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THE WESTERN STATES
Theatre
VOLUME 18 • 2012
R E V I E W

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LOJO SIMON

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Prostitutes, Soldiers, and Intellectuals***
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THE WESTERN STATES THEATRE REVIEW

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The Western States Theatre Review is a regional journal intended to publish works by or about its theatre scholars and practitioners. Our goal is to provide a means by which to share the discoveries and accomplishments in our vast, highly productive region as exemplified by the diverse topics contained in this issue. All contributions are of vital importance to our region and may encompass topics as wide ranging as playwriting, production issues, theatre for youth and international theatre. Please submit projects, articles, reports and short playscripts to the editor. Submissions as electronic attachments by e-mail will be accepted at any time during the year. The deadline for the upcoming issue is November 15.

Submit material and inquiries to George Caldwell, Theatre, School of Arts and Communication, Oregon State University, Corvallis, OR 97331, E-mail: george.caldwell@oregonstate.edu.

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Theatre of War

LOJO SIMON

If theatre is as Lorca says a poem standing up,
What are we standing up for?

Who stands with us? What are we standing on
and for how long? What if our legs grow weary

or we lose one from an IED or two:
a double amputee. What then?

Will anyone speak for us?
Or shall we roll around in our chairs crippled, mute

swordsmen severed from words.
Let us clothe our warriors in suits of poetry.

Let their mouths spew the metallic taste of blood, speak
language of bones upon which we build neither nations

nor monuments of steel and stones, but places to play.

Lojo Simon will earn her Master of Fine Arts in playwriting this year from
University of Idaho, Moscow.

***Soldaderas* in the Mexican Revolution: Prostitutes, Soldiers, and Intellectuals**

SARAH L. CARLE and CELILIA J. ARAGÓN

Historically, Mexican women have played significant roles in the history of the Mexican Revolution (circa 1910-1919). However, their multiple roles in the Mexican Revolution are not as recognized or recorded as much as their male counterparts. Recent research projects on the participation of women and their various roles in the Mexican Revolution aim to fill this gap (Soto, 1990; Macias, 1980; Bush, 1994; Arrizon, 1998; and Soto-Carle, 2005). Very few theatre scholars analyze the plays of Mexican playwrights that write about women's roles in the Mexican Revolution (Arrizon, "Soldaderas and the Staging," 1998).

An examination of three plays from Mexican playwrights who write about the roles of women during the Mexican Revolution aims to construct a historical narrative on transnational Latina "sensuality" and "sexuality" in María Luisa Ocampo's, *El corrido de Juan Saavedra* (1929); Josephina Niggli's, *Soldadera* (1936); and Elena Garro's, *Felipe Ángeles* (1966). Using Latina scholar Alicia Arrizón's concept of "sensuality" and "sexuality" in a Latina performative context, we argue that these playwrights, Ocampo, Niggli, and Garro address a feminist perspective of the "sensual" and "sexual" subjectivities of Latina women in the midst and the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution. The roles of *soldaderas* (female soldiers) as prostitutes, soldiers, and intellectuals depict the abilities of Mexican women to adapt and endure the tensions of war. This adaptability stems from how the *soldaderas* convey their "sensual" and "sexual" agencies. This essay begins with introductions to Arrizón's theory of Latina "sensuality" and "sexuality," a brief description of each playwright and the

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play, followed by excerpts from the play demonstrating how the role of *soldaderas* perform sensuality and sexuality and serve as agents of political power for the women to adjust and tolerate the tensions that the Mexican Revolution creates.

Transnational “Sensuality and Sexuality” on Latina Performance

To date, the majority of work on gender and sexuality in dramatic texts and performances has been largely restricted to the analysis of mostly playwrights and performing female artists from the United States or Great Britain. However, with Arrizón’s most recent publications *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (1999), *Latinas on Stage* (2000), and *Queering Mestizaje: Transculturation and Performance* (2006), these texts have broadened the scope of Latinas as performative subjects, contested the perspectives of Latinas within traditional theories of performance, and pursued critical engagements with race, sexuality, identity, and transnationalism, in performance scholarship. Influenced by Alicia Arrizón’s paradigms of Latina sensuality and sexuality, which develops a Latina feminist cultural practice and theory in the field of Theatre and Performance for Latinas, she builds upon overlapping traditional notions of female sensuality and modern notions of sexuality.

Arrizón’s analysis of female sensuality and sexuality in *Latina subjectivity, sexuality and sensuality* (2008), extracts elements of the theory of “structure of feeling” from Raymond Williams’ book *Marxism and literature* (1977). Williams’ “structure of feeling” illustrates sensuality as a source of cultural insights and intimate knowledge of specific cultural codes in expressing the emotional nuances. Arrizón includes in her scope of sensuality “this structure of feeling is what I associate with sensuality—it is experienced subjectively as we become spectators and participants of the world we inhabit and represent” (192). For Arrizón, in the Latina/o culture it is how we perform sensuality “in music, clothing, fragrance, and accessories, or while walking, singing, and dancing....seen only in the consciousness of subjecthood” (193). Furthermore, Arrizón posits that sensuality can be expressed in one’s sexuality and recognizing the sharp overlapping tones of both sensuality and sexuality. She states that, “while sexuality is characterized by sex, sexual activity, and sexual orientation, to be sensual is to be aware of and to explore feelings and sensations of beauty, luxury, joy, and pleasure” (192-93). The sensuality affect publicized by Arrizón focuses on the embodiment of feelings, emotions, actions, and thoughts that pleases a woman and her desires.

