesty International Freedom of Expression Award at the Edinburgh Festival. Later, Uppercut Films filmed the making of the play. This documentary, entitled *Imagine... Theatre of War*, was nominated for a Grierson Documentary Award in 2013.

In response to the conflicts in the past two decades, the twenty-first century abounds in fictional narratives and dramatic works, including the rest of the works examined in this study, which aim to embody the trauma suffered after the wars and terrorist incidents. Many of these works received appreciation from the public and the victims themselves. However, a great many non-fictional works relying on the real accounts of victims and a variety of documents such as the above-mentioned works of Sheers and others (Burke's *Black Watch* (2006) about the legendary Scottish regiment, the Black Watch's deployment to Iraq, and Arias' *Minefield* (2016), which brought together Argentinian and British soldiers who fought on opposite sides in the 1982 Falklands/Malvinas War) have also been produced to bring a more authentic insight into the real worlds and sufferings of the soldiers. Among them Arias' *Minefield* also manifests those people as civilians and shows how they can be friends in peacetime even though they tried to kill each other a few years ago. All of these plays can be labelled 'war plays': they focus on what comes after the war and the changes it brings to the lives of those who have faced it, as well as embodying the war and trench warfare. *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, similarly, focuses on the casualties of war and the lives remoulded by the trauma besides portraying the war.

There has been an upsurge of artistic response to wars, “yet there has been one glaring omission: the combatants themselves”<sup>318</sup> Dominic Cavendish remarks. *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* successfully fills this void, by giving the stage to the soldiers. The play as a reinforcement of their voice, presents the traumatic lives of these WIS (wounded, injured and sick) service personnel, and veterans with life-changing injuries from partial blindness to lost limbs, from spinal damage to various psychological disorders. By bringing them on stage, the play propels its audiences to confront the inner thoughts of these men and women as well as their bodily wounds, and makes them witnesses of the war experiences and the after-effects of war for these soldiers.

Theatre’s function in the society that produces it has been a long-lasting debate. Alongside its therapeutic function from the beginnings of its history, it aimed at entertaining and educating besides reflecting its society. Starting with the twenty-first century, theatre has carried its role a step forward in engaging with the truth and reflecting it on stage a step forward with a new kind of theatre. Through this brand new theatre form, dubbed ‘verbatim theatre’, its sole aim has now become probing and poking at the truth. Verbatim theatre as a form of documentary theatre is comprised of precise words spoken by real people. However, in some cases the playwright can insert invented scenes alongside the testimonies of the interviewees. Although *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* is not purely verbatim, Sheers and Rayne conducted very detailed interviews with the twelve ex-servicemen and women who took part in the production as well as with other service personnel. Later the script was created based on the accounts of the soldiers along with invented dialogues. In her article “Staging Wounded Soldiers: The Affects and Effects of Post-Traumatic Theatre” (2015), Ariane de Waal writes the following lines on the problematic genre of the play:

In terms of genre, *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* is somewhat difficult to pin down. It is precisely its location at the intersection of such trends as documentary and (proto-)verbatim theatre, auto/biographical and disability performance, testimonial and community-based theatre, Teya

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<sup>318</sup> Dominic Cavendish, “The Two Worlds of Charlie F: When it’s truly brave to go on stage”, *The Telegraph*, 17 January 2012. Retrieved 8 May 2015, from <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/theatre/theatre-features/9014115/The-Two-Worlds-of-Charlie-F-when-its-truly-brave-to-go-on-stage.html>

Sepinuck's 'Theatre of Witness' and Rimini Protokoll's 'theatre of experts of everyday', that makes an analysis of the piece useful for thinking through the ontological status of the real person within and across such categories.<sup>319</sup>

Although it cannot easily be named a verbatim piece as Waal suggests, the play can still be grouped as a proto-verbatim play for it carries a desire to form and reframe what has happened in reality, being comprised of the accounts of the people who are the genuine protagonists. By bringing real soldiers themselves to the stage, some of them with visible injuries received during their service, it even exceeds the reality effect aimed at by verbatim and documentary genres.

Trauma theorist Tal in *Worlds of Hurt* talks about a "literature of trauma"<sup>320</sup> which was born out of the need to tell and retell the story of the trauma to make it real for the victim and the audience who is listening. Furthermore, she advocates that trauma narratives should comprise of the writings by the real victims of trauma, as only these narratives can influence their audiences. She also believes that the people who suffered it should have a right to write and talk about their experiences. In this regard, *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* provides a good example of 'literature of trauma' both because it is based on the real accounts of original survivor victims and because it is presented on stage by those owners of the traumas.

Theatre offers a platform for these soldiers who as the survivors of war trauma constitute themselves a unique community on stage and bear witness to their own traumatic experiences publicly. Herman emphasises the need for such a community among trauma survivors especially those damaged by the war.

In fighting men, the sense of safety is invested in the small combat group. Clinging together under prolonged conditions of danger, the combat group develops a shared fantasy that their mutual loyalty and devotion can

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<sup>319</sup> Ariane de Waal, "Staging Wounded Soldiers: The Affects and Effects of Post-Traumatic Theatre", *Performance Paradigm*, 1, 2015, 18.

<sup>320</sup> Tal, 1996, 21.

protect them from harm. They come to fear separation from each other more than they fear death.<sup>321</sup>

This immediate need for a community who have shared similar experiences arises from the victims' pursuit of emotional support and assurance that they will not live that event again. This need and desire for participating in a group who knows how you feel explain the large number of rap groups formed by the Vietnam War veterans in the late 1960s and continued up to present day. Taking part in such a theatrical event, the veterans seek to allay their individual unrest and ensure collective coping. This grants them the feeling that they are not the only one and through listening each other they may more easily come to terms with their own traumatic memories.

*The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, while epitomising a literary trauma piece, likewise contributes to the truth claim of verbatim theatre by giving a stage to a real community of soldiers whose stories are re-enacted. Away from romanticised, politicised or criticised fictional accounts in the history of theatrical productions, this play aims only to show what war is about as well as what it brings and leaves. Andy Smart expresses in his review of the play that "this [the play] is the truth, not some sanitised account of combat life."<sup>322</sup> In a similar manner, Matt Trueman, emphasising the play's primary objective in his review for *The Guardian*, writes that "the show sincerely explores military careers and never forgets that it's putting humans on stage, not heroics."<sup>323</sup> As Trueman comments on the spot, the wounds, amputated organs, and afflicted psychologies rather than being reflected as badges of courage or patriotism, are exhibited as the true faces and legacies of war and as the agents of suffering that substantially changed the lives of these service personnel. In this respect, rather than watching glorious acts of some courageous soldiers, the audience witness individuals who strive to come to terms with, and heal, their injuries.

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan caused an increase in the number of traumatised subjects as many of the service personnel deployed to those places stayed a long time and

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<sup>321</sup> Herman, 1997, 62.

<sup>322</sup> Andy Smart, 'Review: *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, Theatre Royal', *Nottingham Post*, 15 April 2014. Retrieved 4 September 2016, from <http://www.nottinghampost.com/Review-Worlds-Charlie-F-Theatre-Royal/story-20959663-detail/story.html>

<sup>323</sup> Matt Trueman, "An Unflinching Look at Life After War", 24 March 2014. Retrieved 15 October 2016, from <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2014/mar/24/two-worlds-charlie-f-review>



returned their homes with injured bodies and psyches. Although it is hardly possible to achieve an authentic congruity between these experiences and their literary representation, by bringing the real actors of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan onto the stage and giving them a voice they had not so far found, *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* is one of the closest attempts in literary and theatrical history to achieve this congruity. The play spans the recruitment of the soldiers and their deployment to frontline Afghanistan, the story of being wounded and discharged, homecoming and suffering from PTSD. It also embodies trauma symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares and relationship problems, as well as the soldiers' bodily wounds and the painful recovery processes with physiotherapy and psychotherapy. The plotline in tandem with the structure of trauma, is non-linear, disrupted by flashbacks and hallucinations, as well as by various songs and dances choreographed by the soldiers and professional dancers together.

The play begins in medias res with the sound of an IED explosion and the first scene entitled "Waking" opens in a hospital in Birmingham. A nurse is seen trying to help a wounded soldier named Charlie who is lying on a bed, shouting, swearing and obviously suffering deeply from his physical wounds. From his statements it soon becomes clear that he is a British soldier serving in Afghanistan and wounded by an improvised explosive device. As he speaks, it also becomes evident that he is psychologically afflicted as he believes he has been captured by the Taliban and will be poisoned.

**Nurse:** What's your name?

He stares at her, his breathing becoming rapid.

**Charlie:** Fuck. You.

**Nurse:** You're in Birmingham, in hospital –

**Charlie:** /Fuck you, you Taliban bitch.

**Nurse:** /Can you remember your name?

**Charlie:** (Shouting) Help! Help! I'm in here! Here! <sup>324</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Owen Sheers, *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, Faber and Faber, London, 2012, 9-10.

When his mother and wife come to visit him, he gets more anxious and tries to soothe them, promising he is going to save them for he thinks they have also been captured. Even they cannot help him calm down and make him believe that he is alright.

Although he really is in Birmingham and taken care of by the British doctors and nurses, due to the gravity of what he has gone through Charlie cannot adapt into his environment, and understand what has happened. Traumatized by the idea of being caught and killed by the Taliban, he keeps swearing and threatening the people around. When he falls to the ground, the audience sees him in uniform with one leg missing. This is not a simulation but an authentic amputated limb, the sight of which at the very beginning of the play, shockingly expresses physical trauma and disturbs the audience. Leaning on a crutch, Charlie stares at the audience and starts to tell them how he felt when an IED went off taking one of his limbs:

**Charlie:** You know when you fell off your bike? As a kid? Do you remember that pain? The one that you don't feel at first, but then you look down at your hand, your knee and it's all gritty from where you bounced along the pavement. And that's when it comes on, pulsing and you're like, 'Ow, ow, ow, what the fuck?'<sup>325</sup>

Charlie narrates what he has experienced through a three-page soliloquy, comparing his childhood trauma of falling off a bike and being unable to grasp its painfulness due to the immediate shock, to the feelings he experiences in due course as a result of an exploding IED. Even though he means to, he cannot give an account of what happened as a whole because of the intensity of what he has gone through. As a consequence, this "crisis of truth", to quote Felman, resists language and Charlie, unable to testify to the traumatic horror, repeatedly states not remembering what happened:

**Charlie:** ... I don't remember waking up.

I don't remember eating breakfast.

I don't remember being given orders, or loading up, or leaving the compound.

I don't remember where we went.

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<sup>325</sup> Sheers, 2012, 12.

I don't remember walking through an archway, a low archway.  
 I don't remember the IED going off.  
 None of that.<sup>326</sup>

One of the basic tenets of trauma theory as propounded by Caruth, and van der Kolk for example, focuses on the amnesic quality of trauma. Neurobiologist van der Kolk proposes that traumatic memories do not have a verbal component and for that reason they cannot be narrated as normal memories.<sup>327</sup> Caruth, similarly, suggests that the traumatic event is so painful that the mind cannot grasp and process it at the time of happening, and in the immediate aftermath, this makes remembering and narrating the event impossible. Charlie, as an example of this, faces a severe traumatic incident and with the intensity of the explosion his protective shield, as Freud would put it, is broken, and as a result, he is exposed to immense pain. Therefore, as his consciousness cannot grasp what he has lived, he cannot narrate what has happened. All other characters, in the same way, when it comes to the moment of their catastrophic wounding, fall silent and state that they do not remember what happened back then.

Even before the soldiers begin to testify and narrate their traumatic stories, the play itself presents an embodiment of a trauma. Because before speech comes the sight; Charlie is seen on the stage and the audience realises that he has lost his limb. This moment tells a lot more than Charlie can express. Caruth, draws an analogy of trauma as the story of “a wound that cries out.”<sup>328</sup> Amputated bodies on the stage, and likewise, other visible injuries become that crying wound and express more about the performers and their traumas than their words can. That is to say, they materialise the trauma that cannot be verbalised by means of language. This evinces the potential of theatre in dealing with issues related to trauma; it is a literary mode that does not solely depend on spoken language but rather rests on several layers of representation.

Later on, however, through the psychologist's enquiry, telling their story of being wounded, all of the soldiers recount their traumatic encounter in a linear narrative.

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<sup>326</sup> Sheers, 2012, 12.

<sup>327</sup> Van der Kolk et al., 2007, 287.

<sup>328</sup> Caruth, 96, 4.

**Psychologist:** Do you want to talk about your ‘when’, Charlie?

...

**Charlie:** Sure. I was taking part in an op...

**Daniel:** I was commanding a company...

**John:** I was on top cover ...

**Frank:** I was against the wall

*... A sudden simultaneous moment of contact. The sound of explosion and gunfire. In slow motion Frank is hit by an RPG. John is blown from his vehicle. Roger’s Snatch turns over. Chris, Daniel, Charlie and Leroy are hit by IEDs. ...*

**Daniel:** I was blown twenty metres...

**Frank:** I heard the rocket coming in...

...

**Daniel:** The shrapnel went through the back of my brain...

**Frank:** It shattered my cheek bone, pierced my eye...

...

**John:** And there was silence...<sup>329</sup>

Even though McNally denies preclusion of the memories in the case of a trauma event, asserting that, as trauma does not block narrative memory, the victims can perfectly describe what has happened<sup>330</sup> traumatic amnesia lies at the heart of trauma in Caruth and her followers’ theories. In *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, despite the fact that all of the soldiers deny remembering what happened after they were wounded, they all seem to be perfectly aware of the time span until the trauma event happened. Stuart Fisher, while specifying the limits of verbatim theatre, points out the nature of “truths such as testimonial or traumatic truth that fail to be disclosed by a literal and factual account of ‘what happened’.”<sup>331</sup> When the meditative, incomprehensible and incommunicative nature of the trauma is taken into account, Sheers including these specific details about what happened when the trauma event occurred, while obstructing the memory following

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<sup>329</sup> Sheers, 2012, 45-46.

<sup>330</sup> McNally, 2005, 180.

<sup>331</sup> Stuart Fisher, 2011, 113.

the trauma event, seems discursive. From the soldiers' stories, it is understood that they remember all of it, but naturally not the part where they most probably passed out from the enormity of the pain. It suggests the soldiers' conscious access to the traumatic memory and narrative authority over it. However, even though they seem to be contradicting the amnesiac quality of trauma, these descriptions may be a dramatic mediation created by Sheers' intervention, because even if some may happen to recall the moment of their wounding, it is not logical to expect all of the veterans to remember that moment. As previously noted, the play is not completely a verbatim piece; therefore, privileging the aim of informing the audience, Sheers interferes and provides a complete account of the soldiers' trauma.

In virtue of being soldiers and serving in real life, it is obvious that all the soldiers have experienced PTSD. Therefore it has a crucial place in Sheers' play. In the course of the play it is very obvious that all of the characters who formerly served in Iraq or Afghanistan have either bodily or psychological wounds and that they suffer from serious PTSD. Although bodily wounds may heal in time, such healing does not easily apply to psychological wounds and that is why trauma occupies a greater place in the soldiers' lives and in the play. Rather than talking about the physical pains, each of them talks about the effects of PTSD. One of the soldiers, Daniel, in a scene entitled 'Briefing 2' gives a chronology of the painstaking disorder that all other soldiers have been diagnosed with, referring to the various names used to describe PTSD throughout its history.

**Daniel:** Nostalgia / Melancholia

Wind contusions. / Soldier's heart.

Abreaction. / Effort syndrome.

NYDM (not yet diagnosed - mental). / NYDN (not yet diagnosed – nervous).

Exhaustion. / Battle exhaustion.

Combat exhaustion. / Shell shock.

Neurasthenia. / Traumatic neurosis.

Psycho neurosis. / Fear neurosis

Battle neurosis. / Lack of moral fibre.

Old sergeant syndrome. / War syndrome.

Combat fatigue. / Acute stress disorder.

Acute stress reaction. / Combat stress reaction.

Post-combat disorder. / Post-war disorder.

Post traumatic disorder. / Post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>332</sup>

Just as the stories are told and enacted, the diagnosis is also made by the soldiers themselves. Even though their visible wounds and amputations are acknowledged by the others, the invisible effects of war cannot be. By including a history of PTSD, Sheers draws attention to the prevalence of the disease which has been long ignored by society, the military and medicine.

Considering that response to the trauma occurs in the form of belated repetitive intrusive phenomena,<sup>333</sup> the impact of a trauma event lies precisely in its belatedness. All of the soldiers in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* are haunted by these intrusive phenomena after coming back home, because they cannot differentiate the past from present and live in a durational rather than a chronological time. Consequently, they go on to live in the past through compulsive shifts back in time and space. The reliving of the traumatic events back in the war zone through flashbacks are so central to their lives and the play that the second scene of the second act is even entitled 'Flashback'. Positioned as the first scene of the second act, the previous scene 'Physio' opens in a physiotherapy room where soldiers, who have had limbs amputated or lost their physical abilities, are doing exercises with their physiotherapist accompanied by classical music. While Charlie explains how he and the others ended up in that physio room, the scene is blasted with a massive explosion and in the second scene the setting turns into a war zone in Afghanistan. Just like the traumatic memories, the scene erupts out of a sudden shattering of the peaceful and comfortable present. All of the soldiers and the physiotherapists collapse representing the Afghan civilians who are accidentally killed by the British soldiers in diegesis. The three British soldiers who have fired on the civilians enter the stage, looking panicked with the shock of their mistake. The scene functions as a symptomatic acting out of these

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<sup>332</sup> Sheers, 2012, 57.

<sup>333</sup> Caruth, 96, 11.

besetting moments. Through this scene, the soldiers return back to the trauma moment and relieve these events.

The 'Flashback' scene is particularly significant in exemplifying the theatrical nature of trauma. Just as a theatrical piece stages an incident from the past with numerous rehearsals and productions, traumatic events are likewise re-enacted again and again through compulsive repetitions. By means of theatre's potential to re-enact, the symptomatic returns of a traumatic event can be successfully exhibited in the play. Theatrical effects such as lighting, sound and imagery enable the staging of the symptoms, and easily activate the audience's imagination. Therefore, not only the soldiers but also the audience, go back and witness the trauma events.

In the scene following the 'Flashback', the motionless bodies on the floor get up and start to repeat a sequence of movements of discomfort, saying,

**Women:** It's not re-living it. It's living it. You're in it. You're there, doing it.

**All:** Worse at night, always worse at night. Worse at night, always worse at night.

**Men:** Scared. Scared to close my eyes. Scared to put my head on the pillow.

Scared. Scared to close my eyes. Scared to put my head on the pillow.

**All:** It's not re-living it. It's living it. You're in it. You're there, doing it. Worse at night, always worse at night. Worse at night, always worse at night.

Entitled 'Sleep', this scene becomes another symptomatic acting out of trauma. The scene gives a painful account of the traumatic haunting in the soldiers' lives and, just like repetitive intrusions of the trauma event, these lines are compulsively repeated throughout this scene. Between these repetitive lines, all of the characters and their families recount how their lives were ruined by sleepless nights, nightmares and images flicking through their minds. They see dead bodies, bodies of children in the streams and see themselves repeatedly blown up by an IED. The victims are exposed randomly and unexpectedly to these images and this prevents them from re-engaging in normal life.

Although during a traumatic incident, the victim's mind is occupied only with survival, the physical escape never suffices, because, as Caruth maintains, the victim who succeeds in surviving the traumatic event, "wakes up in another fright."<sup>334</sup> No matter how far the victim tries to escape, the memories follow. Charlie comments on how the physical distances are getting ever closer thanks to the technology. He says that it now takes only twelve hours to get wounded soldiers back home from Afghanistan to the UK. However, the psychological distance and emotional return are much more complicated.

**Charlie:** But in here-

*He taps his head.*

Even quicker than that. Pretty much insta-fucking-taneous. Blink-of-an-eye kinda stuff. With a few weeks' high-definition hallucinations thrown in for free.

The only problem is that when you come back that quick not all of you comes back at once.<sup>335</sup>

Even though they can make it home physically, as Charlie informs us, getting the soldiers' minds off what has happened on the frontline becomes more difficult. Traumatic memories cannot be left behind despite the long distance between where they were suffered and where the soldiers are now, and even despite their conscious attempts to escape from them. These traumatic memories, similar to a material wound, stick to them and do not easily heal. They stay buried in the minds of the soldiers, ready to surface and re-traumatise them at any moment.

Trauma highlights several forms of intrusion involving continual recurrences of the past events as indications of an indelible imprint of trauma that are exemplified by soldiers' various forms of acting out. Another symptom is manifested with the cases of 'hyperarousal'. Herman describes this symptom when he writes that, after a trauma event, "the human system of self-preservation seems to go onto permanent alert, as if the danger might return at any moment."<sup>336</sup> In *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, characters are vigilant

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<sup>334</sup> Caruth, 1996, 65.

<sup>335</sup> Sheers, 2012, 13.

<sup>336</sup> Herman, 1997, 35.



and ready for this danger. Their complaints about their inability to sleep are obvious manifestations of hyperarousal. The lines quoted above repeatedly uttered by all of the characters on the stage in scene three, and they describe the soldiers' hyper-alertness in the face of the threat of revisiting of the trauma, causing extreme anxiety and sleeplessness.

Trauma does not only affect the soldiers' lives. After being discharged, they withdraw themselves from society. One of the veterans, Roger, says he cannot even see his kids,<sup>337</sup> Charlie yells at his partner while she is trying to help him, and almost all of them end up with an isolated life far from any form of social engagement. They also become quite aggressive and direct their anger either at themselves or at those around them. Leroy, describing, his pain states: "It won't go away. It makes me want to smash something. I can't do anything to stop it. Like nails under the skin."<sup>338</sup> His lines also stand as proof of his frustration and how helpless he feels, not being able to do anything about it.

Unfortunately, the lives of the soldiers suffering from post-traumatic stress are not only perturbed by the acting out. The victims disturbed by the recurrent and distressing recollections may seek ways to escape from them to ease their pain. Commonly, they may start to take painkillers and become addicted to them or take alcohol. In the play some of the veterans also succumb to excessive drinking and drug use in their attempts to ease their pain: some in order to fall asleep easily and some to avoid hallucinations or flashbacks. Most of the performers of the play in real life too confess to living addicted to drugs. Stephen Rayne also asserts that, in real life, a "lot of them are taking a lot of medication a lot of the time."<sup>339</sup> Although they do not provide a comprehensive treatment, drugs numb their feelings and hinder them from reliving the symptoms. In the 'Common Room' scene, when the soldiers are handed their medications, they sing 'The Meds Round'.

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<sup>337</sup> Sheers, 2012, 57.

<sup>338</sup> Sheers, 2012, 56.

<sup>339</sup> Cavendish, 2012.