Another aspect to Arrizón’s theory of sensuality and sexuality in Latinas is the paradoxical situation embedded within the social structures of transnational Latino culture. As Arrizón and Chicana/o historians

recognize, Latina/o culture is naturally sensual, all of which are based but not limited to the historical views of language, music, clothing, dance, and food. However, sexuality is a taboo subject for many Latina/os. Arrizón states that, “the effects of *marianismo*, *machismo* and “whore-virgin” dichotomy are embedded in a cultural legacy shaped by the entrenchment of Christian values and patriarchies in Latino cultures” (193). Arrizón advocates for a cultural practice that elicits a critical analysis based on a subject of understanding how Latinas function “sensuality” and “sexuality” under the social structures of patriarchy.

Exposing the differences and similarities of sensualities and sexualities among Latinas is what Arrizón actively promotes in critical engagement. She states, “to develop a feminist cultural practice and theory that works towards understanding the complexities Latina/o sensuality and sexuality, it is necessary to identify representations as a political issue and to analyze women’s subordination within patriarchal forms of representation” (193). While there has been a historical process of sensuality and sexuality in Latino culture, we are influenced more so by contemporary media views on Latina sensuality and sexuality. Given these contemporary and historical factors, Latinas face a paradoxical condition that is forever changing, contesting, reinventing their own views of sensuality and sexuality, in particular, as manifested in *soldaderas* in the plays of Ocampo, Niggli, and Garro.

María Luisa Ocampo¹—*El corrido de Juan Saavedra* (1929)

During 1922 to 1955 Ocampo wrote more than 35 plays in addition to writing *novelas* (novels). Her plays were accepted and put on stage by the major theater companies in Mexico from 1923 through 1943. During these two decades, Ocampo played a vital role in the Mexican theater and continued her participation in political organizations. Ocampo’s advocacy for women’s rights was an important personal choice that influenced her writing for the stage.

Ocampo’s plays are based on the real events and activities during the time period of her writings. Within them she utilizes real historical characters with fictitious names, as well as changes some of the circumstances to the events. Ocampo also has a very unique method of writing her plays in which she incorporates any one or all of the following techniques: serenades, processions, songs, dance, roosters, and the *corrido* (ballads). According to Arrizón, these are the components to the ‘sensuality’ of the Latino culture (“Latina Subjectivity, Sexuality and Sensuality” 193). Integrating these cultural elements in her plays, indicate that María Luisa Ocampo was very conscious in representing her cultural and social traditions in her plays.

In her play *El corrido de Juan Saavedra*, Ocampo gives an understanding of these different roles, from the traditional woman to the *soldadera*². The play is set against a revolutionary campsite, where there are a variety of characters: a young 18 year-old girl, some men, a 40 year-old woman, another woman, the general, Juan, two other women, an old man, a soldier, Adelaida (a 25 year-old woman), and a group of soldiers. In the following scene, Ocampo demonstrates the gender relations between men and women fighting in the Mexican Revolution. She begins with the use of generic terms to equalize gender roles, such as *mujer* (woman), *muchacha* (girl), *hombre primero* (first man), *hombre segundo* (second man):

HOMBRE PRIMERO: When we enter the city, I will buy you whatever you desire. We are going to have plenty of money.

MUCHACHA: My goodness! From where?

HOMBRE PRIMERO: From the rich people! That is the reason we are fighting this war, so that we are not always desiring what we can't have.

MUCHACHA: If Raymundo finds out that you are giving me gifts...

HOMBRE PRIMERO: That will not matter. I will talk to him. Don't worry my love.

MUCHACHA: You are not man enough!

HOMBRE PRIMERO: Do you want to see more of these things?

MUCHACHA: That is what they all say, but nobody dares, except you.

HOMBRE PRIMERO: Let's attend to the war. (he picks up his rifle)

MUCHACHA: Well, let's go then. MUJER PRIMERO: Look! This man has been shot in the belly.

MUJER SEGUNDA: Oh, dear God! Why do we leave our land and our homes! These are times when we should all live.

HOMBRE SEGUNDO: Shut up! Why are you women always getting in the middle of what is none of your business. These are the duties of men. (326-328) (translated by Sarah Carle).

Illustrated in this scene are the new roles that the Mexican woman took on during the Revolution. A common role is the woman who fought physically in the war alongside the men, better known as *soldaderas*. *Soldaderas* were seen more often as the role of the Muchacha in the preceding scene, who fought alongside with the men, traveled with the men to cook for them and sleep with them, and perform as the men's personal prostitutes.