**All:** (sing) Codeine, Tramadol, Fentanyl, Oramorph, Paracetamol, MST, Amitriptyline, Diazepam, Mirtazapine, Citalopram, Ranitidine, Omeprazole, Lactulose, Butran, Ibuprofen, Venlafaxine. Co-codamol.<sup>340</sup>

The song, comprising of the names of various drugs, highlights the painful healing process of the veterans that obliges them to take a large amount of medication. Most of these drugs are used to relieve bodily pain and some somatic disorders that show up as a result of their psychological disorders.

Herman points out certain kinds of somatisation such as headaches, gastrointestinal disturbances and various other unexplained bodily pains that can arise in cases of trauma.<sup>341</sup> Through a therapy meeting between Charlie and his psychoanalyst the physical symptoms are clearly manifested and listed as the following,

**Psychologist:** ...Severe allergic reactions: disorientation; excessive sweating; fainting; fast or irregular heartbeat; fever; hallucinations; loss of coordination; mental or mood changes, agitation, depression, red, swollen, blistered or peeling skin, and... seizures.

**Charlie:** Severe nausea? Vomiting; diarrhoea; headaches; suicidal thoughts – cos I need more of those, right? – Loss of appetite; tiredness; weakness; pale shit and dark piss.<sup>342</sup>

The cumulative effects of trauma manifest in physical form. The medications and psychosomatic symptoms listed by the soldiers unveil the reality of the soldiers' medical record that is not only specified with a visible injury but a psychological unrest. Unable to express their psychological pain, they suffer from these physical somatisations, and live addicted to drugs. In addition to their bodily wounds that attest to their physical trauma, psychosomatic symptoms inform the audience about the soldiers' psychological trauma that cannot be expressed through language.

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<sup>340</sup> Sheers, 2012, 66.

<sup>341</sup> Herman, 1997, 124.

<sup>342</sup> Sheers, 2012, 66.

It is widely accepted that a trauma event after its occurrence disrupts the sense of self and creates new identities for the victims of these events. Almost all of the characters have problems with other people, especially with their partners or mothers as it has already been mentioned. This inability to connect and communicate arises as the survivor's understanding of the self is ruined in the first place following the trauma. Podell and Laub assert that the traumatised subjects fail to "preserve an emphatic tie"<sup>343</sup> with themselves. Much like Stephens' Danny in *Motortown*, each of the soldiers losing this tie during their service returns home as someone else, completely changed. Daniel narrates how and when this change took place:

**Daniel:** How I think of it is, I've got my old brain, and my new brain. My old brain was the one that evolved for the first thirty-eight years of my life. It was me. My new brain, that's the one I was given when I was blown up. I mean, in an instant I became a different person ... I don't like the new me. I don't always recognize myself.<sup>344</sup>

For Daniel, as the title of the play suggests, war means a second genesis. He goes into the army as one person and comes out as somebody else, because the war annihilates what self the soldiers have constructed so far and creates a desperately different one. They start to feel, live and see the world differently. Similarly, when Chris talks to the psychologist, he tells him that his wife says that "The Chris that went away hasn't come back."<sup>345</sup> John, likewise, admits disparity within his personality saying "It's like being two people."<sup>346</sup> At the beginning of the last scene when Charlie recounts the grievous process of being discharged, he says "one of the last things you hand over is your ID. Your identity."<sup>347</sup> Although he is speaking of the military identification card that he returned when he was discharged, it also metaphorically refers to their identity which they leave in the army. When they finish their service, they start another life, new but moulded by their experiences, and with a new identity that they acquired from what they have gone

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<sup>343</sup> Dori Laub and Daniel Podell, "Art and Trauma," *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, Volume 76, 1995, 992.

<sup>344</sup> Sheers, 70-71.

<sup>345</sup> Sheers, 65.

<sup>346</sup> Sheers, 70.

<sup>347</sup> Sheers, 78.

through. “Because we don’t live in two worlds, do we? We live in one”<sup>348</sup> Charlie asserts. It is quite obvious that the problem is to choose which world they want to live in.

The solution for living in a world is not as easy as simply choosing a life, though. Notwithstanding their zeal for getting rid of the traces and reminiscences of the past, the legacies of war refuse to go away, obliging the soldiers to oscillate between two worlds. No matter how problematic it sounds and proves, narrating the trauma event and hearing how the victim feels have been one of the indispensable elements in the process of healing. Laub quoting Moore, suggests that we cannot know the traumatic event has occurred until another narrates it.<sup>349</sup> Testimonial narratives, in this sense, shift position from victim to witness and, in the theatre context, all the servicemen and women in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* experience what they failed to experience in the first place by bearing witness to what has happened and at the same time by testifying it. This act of testifying and narrating the traumatic story, of course, makes the existence of an empathetic listener crucial. Only through this way can the survivor get away with acting out the trauma in various forms, and take a critical distance from what has happened. When this distance can be achieved, the survivor can work through the trauma. In theatre and performance arts the spectator is positioned as the listener. As theatre can address a wide audience, the role of dramatic productions in providing this essential listener and helping to work through the trauma is undeniable. In validating trauma and recovering from it, de Waal writes that

The implied spectatorial position is thus one that affirms the soldiers’ status as victims and puts them ‘safely beyond blame’. This is the basic premise of the performative contract for the more important interpellative invitation to be realised, namely, an apprehension of the soldiers-performers’ recovery process.<sup>350</sup>

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<sup>348</sup> Sheers, 79.

<sup>349</sup> Richard Moore quoted in Dori Laub, “Traumatic Shutdown of Narrative and Symbolization,” *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, 41, 2005, 307–26.

<sup>350</sup> Ariane de Waal, *Theatre on Terror: Subject Positions in British Drama*, Walter de Gruyter, Berlin 2017, 147.

To know that there are people to listen to their pain and understand them, the soldiers acknowledge that they are not alone. This mutual contract between the soldiers and the audience validates the soldiers' victimisation, and giving soldiers the chance to face this reality contributes to their recovery.

Bearing witness to the soldiers' stories on stage, the members of the audience also become the secondary witnesses and sharers of the events. Similarly, dealing with the paradigm of witnessing in theatre, Teya Sepunick defines the purpose of this new form by stating that

The purpose of this form of theatre is to give voice to those who have been marginalised, forgotten, or are invisible in the larger society, and to invite audiences to bear witness to issues of suffering, redemption, and social justice.<sup>351</sup>

Sepunick's work is based on the premise of "finding medicine in stories", which also comprises the subtitle of her book. In *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* the soldiers who have been neglected by society and could not make their voices heard, find the cure in sharing their stories and pain with an audience. The private, individual trauma experience, of which the service personnel themselves are the only witnesses, is translated into a collective realm, through a public retelling and positioning of the listeners as the witnesses. The proximity between the audience and the performers, and the sight of real, injured bodies on stage enable an immediacy, and the authenticity of what they see on stage encourages a communal bearing of witness. As a consequence, this mutual understanding and feeling of empathy enable healing for the victims.

Although theatrical productions have generally lost their sole, original, cathartic role, some trauma narratives and theatrical productions continue to provide a context for it. Aristotle defines the function of theatre as a purgation of the feelings aroused in the audience. In trauma narratives produced by the survivor victims, however, the performance can also enable catharsis for victims burdened with the weight of trauma. Tal, in her work while advocating 'a literature of trauma' by real victims, says "such

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<sup>351</sup> Teya Sepunick, *Theatre of Witness: Finding The Medicine in Stories of Suffering, Transformation and Peace*, Jessica Kingsley Publishers, London 2013, 14.

writing serves as both a validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatised writer.”<sup>352</sup> Similarly, the original idea of writing such a play consisting of authentic materials and staging it with real soldiers came from executive producer Alice Driver who believes that theatre can empower the individual and boost their confidence, self-esteem and give voice to the wounded, injured and sick service personnel and veterans of the armed forces. As initially desired, feeling of catharsis and healing have become the most striking outcomes of *The Two Worlds of Charlie F*. Most of the soldiers taking part in the project evaluate it as a life- changing experience. One of the soldiers, who was suffering PTSD, for example, was a drug and alcohol addict but, after being a part of this society and sharing his problems with people who felt the same, was cured of his addictions and started to feel more hopeful about the future. Egendorf and Lifton, emphasising the importance of a reclamation of emotions while overcoming the trauma, write that impressions from their research show that

a significant minority of Vietnam veterans have had moments of enlightenment, conversions, and other crucial points at which they turned traumatic experiences into resources of renewal. A review of Veterans’ writings yields a similar impression. Most memoirs and novels deal with the war experience or with unsettling, if not traumatic, homecomings. A few accounts, however, focus on the struggles of healing, demonstrating that some portion of the veterans population knows what it means to turn suffering to joy.<sup>353</sup>

During the performances, by sharing their experiences, the soldiers also succeed in bringing together fragments of their shattered selves, which occurred at the time of the traumatic event, and become whole again. In an interview, one of the cast members, veteran Cassidy Little who plays Charlie, asserts:

This show gave me back me. You have to understand that when a person goes through this kind of trauma, they have a lot taken from them. Future goals, aspirations, confidence and much more. Your ego is slashed right

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<sup>352</sup> Tal, 1996, 137.

<sup>353</sup> Quoted in Tal, 1996, 137.

down to its bare bones. Your employment endeavours are taken, your physical appearance is altered, and with a brain injury, even the way you think and react changes. Throw in some very high-powered drugs and you have a perfect combination for confusion and hopeless recovery. So, we needed something to allow us to subconsciously repair that. This show was it.<sup>354</sup>

With the rise of trauma paradigm in many fields of art and literature, talking about traumatic experience as a way of healing has gained importance. As Thompson argues, theatre has also become one of the fertile sites for offering liberation from suffering by expressing it:

Within performance studies in general and in applied theatre in particular, the assumptions emanating from the popularity of the *trauma diagnosis* have led to the prescription of ‘telling one’s story’ as the preferred method and necessary precondition for ‘relief’, ‘liberation’ or ‘healing’.<sup>355</sup> (emphasis in original)

According to Thompson, creating a narrative of the pain allows it to be healed while silence is a dangerous retreat. Caruth writing about the traumatic paradox asserts that trauma is not only an experience but a failure to experience, hence it can only be worked through by grasping the reality of this experience. Performing soldiers in the play refuses to remain silent and in order to grasp the reality of their past bring their fragmented parts together by telling their stories and re-enacting them on stage. This as soldiers state changes the way they have felt about themselves, what they have lived through and how they are going to live. In this way, the performance of the play gives them liberation and a healing of their traumatic burdens.

Even though the audience witnesses real soldiers and real stories in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, the connection between them is not necessarily real. What it means

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<sup>354</sup> Brad Wheeler, “A Wounded Soldier’s Life: ‘This isn’t a Freak Show’”, *The Globe and Mail*, 21 February 2014. Retrieved 6 May 2016, from <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/arts/theatre-and-performance/a-wounded-soldiers-life-this-isnt-a-freak-show/article17026181/>

<sup>355</sup> James Thompson, *Performance Affects: Applied Theatre and the End of Effect*, Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire 2006, 45.

is that the soldiers do not perform their own stories with their identities, but an edited version of them. The play was drawn from the personal biographies and testimonies of the soldiers; however, all the character names and the stories in the play were imagined by Sheers. Even though this seems to disrupt the truth claim on which verbatim theatre hinges, the distance enabled by incorporating fictional identities and slightly distorting the real stories can enable a healthy working through for the soldiers. As van der Kolk and van der Hart suggest, by slightly distorting the traumatic memory and “imagining alternative scenarios, many patients are able to soften the intrusive power of the original, unmitigated horror.”<sup>356</sup> While problematizing the verbalisation of trauma, Caruth, similarly, also suggests to “tell ‘a slightly different story’ to different people.”<sup>357</sup> The victims, therefore, while narrating the unmitigated catastrophe tend towards distortion in order not to face the enormity of the event and be re-traumatised. According to Caroline Wake, performing a real trauma event might carry a ‘risk of repetition’ for the victims, and therefore, she suggests, it might be more ethical to resort to some distortions in order to eliminate this possibility.

It is hard to see how watching traumatised subjects re-traumatise themselves for the performance can be called ethical. Paradoxically, it may be that the practice of false witnessing is more “ethical” since it relieves the primary witness of the burden of repetition and reduces the risk of re-traumatisation.<sup>358</sup>

In the play, when they perform what they have experienced as somebody else’s story, the soldiers, in account of these emotional and critical distances, can get away from the feelings of a victim and distance themselves from the trauma event. Daniel Shaw, for example, who lost his both legs during an IED explosion in Afghanistan as he went to the aid of a colleague, plays Leroy Jenkins and rather than speaking for himself speaks as Leroy on the stage. Even though the stories of Shaw and Jenkins are similar, the narrative frame hinders emotional identification to some extent. This, in turn, as Wald points out, “allows for a gradual liberation from the repetition compulsion through the very

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<sup>356</sup> Van der Kolk and van der Hart, 1995, 178.

<sup>357</sup> Caruth, 95, 153.

<sup>358</sup> Wake, 2013, 46.



mechanism of repeating, albeit repeating in a slightly different form.”<sup>359</sup> Shaw repeats his story through that of Leroy Jenkins, and this way works through his own trauma.

Specific to the Holocaust, literary representations of the trauma and suffering of the victims have been subject of many literary and ethical speculations. Including amputated bodies on the stage in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* can also run the risk of suggesting an ambivalent aestheticisation of the pain, suffering and vulnerability of the soldiers, because the audience is invited to witness the weakest moments, the imperfect bodies of the soldiers, and even to access the most private problems they suffer from. Sheers, however, negates this perception by indicating that the soldiers’ bodily imperfections do not prevent them from living. The soldiers talk freely about their amputations; they even make fun of them.

**Leroy:** How come your stump’s so fucking Gucci?

**Charlie:** Gucci? What’s so fucking Gucci about my stump?

**Leroy:** The scar. Yours is well neat. Mine is like a fucking arse. ... Look, it’s got bum cheeks and everything I can fart out of this fucker.<sup>360</sup>

Charlie carries a personalised number plate for his wheelchair which reads “N0 LEG 14.”<sup>361</sup> In the meantime, Chris makes some phone calls to find out whether anybody has found his leg and his friends tease him for acting like Cinderella. The scene is full of black humour as a strategy to recuperate and come to terms with their bodies. Sheers also asks his audience to accept them as they are instead of feeling pity or treating them as disabled bodies. On the character of the play, Little comments,

This isn’t a freak show, this isn’t ‘Let’s clap for them because they got hurt doing war-y, war-y stuff.’ The audience is coming away a little more informed about what a soldier goes through.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>359</sup> Christina Wald, *Performance Maladies in Contemporary Anglophone Drama*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2007, 106.

<sup>360</sup> Sheers, 60.

<sup>361</sup> Sheers, 65.

<sup>362</sup> Wheeler, 2004.

Rather than presenting the soldiers as disabled bodies, the play highlights what they can do and what they need from society. What they need is acceptance and understanding before pity. Providing a theatrical frame, the dance scene that the soldiers perform with professional dancers transforms them into resilient bodies and proves that physical impediments are not obstacles.

*The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* has potentially persuasive effects as it is based on contemporary social realities and performed by real trauma survivors. However, putting aside its authenticity and therapeutic framework for the British soldiers, what seems problematic in the play is the stance it takes in disregarding the trauma for the Afghan people. With the exception of Afghan civilians killed in the 'Flashback' scene, they or their trauma do not find any representation, although they are the most distinct victims of the war. Contradicting the truth claim that underpins this play, the reality of those people living there seems to be comprehensively ignored. Writing of this absence, Waal, quoting Butler, says "By providing no names, faces, or (hi)stories to the Other, public discourse renders both their lives and deaths unreal, unmarkable, making it impossible for 'us' to grieve for them."<sup>363</sup> Contrary to what Sheers claims, excluding the reality of the Afghan population and inadequately reflecting the effects of war on them, therefore, the play runs the risk of being partial, and misinforming its audience.

While emphasising the function of trauma tragedy, Duggan claims "Rather than looking back at a historical moment of trauma, trauma-tragedy is attempting to bridge or reduce the gap between the historical moment, its witness and (that) experience."<sup>364</sup> *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*, by bringing the experience of trauma with the help of its victims onto the stage, bridges the gap between the victims' traumatic past and present. In doing so, it invites the audience as well as the performers to a mutual witnessing. In terms of the audiences, a successful emotional identification becomes a successful outcome of the performance, as they bear witness to the real testimonies of the real actors of war. However, another criticism that can be addressed in the play is the absence of any overall critical distance even as it encourages an emotional identification. Although the play is ostensibly about war and its destructive effects on the soldiers, there are no

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<sup>363</sup> De Waal, 2015, 23.

<sup>364</sup> Duggan, 2015, 57.

references to the causes and the general outcomes of the war. Lacking such an important aspect, it fails to connect the traumatic event and the results. On the contrary, it even runs the risk of strengthening these phenomena. Although Sheers states “the play is only about what war is about”, in the final scene Charlie’s speech related to the ‘regiment of the wounded’ enforces the continuity of the military values, glorifying its members and victories.

**Charlie:** ... one day you are in. the next you’re out... It’s OK though. Because it isn’t about leaving, is it? It’s about joining too, right? I mean all of us here, yeah, we’re leaving the services, but we are also joining the oldest regiment there is. The regiment of the wounded... you might not be familiar with its victories, but believe me it has thousands to its name. Millions.<sup>365</sup>

In contrast with Stephens’ critical stance against war in *Motortown*, Sheers’ play avoids criticism, and fails to heal or prevent trauma in the long run. Nevertheless, in the scope of soldiers’ personal experience of trauma, the play takes up the challenge of articulating the failed experience of trauma and successfully translates it into a collective realm through a public retelling and positioning the audiences as witness to the trauma which cannot be the soldiers’ alone. As Caruth posits trauma “is never simply one’s own” and “we are implicated in each other’s trauma.”<sup>366</sup> By bearing witness to their trauma, the audiences also accept them as their own and take part in the process of working through.

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<sup>365</sup> Sheers, 2012, 78-79.

<sup>366</sup> Caruth, 1996, 24.

### 3.4. DISRUPTING TEMPORAL AND SPATIAL BORDERS OF WAR AND TRAUMA: ZINNIE HARRIS' *MIDWINTER*

Playwright of the multi-award-winning play, *Further than the Furthest Thing* (2000), Zinnie Harris is one of the freshest voices of the British theatre. She is a playwright, screenwriter and theatre director. After studying zoology at Oxford University, she continued her education with an M.A. in theatre direction at the University of Hull. Harris made her debut with *My Many Wounds* in 1998 which was produced by Hampstead Theatre. Acquiring worldwide fame with a production of *Further than the Furthest Thing* at home and abroad, she was commissioned and produced by the Royal Court, the National Theatre of Scotland, the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Royal National Theatre. From April 2015, she has been Traverse Theatre's Associate Director. Her dramatic output includes *The Chain Play* (2001), *The Wheel* (2011), and her most recent plays, *How to Hold to Your Breath* (2015), *This Restless House* (2016) and *Meet me at Dawn* (2017) among others. In addition to them, she has adapted a couple of plays including *Julie* (2006), an adaptation of Strindberg's *Miss Julie*, *A Doll's House* (2009) and *This Restless House* (2016), an adaptation of Aeschylus' *Oresteia*. Very recently, she produced an adaptation of Eugène Ionesco's 1959 classic *Rhinoceros* at the 2017 Edinburgh International Festival, at the Lyceum Theatre in collaboration with DOT Theatre, one of Turkey's most radical and independent theatre companies.

*Midwinter*, the second in a trilogy of plays concerned with war was first staged by the RSC at the Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon in October 2004. Later, in 2005, as a prequel to *Midwinter* Harris wrote *Solstice*, and the trilogy culminated in *Fall* in 2008. About the trilogy Harris says "They all look at different aspects of war. They have different seasons as titles. *Solstice* is before the war starts, *Midwinter* is the middle of a war and *Fall* is a little bit after it, dealing with how society moves on."<sup>367</sup> *Midwinter* is about a post-apocalyptic future and set between the aftermath of a bitter, non-specific ten-year war and just before another one about to start. In the opening scene of the play Maud, a woman in her thirties, is seen devouring the carcass of a horse. She comes across an old man, Leonard, and his mute grandson, Sirin. They are starving just like the rest of the

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<sup>367</sup> Mark Fisher, "Zinnie Harris – Heading for a fall", *The Scotsman*, 9 August 2008. Retrieved 22 May 2015, from <http://www.scotsman.com/lifestyle/zinnie-harris-heading-for-a-fall-1-1435673>

country and are lured by the smell of the meat. After a discussion, she barter some of the horse for the starving boy whom she then passes off as her dead child. When the war is over, her long-presumed dead husband Grenville returns from the war as a hero, but infected with a blinding parasite. He also brings home the violence and terror of the war. Leonard, knowing Maud and her twin sister from their childhood, reveals that Maud's real name is Magda and she has taken the identity of her twin sister who was drowned in the river long ago. Upon learning this fraud and turning into a soldier again, Grenville starts inflicting violence on the child and Maud. Thereupon, Maud, promising to ease his pain and to heal him, kills Grenville by pouring lime on his eyes. The play ends with Leonard's announcing the outbreak of a new war which ironically will no longer need soldiers at all, and Maud's refusal to acknowledge this. In the closing lines, she claims that from now on, in her house, it is only peacetime for her and her son. In view of contemporary realities permeated by war, Harris' piece offers us a picture of traumatised individuals, each of them responds to war in a different way. Herewith, the play provides a fruitful arena to elucidate traumatic effects of war, and role of theatre in confronting its audiences with these gruesome realities.

The potential of war to damage the psychological and physical lives of those who fought it has been ostensible since 'shell shock' was diagnosed. The term that gained currency in the context of the First World War was used only to denote the traumatic reaction of soldiers to battle. However, with the inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder following the Vietnam War in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* in 1980 as a mental disorder, it came to the fore once more, focused again on the effects of war and soldiers' experiences. Thereupon, a great number of war plays, dominated by the male perspective, were written focusing on the effects of war and depicting war trauma especially of soldiers returning from the war. Unlike these mainstream war plays, Zinnie Harris does not limit the description of war to trench warfare and army life. Rather, she is preoccupied with representing the trauma of war at home and among society, especially among women, as well as the returning soldiers.