Within political upheaval, these women were accustomed to use their sexuality to change their status, as we can see with the role of the Muchacha. Muchacha took advantage of her social position and chose to be with the man that was able to provide her with the most financial opportunities and material wealth. The use of Muchacha's sexuality was a financial gain which meant more than just changing her social status; it also meant political power and being able to control her own future.

For Muchacha, material wealth was a symbol of what Arrizón articulates as the “sensations of beauty, luxury, joy, and pleasure” and “a subject’s sensuality stimulates her/his sexuality” (193). In the following scene we see more characteristics of the *soldadera* in Muchacha’s role as she constructs her body image as one with compelling agency:

MUCHACHA: (*Walking towards the men playing cards.*) The one who wins has to give it to me.

HOMBRE CUARTO: I’ll give it to you precious.

MUCHACHA: Really?

HOMBRE CUARTO: Just come and get it.

MUCHACHA: What, do you think I am scared of you?

HOMBRE CUARTO: Let’s see it! (*He approaches Muchacha. He grabs her by her hair and violently pulls her on top of him. He kisses her. Hombre primero enters.*)

GENERAL: ... (*To Muchacha.*) Come here my love. (*Muchacha approaches the General. Hombre primero steps in between them.*)

HOMBRE PRIMERO: Leave her to me general.

GENERAL: What the hell do you want?

HOMBRE PRIMERO: This broad is with me.

GENERAL: (*Kicking Hombre primero.*) And, what do I care? (*Hombre tries to turn against him. To the soldiers.*) Take this man! ...

MUCHACHA: Will you let me go with you to Mexico?

GENERAL: Of course my love. You will be the *general* (General’s wife). I will buy you a car so that you can drive up and down the streets and everywhere you go, you will be the envy of all women.

MUCHACHA: Can you give me something to guarantee that?

GENERAL: (*Throwing some coins at her.*) Take this.

(326-328) (translated by Sarah Carle).

In this passage, Muchacha’s body becomes the main weapon and tool for negotiating power relations and obtaining materialistic objects, all for a better way of life. In doing so, Muchacha creates her own sexualized subjectivity within the Mexican Revolution. Muchacha left Raymundo for el Hombre primero, because he promised her dresses like the ones the rich women wore, and then she left el Hombre primero, because the General promised her a car. Muchacha illustrates both her sensuality and sexuality as Arrizón advocates that self-representation becomes a political issue. For Muchacha, her sexuality works as a political agency for advancement in the social patriarchal hierarchy.

During the Mexican Revolution, it was difficult for the woman to be more than just a woman; she had to do what she had to, in order to live a better life, which created a paradoxical space for women. Also demonstrated in the scene above is a common attitude in which men blamed women for the war. Men continued to express that everything is always the woman’s fault. Ironically, Hombre segundo tells the Mujer segunda that the Revolution is a man-thing, and women should not stick their

nose into what is of none of their concern. These statements exemplify the image of what the *macho* Mexican man felt towards the Mexican woman during the time period of the Revolution; the woman needed to be at their beck and call, and if she wanted more than this, a man would simply get rid of her, to exude his power and control over women.

María Luisa Ocampo in *El corrido de Juan Saavedra*, was the first Mexican playwright to construct a theatrical image of the *soldadera*. Muchacha as *soldadera* illustrates that sexuality is power, especially in time of war. Muchacha defines for women the alternative role as *la prostituta*, which gives her a way to gain possessions that would advance her status in the war. Therefore, feeling empowered by her sexuality as a weapon and exploring the complexities of “woman” during the Mexican Revolution. Muchacha follows the pattern of Mexican women who opt to find their place in non-conventional roles and embrace their female sensuality and sexuality within the tensions that are created in social and political contexts.

Josephina Niggli³—*Soldadera* (1938)

Josephina Niggli, much like María Luisa Ocampo, brings to life the events of the Mexican Revolution in her plays. Niggli was one of the first Latin American dramaturges whose writings were published by companies in the United States. After the assassination of President Francisco Madero, in 1913, Josephina was sent to San Antonio, Texas, to escape the chaos of the Mexican Revolution (Arrizón, “*Soldaderas* and the Staging” 1).

Niggli and her family lived the following seven years in the southeastern part of the United States until their return to Mexico in 1920. Against her will, her parents sent her back to the U.S. to complete her studies. Therefore, she completed high school in Texas and started her university studies at the age of 15 at the College of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, Texas, where she studied philosophy and history (Dvorkin 1). After graduating from the university in 1931, she attended the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill to continue her studies in theatre art/playwriting and graduated in 1937 with a Master in Drama (Dvorkin 2). During the years that she worked on her master’s, she published a number of historical plays about Mexico and authored many literary works during her career.

Almost every play written by Niggli takes place in Mexico or pertains to its geographical locations and culture. She knew from her experiences what it was like to live during the Mexican Revolution and because of this, she wrote the play *Soldadera*. The theme in this play reflects Niggli’s desire to make the Mexican experience appreciated by her Anglo-American audience (Arrizón, “*Latina Performance*” 99). The themes on

which she concentrates and brings to life in her play *Soldadera* are the representation of the “Mexican” and the exploration of the “mexicanism” in herself, translated and adapted to a foreign audience (Arrizón, “*Latina Performance*” 99).