On the grounds that they do not fight on the frontline, the trauma of war for women has been substantially overlooked. Although women do not actively take part in the war, and are not experiencing it first-hand, they have still become, in Kaplan's terms, victims,

but of “secondary” or “vicarious trauma.”<sup>368</sup> From Ancient Greece on, women in times of war have been depicted as closely connected with the roles of mothers, wives and daughters in society. Besides their sufferings throughout the war, after the wars, their bodies become the casualties of war in any war zones in the world. Produced in 415 BC., one of the best anti-war plays of all times, Sophocles’ *Trojan Women*, exceeds the limits of its time and a good example for the universality of women’s experience in the theatre of war. In the opening of the play, after the Greeks have ransacked Troy, the Trojan women await their departure to Greece as newly-created slaves. By voicing the position of women during male-dominated conflicts, the play provoked intense interest in the literary history of war, including in the twenty-first century. Within the canon of 1990s New Writing, on the other hand, not only the grief and losses that women have to cope with, but also more grievous realities particularly rape and tortures have been provocatively portrayed. Kane’s *Blasted*, “one of the key plays of the 1990s”<sup>369</sup> in Graham Saunders’ words and a landmark play of the in-her-face theatre in the context of war, unflinchingly portrays the grievous horrors of war from rape to cannibalism and stories of appalling atrocities that no one was willing to hear until then. Following Kane’s footsteps her contemporaries too such as Mark Ravenhill, Anthony Neilson and Martin Crimp produced plays with evocations of the violence of war and its deleterious effects on each member of society.

In *Midwinter*, not confined to the trenches, war haunts life in the entire society. Because of this, all of the civilian characters, as well as the soldiers, display symptoms of war trauma, and they suffer from its after-effects. Even though trauma’s indelible effects on individual psyche are indisputable, collective trauma, such as that caused by war, can have further destructive consequences. In *Midwinter*, although Harris depicts the characters’ experiences as personal, this narrow experience extends to a collective experience of war. The play portrays the war-stricken lives of society, and their degrading sense of community as a result of profoundly broken social attachment bonds. Despite the reality that self and society generally shape each other, in *Midwinter* no such meaningful interaction occurs. Because, as Herman emphasises, traumatic events disrupt

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<sup>368</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 20.

<sup>369</sup> Graham Saunders, *About Kane: The Playwright and the Work*, Faber, London 2009, xxi.

human relationships breaching the attachments of a community.<sup>370</sup> The play begins by revealing the collapse of the sense of a community and evident disruption of societal bonds:

**Maud:** Who's there?

*No answer*

*She returns to the horse*

*Another noise*

*She stands up again.*

Answer me.

*She holds the sharpened stone out.*

I can see you.

*She looks about both directions.*

One move and you've had it. I'm armed. I'm a good shot.

*An old man (Leonard) and a boy appear. Leonard walks with a stick.*

**Leonard:** We smelled the meat.

**Maud:** Don't move.

*Leonard takes a step forward.*

**Leonard:** Couldn't smell anything else for miles. Half the city will be following us.

**Maud:** It's mine.<sup>371</sup>

After major traumatic events especially those that are inflicted by a human agent, the victim loses the sense of safety, and, furthermore, any feeling of trust. Far from feeling safe as a part of a community, with the emergence of the war and the subsequent exposure to violence and hunger, all the characters in *Midwinter* become traumatised and look for ways to survive alone. The ensuing state of trauma as a result of the internalised state of conflict hinders attachment to anybody, and this, in turn, renders a community impossible. Maud, as an embodiment of this loss of any form of commitment, regards everybody as

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<sup>370</sup> Herman, 1997, 51.

<sup>371</sup> Zinnie Harris, *Midwinter*, Faber and Faber, London 2004, 3-4.

a possible threat to her life. With the internalised trauma of being attacked or betrayed, she refuses to communicate with an old man and a little boy, and avoids helping them.

In effect, throughout the thirteen scenes the play is structured upon, there is no real connection between any of the characters. Maud cannot have a healthy relationship with either the boy or her (sister's) husband Grenville. Although she tries hard to construct a real mother-son relationship with Sirin, she can never be successful. Likewise, Leonard, Grenville and the boy cannot make meaningful connections with one another due to the impairments that the trauma of war has caused. Even though they all strive to spend their lives together, even in the same house they live in isolation, grappling with their fears and wounds. Leonard seems to be fond of his real grandson, Sirin, at the beginning of the play yet, he refuses to take him when Grenville is very hard on the child and Maud wants to give him back.

**Leonard:** I can't take him

**Maud:** He is your grandchild.

**Leonard:** But you said it yourself, I am getting old. You know I can't.

**Maud:** You said you wanted him

**Leonard:** When you had him, I wanted him, but now –

**Maud:** Grenville will kill him.

**Leonard:** You will have to find someone else for him.

**Maud:** He is your grandchild.

**Leonard:** It doesn't count for anything.<sup>372</sup>

As we can get from Leonard's statement, the concept of a relationship or any kind of bond 'doesn't count for anything' as the war and its trauma have damaged them all. They all look towards surviving the war rather than constructing a society and being a member of it. The war disrupts their emotional and psychological lives so severely that they even lose the feeling of attachment to their closest family members. Leonard abandons his grandson, only living relative, even though he knows the child will be tormented by Grenville. Maud, similarly, does not show any sign of grief for her missing family members, presumably all of whom she has lost to war. These problematic relational bonds

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<sup>372</sup> Harris, 2004, 64.



between the characters suggest that war trauma strips them of humanity, leaving behind insensitive living things.

As well as ravaging the land and disrupting relationships, the war also destroys the identities of the characters. As Laub and Podell observe, traumatic experience brings along “failure to preserve an emphatic tie even with oneself”<sup>373</sup> and consequently, motivations, goals and a sense of security are destroyed and the individual loses the understanding of self. Maud, Leonard and Grenville too, losing this tie with their basic motivations and goals, cannot manifest their real identities and cannot easily be depicted through their self-qualities. On the other hand, Kaplan suggests that while annihilating existing identities, traumatic events “produce new subjectivities through the shocks, disruptions and confusions that accompany them.”<sup>374</sup> All of the characters in *Midwinter* are reshaped by the shadows of the war. They are all insecure, escaping from the realities of the past and the future, and fixated on survival more than anything else. Upon surviving, they tend to form new subjectivities in accordance with the traumatic conditions. For instance, after the war, the dead horse and the desperate child are not the only things that Maud steals. As she loses most of her life and identity to war, she escapes from her real identity and strives to forge a new one by stealing that of her dead sister in order to leave the traumatic past behind, and to fill the void left by the war. As well as forging herself a new identity she also constructs one for the boy. She passes him off as a dead child, changing his name and introducing him to Grenville as his own son. Thus, she prepares a new life through him and her newly-planted herbs, without traces of the old one.

Maud intends to live with this forged identity which is an ostensible product of trauma. She ignores the past despite all its impending effects, and rebuffs Leonard when he uncovers the truth about her past life and identity.

**Leonard:** Little twins, used to be so hard to tell you apart.

**Maud:** You have to be joking

**Leonard:** Magda had the mark, Maud didn't. Even Katherine couldn't tell you apart otherwise.

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<sup>373</sup> Laub and Podell, 1995, 992.

<sup>374</sup> Kaplan, 2005, 20.

**Maud:** You mis-remember.

**Leonard:** No, because Maud died with my daughter. I remember pulling their bodies out of the water. And, if you aren't Maud, you must be Magda.

*Pause.*

**Maud:** Sirin, go and wait for your father.

*He doesn't move.*

Go and stand outside the door.

*Sirin does nothing.*

Move, I said.

**Leonard:** Which must mean you are living in her shoes.

*Sirin hangs on to her.*

**Maud:** Sirin?

*She tries to carry him out. He cries.*

**Leonard:** Tell me you aren't. Tell me I'm wrong

**Maud:** You are wrong.<sup>375</sup>

In the same way, she denies the reality when Grenville confronts her saying he knows that Maud died with her son Isaac.

**Maud:** How can I have died, I am right here?

**Grenville:** He said –

**Maud:** A mistake, Magda died, yes, I should know, I mourned her, but Maud, no ...

**Grenville:** The mark above your arm –

**Maud:** We both had it.

**Grenville:** Maud didn't.<sup>376</sup>

Dissatisfied with her life and identity that are torn with war, she wants to restart her life and chooses that of her dead sister which is untouched by the war. Married to the man she loved and pregnant with his baby, her sister seems to have had an ideal life which is

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<sup>375</sup> Harris, 2004, 48-49.

<sup>376</sup> Harris, 2004, 57-58.

what Maud longs for. That is probably why she wants to reconstruct this idealised life by adopting her identity.

The central dialectic of trauma is a paradoxical one. Because it both claims and denies expression.<sup>377</sup> After undergoing a trauma event, trauma theorists also argue, the victim may tend to deny or suppress what has happened to them rather than confronting the reality. In this case, however, the victim re-enacts the painful event after a period of time, because as Tal puts it, “On a social as well as an individual psychological level, the penalty for repression is repetition.”<sup>378</sup> War gives Maud the opportunity to steal her sister’s identity and live in it, while leaving her painful life behind. Even though she strives to bury this deep down, the reality comes back again to haunt her life. With this pseudo-life she endeavours to be happy and safe from any external threat but she cannot get away from the past. In an attempt to forget the past and construct a hopeful future, she perpetually ignores what has happened and sedulously abstains from a working through. As she cannot come to terms with her traumatic life, she keeps reliving it. Her buried trauma surfaces and haunts her through the old man who brings the past into the present.

Another traumatised and transformed subject created by the war is depicted through the only soldier character, Grenville. By virtue of being a soldier and experiencing the war directly he presents the embodiment of the violence and trauma of the war. Like many other contemporary playwrights, Harris, instead of narrating the ethos of heroism or resilience, portrays the destructive effects of war on soldiers. Rather than glorifying his experience in the war and dignifying the medals he has been given in return for his service for the county, Grenville celebrates breaking all his bonds with the army instead.

**Grenville:** Ah, we have company. I feel like celebrating.

*He gets out a bottle of whisky from his pocket.*

That is my last ever engagement from the army. That is the last I ever have to see of the lot of them, and look –

*He takes out a whole handful of medals.*

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<sup>377</sup> Herman, 1997, 1.

<sup>378</sup> Tal, 1996, 7.

-look Maud, medals and medals. We can hang them on the mantelpiece. You can play with them, Isaac, put them in your treasure box. We can use them as buttons if you like. Would someone please smile at me. This is a celebration.<sup>379</sup>

From Grenville's statements indicating his happiness at breaking his bonds with the army, it is not difficult to imagine that what he has experienced during his service is not something he is proud of. Michael Billington calls *Midwinter* a "moral parable"<sup>380</sup> for its role in highlighting the subject of war and its effects on soldiers and civilians as well as in commenting on its realities. Harris, in confirmation, underlines the futility of war by showing what the soldiers, and some civilians, got when it ended: a handful of medals signifying nothing in comparison with what they have given away. Grenville fights in the war for ten years, and he is given the medals for his service and bravery. During these same ten years, however, he loses his wife and his child. Besides, it is revealed throughout the play that medals are not the only thing that the army and his experiences during his service have given him. He leaves the army and returns home with the worst of several legacies: acquired violence, sore eyes infected with a parasite which gradually blinds him, and obtrusive memories.

If we revisit Freud, a trauma survivor can walk away from the scene of the trauma event unharmed, only to suffer symptoms of the shock later. Grenville returns home from the war in good shape and never clearly shares any information about any disturbing events. By all appearances, he returns from the war unharmed, albeit the traumatic experience of war comes to light by way of intrusive nightmares or flashbacks, and the enigmatic virus in his eyes. Whenever he closes his eyes, Grenville remembers his disturbing memories of war and shares these compulsive, painful repetitions with Maud. He also expresses his constant fear that they are going to ruin his life.

**Grenville:** Just there chasing my tail, just right there behind me. Catching up. Faster faster, getting there. And the only thing you can do

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<sup>379</sup> Harris, 2004, 49.

<sup>380</sup> Michael Billington, "Midwinter/Poor Beck", 8 Oct 2004. Retrieved on 20 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/stage/2004/oct/08/theatre>

is open your eyes and see that it is nothing. It has gone. Gone. Until you close your eyes again.

But if you can't open your eyes, if they stay closed, or you can open your eyes but you can't see... then what?<sup>381</sup>

Caruth says that “the painful repetition of the flashback can only be understood as the absolute inability of the mind to avoid an unpleasurable event that has not been given psychic meaning in any way.”<sup>382</sup> Grenville’s being flooded with the reminiscences of the war and painful emotions when he closes his eyes, denotes the overwhelming nature of the events he experienced and his inability to grasp them at the time of happening. During the long years of war, he is exposed to many traumatic experiences but he cannot put them into words. He avoids remembering and talking about them both because of not wanting to recollect and also because of the traumatic nature of the memories that resists narration. As a result, his traumatic experiences cannot be fully assimilated into his consciousness and thus cannot be narrated. On the other hand, they continue to impose themselves against his will in non-verbal forms and traumatise him again.

Herman contends that trauma symptoms that cannot be spoken, sometimes manifest themselves in somatic forms. “Over time,” she writes “[trauma victims] begin to complain, not only of insomnia and agitation, but also of numerous types of somatic symptoms.”<sup>383</sup> One of the most striking examples of the trauma that manifests somatically in the play is the ominous outbreak of a parasite in the eyes of the soldiers that is going to kill them all. This parasite stands as a metaphor for the internalised war trauma that affects the soldiers’ lives. It is acquired during soldiers’ service in the army under extremely hard conditions. The way it emerges after some time and perturbs the victims’ lives all evoke trauma symptoms. Just like any other symptom, it now and then intrudes into soldiers’ lives and destroys them. Similar to all of the soldiers, Grenville is also infected by this enigmatic parasite, and on returning home, he starts to suffer from it. His vision is impaired and it apparently gives him severe pain.

**Grenville:** Or my mind, it goes out of control, I scare myself.

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<sup>381</sup> Harris, 2004, 42.

<sup>382</sup> Caruth, 1996, 59.

<sup>383</sup> Herman, 2001, 121.

My eyes water for no reason, that is the worst of it. All this stuff comes out of them, so much I can't see, and when I rub them it only gets worse.<sup>384</sup>

Unable to find a cure, as it cannot be diagnosed, Grenville has to put up with that pain. He wants his pain to abate, but it gets worse in time, like any ignored trauma. It even brings about his death. As a consequence of the pain he inflicts on the boy and Maud, Maud kills him by deceiving him into pouring lime in his eyes. Trauma, in a roundabout way, leads him to his death.

The somatisation of trauma in the form of this blinding parasite, which can be considered as a legacy of the war, and its violence that all the soldiers have inherited, also denotes a form of communication for the soldiers. Whereas Sirin communicates his trauma by staying silent, Grenville and other soldiers communicate it through this parasite. On the somatic expression of trauma, Lyndal Roper writes:

Body images, bodily malfunction or even what the psychoanalyst Joyce McDougall calls somatic expression, can be a kind of mute communication, a pre-linguistic resource to which we resort when language dries up in inexpressible psychic pain.<sup>385</sup>

Grenville too never talks about his memories in the army as he probably does not want to remember them and he is unable to put them into language in an effective way. He evades Maud's attempts to talk about the war. In consequence, Grenville's psychic pain as well as that of all the other soldiers finds expression through this ominous blinding parasite. Inasmuch as it haunts each of them, it also renders a communication of what they are going through possible.

Besides the intrusions of the memories and his sore eyes, Grenville naturally suffers from difficulty in adapting to post-war society. Just like other soldier characters such as Danny in *Motortown* and all other soldiers in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.*,

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<sup>384</sup> Harris, 2004, 25.

<sup>385</sup> Lyndal Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Modern Religion in Early Modern Europe*, Routledge, London 1997, 22.

Grenville manifesting symptoms of PTSD fails to reclaim his civilian life after coming home. While Maud sacrifices a lot and tries hard to maintain a domestic context, Grenville cannot reconcile himself to it. He attempts to be a proper husband and have a strong father-son relationship; takes Sirin to fishing, tries to teach him talking, yet, unfortunately, he cannot be successful in either of those. Now that he was destitute of a social life in connection with other people during his ten-year military service, he cannot get involved with them again no matter how much he desires to.

Another after-effect of Grenville's trauma surfaces in the form of violence. Resorting to violence as a result of war veterans' inability to communicate their suffering is one of the most common consequences of war trauma. Unable to recover from the war-time experiences, Grenville too succumbs to violence and terrorises the people around him. As Michael Cotsell notes, in cases of trauma "in the worst outcomes, the traumatised themselves adopt traumatising behaviour towards others, typically those closest to them."<sup>386</sup> With regard to this, Grenville's trauma is manifested in the form of aggressive behaviour inflicted on his son and wife. Thus, he, a victim of war, becomes the victimiser. When he first comes back home, Maud's concerns about the problems a soldier experiences upon returning home foreshadow what is going to happen.

**Maud:** You are a soldier, you're used to different things now.

**Grenville:** I love you, that is the same.

**Maud:** You will kill us.

**Grenville:** Don't be stupid.

**Maud:** You'll get angry and –

**Grenville:** No. never.<sup>387</sup>

As a result of his subsequent aggressive behaviour, the repercussions of war and its trauma are felt in the house when, as Maud asserts, he turns "back into a soldier".<sup>388</sup> Although he does not kill anybody, Grenville assaults old Leonard in order to extract information about Maud and Sirin's real identities, mistreats the boy when he learns that

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<sup>386</sup> Michael Cotsell, *The Theater of Trauma: American Modernist Drama and the Psychological Struggle for the American Mind, 1900-1930*, Peter Lang, New York 2005, 3.

<sup>387</sup> Harris, 2004, 22.

<sup>388</sup> Harris, 2004, 64.

he is not his real son, throttles the pedlar who tells him that all the soldiers will eventually go blind, and torments Maud for deceiving him. All this violent behaviour signals his inability to work through his trauma as he cannot face or get away from the memories of war and what it has done to him. For this reason, his trauma keeps coming to the fore in different forms, ruining both his life and that of the others around him.

The traumatic effects of war on all of the characters are quite obvious. Grenville's inability to express his feelings and suffering turns back in the form of violence and parasite, Maud, on the other hand, refusing to speak about the existence of the war, compulsively looks to the future. In Sirin's case it becomes graver. Owing to the fact children are much more vulnerable to outside dangers, violence of war can take a more devastating toll on the victim when the victim is a child. It can also be particularly acute as the self is in construction on the basis of attachment and relations. A child's identity is formed through the relationship with the mother as the early caregiver. A mother's influence, as the only person the child is securely attached to, is very important in a child's development of trust, which later influences all other relationships throughout his life.<sup>389</sup> Devoid of the crucial maternal affection, the only child in the play, Sirin cannot respond to the outside world in a normal manner. Besides, as his schemas for hope, faith, meaning and purpose are not fully developed yet, he cannot make sense of the traumatic experience and cannot cope with it. With reference to the APA definition of PTSD as a response to a witnessed or life-threatening event involving extreme fear, helplessness and horror, it can be posited that Sirin, a child of eight, is clearly suffering from post-traumatic stress. He loses both his parents to war, sees the horrific face of war and, he is about to starve.

Although Harris does not provide precise information related to the boy's past, it is not very difficult to imagine it, just like his future. When Leonard begs for some meat for Sirin, Maud says that the boy will be alright when he is conscripted at the age of ten. It means that joining the army to fight when he is still a child is his only hope for staying alive; otherwise he will starve to death.

**Leonard:** He is starving, and you are playing a cruel game.

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<sup>389</sup> Jude Cassidy, "The Nature of a Child's Ties", *Handbook of Attachment: Theory, Research and Clinical Applications*, Jude Cassidy and Philip R. Shaver (eds.), Guilford Press, New York 1999, 5. pp. 3–20



**Maud:** He won't starve for long. They'll decide they need him soon. Then they'll feed him. Feed him up. Oh, there is food. Didn't you know that? We may be under siege but food does get in. After all they need food to feed the ten-year-olds they call the men.

**Leonard:** He's eight.

**Maud:** So they'll let him starve for another two years yet.<sup>390</sup>

Echoing the use and exploitation of the children in the army as in Debbie Tucker Green's *Stoning Mary* (2005), and Sam Holcroft's *Cockroach* (2008), Harris foreshadows Sirin's future: in a time of war, his childhood will be stripped from him and he will become the agent of war and further deaths. Maud's critique of the army in this dialogue is probably informed by Brecht's *Mother Courage and Her Children* (1941) where army have always food to feed its soldiers whereas the civilians are starving. Once they start to benefit from Sirin, Maud implies, the army is going to breed him which will be his only chance to survive.

If what he has gone through, his present condition and his ominous future expectations are considered, Sirin's traumatised state seems inevitable. Even his own grandfather calls him an imbecile as he cannot speak and it is later revealed that the child was not loved even by his own mother because of his inability to speak.

**Leonard:** She didn't love him any more than I did. She was always wishing him on someone else. She tried to lose him when she was pregnant, she twisted her ankle trying to abort, and when he was born he was such a strange child, it was the same. The silence, it drives you mad. You have to have both sides of the conversation to yourself. No one can live with that.<sup>391</sup>

From the information Harris provides, the play begins just after a ten-year war and Sirin is eight years old. Born into a bitter war, he never speaks and this silence causes even his

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<sup>390</sup> Harris, 2004, 6-7.

<sup>391</sup> Harris, 2004, 65.

mother to despise him. This is an extremely disconcerting vision of a world which is no longer fit to accommodate children and offer a liveable future to them.

Through language one can understand the world and relate to it. Language also plays an important role in elaborating and structuring the traumatic memory. In the case of trauma, it is of the utmost importance to speak about it for a successful working through, as it will allow the victim to take a critical distance to the event and distinguish between the past, present and future.<sup>392</sup> However, it can be hard for the trauma victim to articulate the traumatic experience. As Caruth puts it, emphasising the difficulty of verbalising their experiences, “[trauma victims] carry an impossible story within them, or they become themselves the symptom of a history that they cannot entirely possess.”<sup>393</sup> For this reason, silence, in some cases, becomes an integral part of the trauma. It is also a central claim of the trauma theory that “trauma creates a speechless fright”<sup>394</sup> and, as language is neither appropriate nor powerful enough to describe the experience of trauma, remaining silent often becomes the only choice. Narratives of trauma, because of this, are mostly haunted by profound silences. It can either be adopting linguistic silences throughout the text or a mute character can be employed in order to embody the horror of an event. A very good example can be found in Harold Pinter’s *Mountain Language*, where an old woman is beaten up for not speaking the capital’s language, which she cannot speak as she doesn’t know it, and for the rest of the play she remains silent due to the traumatic treatment she has experienced.<sup>395</sup> In this play Pinter perfectly portrays how a traumatic event and its results can be better expressed without using words.

In *Midwinter*, the most striking example of silence caused by trauma is Sirin who is totally stripped of speech. From the very beginning to the very end except the word ‘fish’ in the thirteenth scene, Sirin does not utter any word. It can be easily argued that he remains silent because of his ‘semiotic incapacity’, for he is too inexperienced to shoulder the horror of war and define it with his existing vocabulary. On the other hand, Patrick Camegy comments that “the boy’s stubborn silence is an enigma in response to which the

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<sup>392</sup> LaCapra, 2001, 22.

<sup>393</sup> Caruth, 1995, 5.

<sup>394</sup> Michelle Balaev, “Trends in Literary Trauma Theory”, *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* Vol.41 No.2, June 2008, 149.