The one-act play, *Soldadera* symbolizes what the real Mexican woman was like during the Revolution. It not only recognizes her strength and values, but the way she fought side-by-side next to the Mexican men in the *bola* (the Revolution). It was the first representation along the U.S.-Mexico borders of the *soldaderas* participation in the Mexican Revolution. In the following passage, Concha illustrates her ideals of “*soldadera*” as a vengeful woman, a heroine, and a true soldier:

CONCHA: (*standing*) Yes, this is the Revolution. We had to forget how to weep, and how to be kind and merciful. We are cruel, because the Revolution is cruel. It must crush out the evil before we can make things good again.

TOMASA: Crush it lower than the earth.

CONCHA: Adelita, Adelita, for you there is tomorrow, but for us there is only yesterday. The Revolution is a fire that flames up and destroys, and we are the fire.

THE BLONDE ONE: Burning, burning, let us burn them all. (42)

Concha symbolizes the true essence of revolutionary women. The tensions of war caused the women to act like ravaged animals and affected their will to live as they only thought of killing those who did them and their family harm. Being vengeful, Concha as a *soldadera*, questions the motives of the revolution and avenges those that made her and the others, and their family members suffer. According to Arrizón’s feminist cultural critique, Concha’s sensuality is embedded in the “structure of feeling” of that environment of which she inhabits. Contrary to what Arrizón posits as the exploration of feeling and sensations of beauty, luxury, joy, and pleasure, Concha’s feelings are affected by anger, revenge, and suffering. Concha is juxtaposed with putting her traditional role aside and temporarily joining the Mexican Revolution to fight for her lost possessions.

Concha’s identity as “*soldadera*” is intertwined in serving both a social and political role. Her motives in serving as a *soldadera* meant that she would protect and avenge her family’s honor, go to battle for her country, and protect individual rights of women. Niggli reveals to her audience that the Mexican woman was very valiant, and she left her traditional role of staying at home to care for her family in order to seek justice for all women.

In the play, *Soldadera*, women’s body of sensuality and sexuality function as a celebration of the femininity strongly identified as a social and political heroine of the Mexican Revolution. Concha, the leader of the

revolutionary women, has a practical approach to killing the “rich ones” for the plight of the revolution. Her anger stems from her search for justice and equality for women. Concha embraces the female body as an instrument of political resistance. Concha explains to Adelita, who has a romantic kind-hearted view of the “rich one,” the role of women in the revolution when she confirms the ideal model of *soldadera* ideology by stating, “the revolution is a fire that flames up and destroys, and we are the fire” (41-42). She is a true *luchadora* (a fighter).

Concha’s *soldadera* ideology represents an older generation of women who believe that women need to be strong, bold, and great fighters at all costs, herein lies the sensuality of Concha. She believes that this is what bonds the women during wartime. However, another *soldadera*, Adelita’s views of the revolution are juxtaposed by Concha’s rough and tough views. Ironically, Adelita seeks the protection of the other *soldaderas*, as her mother died and the women took her in to raise her. Adelita, unlike Concha, represents youth, tenderness, and beauty. These qualities represent Adelita’s sensuality. Adelita has a romantic interest in the Rich One. Her romantic views parallel her vision of the revolution, which have not been affected by the ill ways of the revolution. Instead, she strives for kindness, virtue, and peace. The following scene demonstrates the different views on the revolution between Concha and Adelita.

ADELITA: Can’t you give the man a moment’s peace? After all, he’s human.

THE BLOND ONE: No Rich One is human. They are beasts, all of them.

ADELITA: This man is different. He believes in the Revolution. Why, he even knows the words of the ADELITA—

TOMASA: (*Sneers.*) What does he know about the great song of the Revolution?

ADELITA: He’s crazy about the Revolution and he wants to know all about us, what we think about, how we live, everything.

MARIA: And I suppose you tell him everything, eh? Not that the news will do him any good, when he’s dead. (16)

As the *soldaderas* have taken the Rich One as their prisoner, Adelita makes a plea for his life. In her naïve ways, she truly believes that everything that the Rich One says is the honest truth to the point of trying to convince the *soldaderas* that he is helping them win the revolution. Adelita is concerned to hear how the *soldaderas* are planning to kill the Rich One. Aside from being caring, she is troubled to hear how the *soldaderas* view life as disposable and replaceable by others. Alicia Arrizón, in her book, *Latina Performance: Traversing the Stage* (1999), states that Niggli uses her characters as metaphors and symbolism to represent unique situations and depict the life of a revolutionary woman (58). Moreover, Arrizón’s concept of the “paradoxical knowledge” within the culture is

demonstrated through Concha's ideology—fight like a man, a *luchadora*, but be a woman. This leads to a contradiction with Adelita's theory of moral value in fighting the war with human kindness.

The following passage demonstrates the Adelita "*soldadera*" philosophy, which speaks to a humanitarian and more romantic approach to the war.

ADELITA: You are making something ugly and horrible out of the Revolution. And it isn't ugly—it's beautiful! What if the Rich Ones did kill your son, Tomasa? Will killing him bring your son back to life? Will the wrong they did to your son, you Old One, be made right if you do the same to him? I don't know what you're all talking about. It isn't human—it isn't the Tomasa and the Blondie and the Old One and the Concha that I have always known. And Cricket up there looking forward to tying him up! Oh, you are horrible, horrible!

THE BLOND ONE: You don't know what you're talking about. Why shouldn't we hate him and his breed? They took my man, didn't they, and hung him from the door of his own house. And María. How about María? They made her stand and watch while they tore her man's eyes out, didn't they? We can't do anything to them that's worse than what they've done to us! We're human, aren't we?

ADELITA: But that's over—that's finished. Nothing we do now can change that. Because they were brutes and animals, does that make us brutes and animals, too? (41-42).

This passage illustrates a crossing point for Adelita, who is conflicted with the evil behaviors and tension that the war has brought upon the other *soldaderas*. Her new role is to choose to follow her own ideals and break away from the other revolutionary women. Adelita proposes that women must behave more dignified than their male counterparts and finding peace, love, and beauty in the people fighting the war.

In representing her romantic notions of the war, Adelita's sensuality stimulates the soul, the mind, and the senses of other *soldaderas*. In Niggli's play, *Soldadera*, it examines the representation of sensuality of all the *soldaderas* and the multiplicity of roles of women in the Mexican Revolution. Whether it is Concha's *soldadera* pedagogy as a heroine, a vengeful woman, and a true fighter for equality and justice or Adelita's *soldadera* philosophy of love, beauty, and human kindness, *soldaderas* perform multiple ways of expressing sensuality that engage the body in ways of resisting political warfare.

Elena Garro⁴—Felipe Ángeles (1966)

Elena Garro is considered one of the most controversial and fascinating figures of the Mexican culture (Vargas 1). As a young lady, Garro wrote articles for newspapers and magazines in favor of the distribution of land

for the *campesinos* (farm workers). She also solicited a legal hearing from President Lázaro Cárdenas to help the *campesinos* (Toruño 7). When Garro was seventeen she was a choreographer for the *Teatro de la Universidad*, directed by Julio Bracho in Mexico City. In 1937 she married the very well known Mexican poet Octavio Paz, with whom she had a daughter. During this time, she distanced herself from the theatre and did not return to it until the 1950s⁵.

Garro wrote a historical drama about a figure who was present in her mind ever since she was a child and overheard her grandfather, Tranquilino Navarro, and her uncle, General Benito Navarro, speak of a just and honest man who died for the true ideals of the Revolution⁶. She later brought the figure to life in her play *Felipe Ángeles*. In her play, the three female figures highlight how Mexican women used their intelligence to get them through the years of political resistance and rebellion. The following passage from Garro's play, *Felipe Ángeles*, demonstrates how the role of the Mexican woman becomes the voice of the town as they fought against the assassination of Felipe Ángeles:

SEÑORA SEIJAS: The committees Pro-Felipe Ángeles have sent us to ask for the life of your prisoner.

DIEGUEZ: He is not my prisoner, Madams, but the Government's prisoner. Are you relatives of General Ángeles?

SEÑORA GALVAN: No Sir, the General's family is in exile, you know that, and the Government will not allow his brother to cross the border.

DIEGUEZ: I am sorry Madam. I see that you have come here impelled by mercy.

SEÑORA REVILLA: No Sir, justice is not comparable to mercy.

DIEGUEZ: Madam, I take pride in knowing what justice is, since I am in charge of imparting it...sometimes the face of justice is scary...but, it is not my intention to argue with Madams. How can I be of service to you?

I don't understand what you are asking me. (21) (translated by Sarah Carle).

This passage speaks to the feminist concept of "social collective" that is promoted by many feminist critics (Judith Butler, 1990; Iris Marion Young, 1994; Kathi Weeks 1998). Social collective is a feminist "attempt to construct or speak for a subject, to forge the unity of coalition from the diversities of history and practice" (Young 716). As this concept relates to *Felipe Ángeles*, the women, collectively, know that it is best to fight together than alone, a socially constructed behavior common in Mexican women. Their unity also represents a symbolic "*bola*," in which they create a *coup de tat* to overthrow the decision of the assassination of Felipe Ángeles.

The "social collective" concept that the three women represent in this play is the powerful force of women coming together to create justice

for their community. They realize that they are more powerful and have better odds at obtaining Felipe Ángeles' freedom together rather than individually. Arrizón's concept of sensuality is the "social collective" among the female characters in *Felipe Ángeles*. As demonstrated in the social collective power of the women, intelligence and reasoning, for example, accentuate the sensuality of the women in the Mexican Revolution.

One can clearly see the role of the Mexican woman start to evolve with the attitudes of the three women presented in the play. They have gained confidence so that they are more able to articulate what is on their mind but choose their words cleverly so not to offend the authoritative men they have to deal with. In the following passage, the women interrogate Dieguez's motives for his quick plotting. Using their intelligence and power of reasoning, the women counteract his reasoning techniques:

SEÑORA SEIJAS: And why the hurry in announcing General Ángeles' betrayal! One could say that you are all scared.