<sup>395</sup> Harold Pinter, *Mountain Language*, Grove Press, New York 1989.

characters' secrets slowly come to light."<sup>396</sup> In a way, for Camegy it amounts to what is hidden and not spoken throughout the play. However, at the end of the play, although the secrets are revealed, the boy remains silent. If we take secrets as the past traumas of the characters, Camegy's verdict becomes more acceptable, because neither Maud, nor Grenville verbalises their pain. They keep them silent just like Sirin. They prefer to speak of anything but war and its consequences. In Sirin's muteness what makes more sense is not a metaphorical response to the secrets but a very traumatic reaction to what he has gone through. Children's capacity for verbalising is limited compared to an adult's, and Sirin's known world cannot provide any precedent for what has happened and is still happening. Therefore, it is particularly difficult for him to put his traumatic experience into a narrative and share it with others even though it is one of the most important factors in recovering trauma. He fails at creating a narrative for his experience and pain and with his absolute silence he becomes a symptom of the history he cannot possess, as Caruth expresses it.<sup>397</sup>

Laub points out the role of the listener as an important part of the process of narrating and healing trauma. In some cases, however, he argues that the victims can prefer silence and when this is the case, their silence must be listened to. Laub writes,

Silence is for [the victims] a fated exile, yet also a home, a destination, and an abiding oath. To *not* return from this silence is rule rather than exception. The listener must know all this and more. He or she *must listen to and hear the silence*, speaking mutely both in silence and in speech.<sup>398</sup> (italic in original)

Sirin's grandfather gives him away and Maud uses the boy as a substitute for the old one, and to set up a normal future for herself. Grenville, similarly, wants to satisfy his desire for a father-son relationship. However, upon learning the truth, the boy becomes the target of his violence. The child is deprived of any emotional bond and the war forces him to

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<sup>396</sup> Patrick Camegy, "RSC Flirts with New Writing", *The Spectator*, 23 October 2004, 61. Retrieved 16 April 2016, from <http://archive.spectator.co.uk/article/23rd-october-2004/61/the-rsc-flirts-with-new-writing>

<sup>397</sup> Caruth, 1995, 5.

<sup>398</sup> Laub, 1992, 58.

live through some terrible experiences. His silence, self-imposed or due to the semiotic incapacity, actually tells more than words can say. It is a symbol of the trauma, the ‘speechless fright’ that war trauma has caused. This state necessitates, as Laub proposes, a listener that can hear his silence. But this listener cannot be provided, because, struggling with their own issues, none of the characters can really sympathise with his situation. Instead of understanding the boy and the troubles he is undergoing, they are all irritated, even driven crazy, by Sirin’s silence. This lack of a listener, in return, reinforces his silence.

However, the effect of trauma on language is not solely manifested in complete silence in *Midwinter*. In case of other characters, it is either manifested through a fractured language, endemic pauses pervading each scene, or more evidently abstaining from talking about war and what it has done to them. As noted previously, Maud always eliminates the memory and the idea of the war and never talks about it. Grenville, on the other hand, tries in vain to distract himself from reality. When Maud mentions soldiers dying in the war, he says “Lots died. Don’t think about them.”<sup>399</sup> But then, he himself seems to be haunted by the things he is trying to deny by avoiding to talk. All his dreams, state of constant fear and restive mood disclose this reality. Even though he does not want to remember, he cannot escape from the traumatic memories of the war that impose themselves on him.

On the other side, refusing to come to terms with her past, Maud compulsively thinks about the upcoming years and faithfully believes in a welcoming future. She tries to insulate herself from further harm, by disregarding the war and its problems. Throughout the play, herbs and plants reappear as her hope for the future, she always says the herbs will grow and they will live on them,<sup>400</sup> they will sell them and get the ointment for Grenville’s eyes.<sup>401</sup> She plants herbs for her future life, she does not provide the requisite soil, though. These plants that she works so hard to grow and use can be seen as a metaphor for Maud’s life.

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<sup>399</sup> Harris, 2004, 24.

<sup>400</sup> Harris, 2004, 26, 27, 29, 31, 77.

<sup>401</sup> Harris, 2004, 43, 56, 70

**Leonard:** They won't grow, by the way. The soil is too sandy. Too thin, the water runs through. You can't plant herbs here.<sup>402</sup>

Just as with the plants, she disregards the missing ingredients yet forces a brand-new life out of the ruins of the old. Her feigned life is proven to be badly sown just like her plants are. In view of refusing to acknowledge her trauma and work through it, she cannot escape from facing the past in its intrusive returns. In *Representing the Holocaust* LaCapra tells us,

Trauma is effected belatedly through repetition, for the numbingly traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only after a temporal gap or period of latency, at which time it is immediately repressed, split off, or disavowed. Trauma then in some way may return compulsively as the repressed.<sup>403</sup>

Throughout the play Maud dismisses the reality of the war by focusing only on starting a new life. In doing so, she represses the reality of war and its trauma. As Harris puts it in an interview, "In *Midwinter*, the only way for the woman [Maud] to survive the war is to keep focus very close: this house, this room, this child."<sup>404</sup> Keeping her focus close, however, she disavows what has happened eliminating the possibility of a working through. She could recognise the past as a part of her life and work it through only if she confronted it. However, she abstains from facing it, rendering a healing process impossible. As in Tal's argument, her repression of the reality is punished by the repetition of this reality. The war also brings its horrors again, and its trauma, which was not worked through, casts its shadow again, obliging her to re-experience what she has stubbornly denied.

Curiously enough, the war starts again regardless of the fact that most of the soldiers have died in the preceding war, the rest has been blinded and will eventually die.

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<sup>402</sup> Harris, 2004, 33.

<sup>403</sup> LaCapra, 1996, 174.

<sup>404</sup> Fisher, 2008.

Even the pedlar puts that reality into words, and finds it comforting for there cannot be any war again,

**Trent:** It's a good job that all you soldiers have gone blind, because, whatever happens, the war can't start again, can it? The war can't start because who the hell would they fight with.<sup>405</sup>

Yet it starts. Leonard informs about the punchline of the upcoming war stating "This next war won't need soldiers."<sup>406</sup> With this bit, *Midwinter* reminds Caryl Churchill's dystopian play *Far Away* (2000) that ends with a war in which not only the soldiers or the civilians but, quite literally, everything is against everything; lakes, forests, and animals. Both Churchill's and Harris' play attest to 'New Wars' that is termed by Mary Kaldor. Kaldor defines the term according to the impact of globalisation on warfare. "In such contexts," she writes, "the distinction between state and non-state, public and private, external and internal, economic and political, and even war and peace are breaking down."<sup>407</sup> In these wars mostly guerrilla and terror tactics are used, and the targeted victims are mainly civilians rather than uniformed combatants. These are all recognisable by the contemporary audiences who live in an era agitated by a constant state of war on a daily basis, which again rather than fought on battlefields by the soldiers comes to city centres or even fought on digital spaces. In this respect, Harris' reference is no stranger to her audiences.

When war breaks out once again, Maud insistently continues to disavow this reality and states that

**Maud:** In this house, whatever happens out there, in this house...  
Peacetime. That's all I know.  
Pause.

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<sup>405</sup> Harris, 2004, 68.

<sup>406</sup> Harris, 2004, 76.

<sup>407</sup> Mary Kaldor, "In Defence of New Wars", LSE Research, 2013. Retrieved 7 July 2017, from [http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49500/1/\\_lse.ac.uk\\_storage\\_LIBRARY\\_Secondary\\_libfile\\_shared\\_repository\\_Content\\_Kaldor%2CM\\_Kaldor\\_Defence\\_new\\_wars\\_2013\\_Kaldor\\_Defence\\_new\\_wars\\_2013.pdf](http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/49500/1/_lse.ac.uk_storage_LIBRARY_Secondary_libfile_shared_repository_Content_Kaldor%2CM_Kaldor_Defence_new_wars_2013_Kaldor_Defence_new_wars_2013.pdf)

It's peacetime here, you understand. There is no more of this, not here. Not just as Sirin is learning to talk. No, not now. We are in a different land to out there. They're in one season, but we are in another.

You understand? In the four walls of the garden —

**Leonard:** I don't even understand it.

**Maud:** So don't mention it. It's gone. [...] That is it. It's over, do you understand me? There is no war.

**Leonard:** Even as...?

**Maud:** Peacetime.<sup>408</sup>

As well as denying the outbreak of the war again, she also goes on to narrate a hopeful future and a happy life untouched by the war and far from its effects. If we draw on what Santner suggests on the strategies to live with trauma, Maud's response can be equated with narrative fetishism which is a kind of acting out by refusing to mourn, and simulating a condition of intactness without resigning herself to the reality of trauma. Maud voluntarily seeks to reinstate the pleasure principle without addressing the unpleasurable realities of the past and the present. Although Leonard informs her of the outbreak of a new war, she passes off this reality and keeps narrating optimistically what is going to happen in the future.<sup>409</sup> As Santner proposes, Maud, consciously or unconsciously, tries to expunge the traces of the trauma of war by ignoring it and talking about a future that she desires and, in this way, she also avoids the burden of trauma and reconstitutes her self-identity under post-traumatic conditions.

In case of a trauma, LaCapra underscores the vitality of working through in which the traumatised people can take a critical distance to the event they experienced and can distinguish between past, present and future.<sup>410</sup> Maud is obsessed with the hopeful future but cannot make peace with the past or even the present. This, ultimately, prevents her from overcoming her trauma and leading a meaningful life as the thing she disregards keeps compulsively repeating itself. Maud's stance here makes reference to the attitudes of the people around the world who live far away from the war zones. Those who can

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<sup>408</sup> Harris, 2004, 76-77.

<sup>409</sup> Harris, 2004, 75-76.

<sup>410</sup> LaCapra 2001, 22.

turn off their TV and live as if nothing is happening, ignore what is going on around the world outside their countries. Not accepting the reality just like these people who deny bearing witness, causes this unaccepted trauma to come back and re-enact itself. Aware of the sufferings and traumas of people who live with war, Harris is also well aware of the need for bearing witness to what is happening around the world. In an interview with Mark Fisher for *The Scotsman*, she says about the trilogy “The three plays try to work out how one can reconcile living in the West and being perfectly happy, with atrocities that are happening all the time.”<sup>411</sup> One of the characters in Zinnie Harris’s *Fall* says “we have to bear witness, we have to really listen to what other people have lived through.”<sup>412</sup> Harris attempts to confront the audiences with the realities and invites them to bear witness to what is happening around the world in order not to act them out in the future, as happens in *Midwinter*.

As it starts, *Midwinter* ends with another war, making war an all-pervading force controlling the characters’ lives. Julia Boll comments on the war as an “unlisted character”<sup>413</sup> in *Midwinter*, as it is ever-present but almost never mentioned. Besides, although it is understood that there is a constant state of war, one of the most striking characteristics of the play is its lack of a specific setting and time. Different from all the other plays depicting war in this thesis, only in *Midwinter* is there no recognisable conflict taking place in a familiar location and at a recognisable time. Although recent conflicts and wars in the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan and Israel have absolute reverberations in the play, Harris avoids giving clear clues. In an interview for *The Scotsman* she says:

It exists in its own world, like Illyria in *Twelfth Night*. The theatre is about fiction, about asking ‘What if?’ It feels like you ask slightly more philosophical ‘what if’ questions without getting into the nitty-gritty of talking about Mugabe or whoever. With any real character, people can say, ‘Well, no, he wouldn’t have done that. ‘If you want to write about the modern world, you have choice of verbatim theatre where you present exactly what’s going on – which isn’t the way my writing comes out – or

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<sup>411</sup> Fisher, 2008.