DIEGUEZ: We live in a time that is in more of a hurry than we are, Madams. The government can not waste a lot of days on a case of a general who is a traitor of the Revolution.

SEÑORA REVILLA: General, before confirming that your prisoner is a traitor, you should prove it.

DIEGUEZ: You ask for proof? You will have it today.

SEÑORA REVILLA: And who is going to give me that proof, the court that is condemning Felipe Ángeles to death? ... (22) (translated by Sarah Carle).

This passage indicates that these *señoras*/madams make General Diéguez a little nervous, because they are very conscientious of what is going on around them and of Felipe Ángeles' state of affairs. Diéguez, anxious to speed up the process of the assassination, fears that the women will interfere. The *señoras*/madams are very direct when they speak to him and make sure to offend him without his acknowledgement. These women perform their sensuality by developing the concept of "social collective" to shape, influence, and inspire one another.

The trio of women, engage in "social collective," as they stick to their guns and do whatever it takes to try to save Felipe Ángeles' life. Garro demonstrates this when she wrote:

SEÑORA REVILLA: And will you allow us to speak to your prisoner?

DIEGUEZ: However many times you deem necessary. The prisoner will be here before 8:00 am. You will have to excuse me; I must tend to the generals of the War Council. At your feet, Madams!

SEÑORA REVILLA: Thank you for your advice, we will go look for attorneys. (22) (translated by Sarah Carle).

This passage illustrates that the *señoras*, as *soldaderas*, have come together to save an innocent man's life, because they believe that the Revolution was not formed to kill a man who fought to reconstruct the town of Chihuahua, and also because there is nobody else willing to take a stand to be his defense. They have the intelligence and strategies to legally defend General Ángeles and are strong-headed in their ideals. When exploring Latina sensuality and sexuality, the women in *Felipe Ángeles* navigate their political bodies by quickly strategizing and incorporating the appropriate language and reasoning demonstrating their ability to assert their identity as a collective unit. It is crucial to consider intelligence as an emotion of "sensuality" and the female body as sites of knowledge, language, history, and power. Garro invites her audience to re-think the roles of *soldaderas* through the roles of the three señoras who are the voice of the town of Chihuahua. The naming of "*señoras*" promotes a specific and distinct social collective, one that gives feminism in the play its specificity as political power in unity. The *señoras* rise up against the embedded patriarchy—the oppressive powers.

In Garro's image, *las señoras* represented the "intelligent *soldaderas*" and the "social collective" voice of the Mexican Revolution. They were intelligent and courageous women fighting in the Mexican Revolution, not physically, but with their ideas, words, and beliefs—this became their sensuality. Garro creates political agency in collaborating forces with each other as intelligent, strong-willed individuals. They not only seek justice for themselves but also for those that have been unjustly imprisoned by the Mexican Revolution and society. Symbolically, Garro represents women as hope for the future of Mexico and for all Mexican women.

Conclusion

Mexican women were essential to the revolution and participated in multiple roles. They were involved in politics, were strong advocates for the social causes, and participated in life on the battlefields. Mexican female playwrights such as Ocampo, Niggli, and Garro exemplify Arrizon's theories of the transnational Latina "sensuality" and "sexuality" in their *soldadera* characters. It was through their own lived political experiences that made them prominent political activist, thinkers, role models, and fighters. Ocampo, Niggli, and Garro create a space in Mexican Theatre where complex and imaginative concepts of the "*soldadera*" are explored. Through their plays, María Luisa Ocampo, *El corrido de Juan Saavedra* (1929); Josephina Niggli, *Soldadera* (1936); and Elena Garro, *Felipe Ángeles* (1966), construct a vision of sensuality and sexuality in *soldadera* (the soldier), *la prostituta* (the prostitute), and *intelectuales* (intellectuals). With

sexual dominance, heroic values, and intelligent demeanor, Mexican women claimed authority as subjects possessing abilities to resist and endure the war.

As Mexican feminist playwrights, they were highly influenced by the political environment of their time. Calling attention to women's rights and fighting for the equality of women in Mexican culture, as they were displaced or exiled in society for expressing their views of women in the Mexican Revolution. Finally, by highlighting women's roles in the Mexican Revolution, Ocampo, Niggli, and Garro exemplify agency in the female performative subjectivity. The *soldadera* characters examined illustrate the power structures and tensions that war creates, demonstrate how women negotiate, mediate, and traverse the politics of war in the name of re-articulating their own transnational female sensuality and sexuality, and political agency.

Notes

1. María Luisa Ocampo Heredia belongs to the first generation of women who promoted the acknowledgment of the rights to citizenship for the Mexican woman and made a valiant defense towards these women obtaining the right to vote (Cervantes 1). Ocampo is one of the most important figures and dramaturges of the twentieth century and foremost in Contemporary Mexican Theater (Merlin 39). She also was the only woman during this century to promote theater in Mexico (Merlin 39). Ocampo was born on November 24th in 1908, in Chilpancingo, Guerrero, Mexico and died on August 15th in 1974. *El corrido de Juan Saavedra* was premiered at *el Teatro Regis* in Mexico on May 24, 1929 and was published in 1934, the play is set in Tixtla, Guerrero, Mexico in 1912.
2. The *soldadera* was a woman who traveled with the armies in order to cook, fight in battle, heal the wounded, and do a massive amount of other activities while living in misery alongside the men who battled in the war. For Ocampo, there is a parallel with Mexican women and *soldaderas* as they developed diverse roles during the Revolution. Women of all classes formed resistance groups, founded newspapers and magazines, worked as nurses, constructed hospitals and health organizations, purchased, stole and sold weapons, fought and collaborated plans and documents (Soto 21).
3. Josefina Niggli was born in Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico, on the 13th of July in 1910 and died on the December 17th, 1983 in North Carolina. She spent her formal education years in the United States. Mexican politics influenced much of Niggli's life as a child. Her fluctuating identity between Anglo and Mexican heritage is evident in the evolution of her own name. Her birth certificate spells her name "Josephine," but she published her early books under the more Latina tag of "Josephina Niggli." In her later works, she had successfully switched the spelling to "Josefina."

4. Garro was born on November 11th in 1916 in Puebla, Mexico. She was raised in Puebla with her family and along with the indigenous sons and daughters of the employees of her home. This is where her respect and interest for the marginalized was born; in other words, her extra literary intent to fight for the indigenous.
5. Elena Garro completed the play *Felipe Ángeles* between 1956-1958. She got involved in the defense of the *campesinos* that had their land taken from them. This antigovernment position forced her to leave Mexico again in 1959. She was accused of a communistic complot to destroy President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. This tense, prosecutable situation forced her to leave the country. She lived in paranoia, misery, hunger and desperation for twenty years.
6. In 1993 she returned to live in Mexico, where she lived her last years. She had a very complicated life and her dramatic plays and *novelas* reflect the lifestyle and surroundings she lived through. Elena Garro died on August 22, 1998 in the city of Cuernavaca, Mexico.

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Stereotyping Playwrights

NATHAN STITH

In his book *Stereotypes, Cognition and Culture* (2000), Perry Hinton suggests that “stereotyping involves judging people as category members rather than individuals” (5). As academics and theatre scholars we often find ourselves placing artists in categories based on their race, gender, sexuality, social class or some other descriptive category. We stereotype artists in an effort to provide a clearer image of what “type” of artist they are. Because they have been categorized and stereotyped these artists have essentially three choices: they can embrace the given stereotype, they can reject the given stereotype or they can attempt to redefine the stereotype (and in effect themselves) by shifting attention to a more personally acceptable category or categories.

Academics are not alone in the desire to judge people by placing them in categories. But many in and out of academe feel uncomfortable with the idea of categorizing individuals. Judith Butler says “I’m permanently troubled by identity categories, consider them to be invariable stumbling blocks, and understand them, even promote them, as sites of necessary trouble” (14). Despite the uneasiness Butler and others feel, the act of stereotyping continues. The question becomes what is gained through the practice of stereotyping artists? Conversely, what is lost? Using a social psychology framework, this paper will initially seek to provide a better understanding of the sociological reasoning behind stereotyping. Why do we stereotype? What effect does a stereotype or categorization have on an individual? Are stereotypes accurate depictions or are they simply social constructs used to place vague definitions on people?

Once we have gained a clearer picture as to why we stereotype and what effects stereotyping can have (both positive and negative), this paper will examine the response two prominent American playwrights,

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August Wilson and Edward Albee, have had to the social stereotypes placed on them and the categories of which they are a part. Because of the element of judgment inherent in stereotyping, one's self-identity is—or can be—affected by the stereotypes placed on them by others. Despite Roland Barthes claim that the author is dead, it is difficult to make the argument that a playwrights' perception of their own identity has no bearing or influence on the work which they produce. Art, at its core, is the expression of one's individuality. Our individuality is related to our own sense of self; so what happens when an artists' individuality is diminished by judging him or her as a member of a category rather than as an individual?

August Wilson has embraced his primary stereotype, that of his race. Edward Albee, on the other hand, has attempted to distance himself from a desire among his critics, fans, and peers to place him in a singular category, that of a gay playwright. Because of their divergent reactions to the categories of which they are a part, do they have differing views regarding the purpose of their work? This paper will investigate each of these playwrights' attitudes toward his particular category and stereotype in an effort to determine what, if any, effect their reactions to these stereotypes has had on their bodies of work as well as the response to their work by critics and audiences.