<sup>412</sup> Fisher, 2008.

<sup>413</sup> Julia Boll, “The Unlisted Character: Representing War on Stage”, *The New Order of War*, Bob Brecher (ed), Ropodi, Amsterdam 2010, 167-180.



you have something fictional and theatrical, asking questions that turn things on their head a bit more.<sup>414</sup>

In *Stoning Mary*, touching upon the issues of war and violence around the world, debbie tucker green, hinting at the possibility of its occurrence anywhere in the world, notes “the play is set in the country it is performed in.”<sup>415</sup> Harris, in a similar manner, without confining it to a specific place transgresses borders of race, nation and origin and reminds her audiences of the possibility that these events may happen anywhere and anytime, even in their home country. In an interview with Sinem Dönmez on the production of *Midwinter* by DOT Theatre in Turkey she says,

[In *Midwinter*] where we are and when it happens is not clear, while writing I was thinking of Iraq War, but it can be anywhere. This is just aftermath of a war. It reminds us that the war is real and everywhere. We are all in the same world, those trying to survive the war are not different. Either an African woman or a European one.<sup>416</sup>

Keeping the critical distance between the play and the audiences by eroding spatial and temporal borders, Harris challenges her audiences to face the possibility of war and its destructive effects at any time. She also makes us question what is happening around the world outside our lives in bubbles that are prone to pop anytime. This also reminds Kane, who stated that “the seeds of full-scale war can always be found in peacetime civilisation.”<sup>417</sup> It doesn’t matter how safe we feel or seem at present, war can erupt without warning and lead to incurable traumas. The essential question is where do we stand and what should we do in the face of these catastrophes, that we reckon always befall others.

*Midwinter* does not only demonstrate a network of connection between the past and ongoing wars by eroding the borders, but also reveals the universality of human

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<sup>414</sup> Fisher, 2008.

<sup>415</sup> debbie tucker green, *Stoning Mary*, Nick Hern Books, London, 2007, 2.

<sup>416</sup> Sinem Dönmez, “Kış Dönümü: Nasıl Oluyor da Yaşamaya Devam Edebiliyoruz?”, *Kültür Servisi*, 13, April, 2016. Retrieved 5 May 2017, from <http://kulturservisi.com/p/kis-donumu-nasil-oluyor-da-yasamaya-devam-edebiliyoruz>

<sup>417</sup> Dan Rebellato, “Sarah Kane: Interview with Dan Rebellato”, 3 November 1998, in Alex Sierz, *Modern British Playwriting: The 1990s, Voices, Documents, New Interpretations*, Methuen Drama, London 2012, 202.

suffering originating in these catastrophes. Traumas surfacing and disturbing the characters are not peculiar to them. Regardless of where or when the wars broke out, they devastate the lives sparking off severe psychological trauma. Harris, proving a playwright of her era successfully makes a point of these problems and how they transform the societies on contemporary stage.

## CONCLUSION

If theatre wants to find itself needed once more, it  
must present everything in love, crime, war and  
madness.

Antonin Artaud, *Theatre and its Double*

As a result of the political, economic and social upheavals of the twenty-first century, as in the 1980s and 1990s, trauma has once again been brought to the fore and become “a cultural trope”.<sup>418</sup> In response to this upsurge of interest, an array of literary works informed by these conflicts and their results has flourished and, as the defining forces of the new millennium, wars and their painful effects in particular, have found a place in many of these works. Referring to the earlier part of the twentieth century, Artaud emphasises above the necessity of confronting all the problematic issues in theatre for theatre to assume a dynamic and vibrant position in a society. In line with Artaud’s statement, through its immense capacity to respond to contemporary conflicts, theatre in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has become one of the most active mediums in communicating and representing wars and issues arising from them.

Malpede suggests in the introduction to her edited book *Acts of War: Iraq and Afghanistan in Seven Plays*, “Dramatic art arose as a complement to, perhaps also as an antidote to, war”<sup>419</sup> signalling the power of dramatic works both in representing war and informing audiences about war’s deleterious effects on society. Since the ancient Greeks, theatre history has abounded in representations of war and its trauma. The number of plays addressing contemporary wars and their aftermath in British theatre is also enormous. This plethora of artistic representations of war on stage recalls John Galsworthy’s prophecy about the impact of the First World War on literature: “That stress will most likely have a more ultimate and powerful influence upon literature than the war itself.”<sup>420</sup> Numerous theatrical representations, ranging from fictional responses to verbatim pieces based on the accounts of the war by veterans, also denote the powerful

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<sup>418</sup> Wald, 2007, 3, Kirby Farrell, *Post-traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1998, 14.

<sup>419</sup> Malpede, 2011, xv.

<sup>420</sup> Hew Strachan, *The Oxford Illustrated History of the First World War I*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1998, 312.

impact of wars on public consciousness and the playwrights. Plays examined in this study also address the wars and their impacts through traumatised individuals and societies who exemplify the real face of the war.

Trauma that cannot be experienced at the time of happening comes back to haunt its victims' lives. It reveals the existence of many obstacles to its resolution, such as silence, denial, repression and resistance. Regardless of how hard it is to put traumatic experience into words, it demands to be shared, communicated and elucidated. Trauma that cannot be communicated results in symptoms pervading the victims' lives. Trauma itself is defined as unknown and unspeakable and that inevitably brings representation into question. Many trauma theorists suggest that, with its metaphorical language, literature is the most appropriate medium to address and represent trauma creatively. In accordance with this purpose, contemporary plays examined in this study attempt to recreate portrayals of traumatised subjects on stage.

Pinter's *Ashes to Ashes* focuses on the Holocaust, unarguably one of the most traumatising events in human history. One of the vicarious victims of the Holocaust, Rebecca, haunted by memories of the past, suffers from trauma symptoms. She is torn between the will to communicate these memories and the inability to put them into words. Her inability to verbalise what is troubling her, denotes the difficulty of accessing traumatic memories and their resistance to expression. By adopting silences, elusive sentences, indirect references and intrusive memories, Pinter exemplifies the symptoms inherent in trauma and, in this way communicates them to his audience. Examining such a horrendous event from a not very distant past, he investigates society's relationship to this past and invites his audience to confront their own recollection of history, as the repression of it is most likely to produce its repetition.

Providing the most poignant 'antidote to war' Stephens' *Motortown* brings into question the traumatised soldiers who fought in the war in Iraq and Afghanistan. Anti-hero Danny returns home with memories of unspeakable acts that traumatise him and disturb his civilian life. No matter how much he resists these memories and rejects talking about them, the unresolved and uncommunicated trauma buried in him resurfaces and provokes him to repeat the same atrocities. Stephens portrays the impacts of unspoken trauma, yet he does not put the blame merely on Danny who refuses to speak. He criticises

a society that superficially condemns the war but ignores its victims, and he points to those who refuse to listen and share the pain of trauma victims as one of the causes of trauma. In doing so, Stephens underscores the responsibility of sharing and communicating and, through this play, assumes that responsibility himself.

Sheers' *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* similarly dramatises the individual psychological traumas caused by the war. With the help of dramatic means, trauma symptoms such as flashbacks, compulsive repetitions, and nightmares are successfully presented in the play. Differing from *Motortown*, however, Sheers' play additionally embodies the physical traumas of the real victims –the soldiers who served in Afghanistan and Iraq. The play that can be considered semi-verbatim in the context of giving stage to real victims and based on their own stories becomes an epitome of a trauma play. The soldiers testify their traumas and the audience, positioned as the listeners, bears witness to these traumas. Providing victims with a backdrop for communication, the play thus turns into a healing agent itself and becomes a fertile means for the working-through process.

Contrary to the two former plays, *Midwinter*, deals with another, less acknowledged component of the wars by focusing on civilians who live in a war zone, as well as a returning soldier. Portraying the trauma of an ever-present war, Harris avoids specificity and does not name the war, time and the place in the play. Doing so, she both unfolds the reality of war going on somewhere in the world and alerts her audiences to the fact that it can break out anytime, anywhere.

War, denoting an event “outside the range of usual human experience”,<sup>421</sup> creates more traumatised subjects than any other catastrophe. Four selected war plays that bring these subjects from soldiers to civilians on the stage attest to the frequency of war-caused trauma and its deleterious effects, and become a site for representing them. Not confined to the trenches, trauma pervades in every sphere of life and seeks expression in these plays. They all denote to the reality that trauma event which transforms its subjects and create new identities through its intensity. That means the stage serves as a medium where the war trauma is acknowledged, and more importantly, where a process of working through is initiated. If the war trauma is not worked through, it may lead towards further

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<sup>421</sup> American Psychiatric Association, 1980, 236.

destruction and trauma both for the victims and the society as depicted in the plays studied in this thesis.

Despite the ability to integrate trauma exhibited by the plays, the often reiterated nature of trauma as unspeakable is also present. All of the characters in the texts are often confronted with the inability either to speak of, or to know their experiences. This is particularly evident in *The Two Worlds of Charlie F.* The play centres around traumatised soldiers highlighting the victims' inexpressible pain as well as limitations in narrativising complex trauma experience. The extent to which the unspeakable may impact the trauma victim's life is exemplified in *Motortown* wherein the anti-hero's reluctance to speak about his war experience generates more traumatic events. Functioning like a medicine to their illnesses theatre comes out as a healing agent for the soldiers and give them opportunity for working through.

In addition to that, all the plays examined in this thesis elucidate the attitude of society towards the traumatised—an important issue that is usually problematised by the victims' experiences and psychic defences, and at the same time by their unwillingness to listen and witness. In view of the fact that empathetic listener is crucial in the process of sharing trauma and enabling a working-through, society by bearing witness and sharing their pain can either help the victims to get through their trauma or further isolate them by overlooking their pain and exacerbating the effects of trauma. Especially in Harris' and Stephens' plays, universal responsibilities of societies in case of war have been highlighted and the audiences are invited for self-questioning. The theatrical medium, therefore, becomes crucial in its function of raising awareness in the audiences with regard to their attitudes towards war trauma victims.

Upon investigating the relevance of trauma theory to the wars and their effects on the society and reshaping the cultural memory through a personal context, these contemporary plays adopt a testimonial role. They bear witness to the gruesome realities and effects of war. Thus the silence of trauma finds expression—an outlet—through these plays. In this way, playwrights become mediators between the traumatised and society, and provide the victims with empathetic listeners. It can be posited that, in the process of the re-enactment of the trauma event, the shared participation of victims, playwright and audience may ultimately provide the most appropriate testimony. By making the

unspeakable spoken, they allow for an integration of the traumatic experience and, foster positive psychological healing for a healthy working-through of the trauma.

The plays studied here also illuminate some of the ways in which the playwrights respond to the traumatic events and their stance against them. Adopting a world citizen attitude, they attempt to communicate the others' trauma and ultimately call their audiences for collaboration. Their plays imply that no matter how far wars or similar catastrophes may seem to us at any given moment, as long as they are ignored and not worked through they can break out anywhere in the world or come home in different disguises as is suggested in *Ashes to Ashes* and *Midwinter* or *Motortown*. From this perspective, the playwrights remind their audiences their role in responding to what is going on around the world and induce them to participate in predestining the future of the world. While trying to do this however, they refrain from getting into the worlds of real victims who are the civilians living in warzones. Except *Midwinter*, which peeks into the experiences of people living in an unnamed country, other plays seem to focus on the perpetrators' or non-victims' trauma and their pains, disregarding the sufferings of the innocent civilians of wars to a large extent. In this respect, the plays run the risk of being partial and fall short in reflecting the war trauma thoroughly.

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