Rather than rely on Hinton's rather simplistic definition of stereotyping cited above it would be helpful to have a deeper understanding of the various ways psychologists have approached the idea of stereotyping and categorization. According to David Schneider, the term stereotype was coined by the journalist Walter Lippman in 1922 (8). Lippman viewed stereotypes as images in a person's head which assist us in understanding our social environment. This interpretation of stereotypes focused primarily on the opinion that stereotypes were inherently faulty and used incorrect beliefs to create the image of an individual (Dovidio, et al. 279). More recently, social psychologists have focused on the cognitive aspects of stereotypes which view stereotypes as little more than basic generalizations about a person or group (Schneider 12). From a cognitive perspective, stereotypes simplify our lives: "by being able to place a person in a particular group, we can draw on a rich mix of theoretical and empirically based knowledge about his behavior and why he does the things he does" (Schneider 364). This view, while not explicitly stating that all stereotypes are accurate and true, suggests that stereotypes have a fluidity based on the stereotyper's body of knowledge of the world and that these stereotypes are not *necessarily* faulty.

In addition to simplifying our lives, psychologist David Schneider and others believe that stereotypes actually assist us in establishing our

own self-worth. Schneider suggests that our opinion of ourselves comes, at least in part, from the groups of which we are a part, and it is only natural that we would ascribe positive characteristics to our own groups and less positive traits to other groups; “such a process,” according to Schneider, “is universal and usually unconscious” (366). However, not all psychologists agree with the notion that stereotypes *always* simplify our lives by giving us easily available information about a person or group. Charles Stangor and Mark Schaller believe that while stereotypes can sometimes provide necessary information about a person or group, they can also “reduce the complexity of an information-rich environment” (21). In other words, if we depend solely on stereotypes to provide us information about a person, we are ignoring the complexities we all have as individuals. This binary is not necessarily problematic. We live in a complicated world and stereotypes may assist us in categorizing an individual so that we can provide ourselves a framework of ideas about a particular person which can be confirmed or contradicted through direct contact with the individual. Although all of these ideas about the individual may not be completely accurate they, at the very least, initiate our understanding of the traits this person could potentially have. As Perry Hinton observes “once we have categorized a person we can then ‘explain’ them stereotypically” (83). Stereotypes, then, are social constructs, but they are useful regardless of the degree to which they are accurate descriptions of an individual.

The question now becomes how do stereotyped individuals react to the categories in which they have been placed? By using August Wilson and Edward Albee as case studies, this paper seeks to provide a clearer understanding of two possible ways that individuals respond to being stereotyped. August Wilson, as we shall see, has embraced his primary categorization as an African-American. Edward Albee’s response to being stereotyped is somewhat more difficult to navigate. He has been categorized as a gay playwright. He does not reject this categorization, but he does believe that placing a singular category on him or being stereotyped as “nothing more” than a gay playwright ignores the multitude of categories of which he considers himself a member. Because I believe the backgrounds and upbringing of these two playwrights has had some impact on their reactions to being stereotyped, I will begin with a brief biographical account of each of these men prior to an analysis of their response to stereotyping.

August Wilson was born Frederick August Kittel on April 27, 1945 in “the Hill” section of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. His father, Frederick Kittel was a white, German baker; his mother, Daisy Wilson, an African-American maid. Wilson’s father was mostly absent during his early childhood and

passed away in 1965. After his father's death, Wilson adopted his mother's maiden name and dropped his first name (Bogumil 1). Wilson quit high school after being falsely accused of plagiarism and did not have any other formal education (Bogumil 2). After a brief attempt at writing poetry, Wilson formed the Centre Avenue Poets Theater Workshop and in 1968 co-founded Pittsburgh's Black Horizons Theatre Company devoted to presenting plays written by black playwrights involved in the Black Power movement (Bogumil 3). Wilson made his Broadway debut as a playwright in 1984 with his play *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom* ("August Wilson"). Soon after, Wilson set to write a cycle of 10 plays—one for each decade of the twentieth century - chronicling the black experience in America. Wilson died of inoperable liver cancer in October of 2005, four months after completing the final play of his cycle, *Radio Golf* (Bryer xxii).

Edward Albee was born on March 12, 1928, in Washington D.C. He was adopted by Frances and Reed Albee and raised in Larchmont, New York. He was named after his adoptive grandfather who found success as the owner of a number of vaudevillian theatres (Kolin xxi). His parents were described by biographer Robin Bernstein as "wealthy" and "materialistic" and Albee disagreed with most of their political and social views of the world (185). Albee was dismissed from Trinity College in Connecticut after a year and a half of studies and moved to New York City (Kolin xxi). Albee began writing plays at the age of 12; his first produced play, *The Zoo Story* opened in 1959 in Berlin, Germany. Albee has spent his entire adult life working as a proponent for civil rights for marginalized groups, and his plays are described by Michael Rutenberg as "reformist plays of social protest" (8). His style is eclectic, varying from realism in *The Zoo Story*, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*, and *A Delicate Balance* to surrealism in *The Sandbox*, and *The American Dream* to impressionism in *The Death of Bessie Smith* to symbolism in *Tiny Alice* (Rutenberg 8). His most recent play, *At Home At The Zoo*, serves as a first act to his earliest professionally produced play, *The Zoo Story*.

Both of these playwrights have been placed in a stereotyped category—Wilson as an African-American playwright and Albee as a homosexual playwright - and both have responded to their categorization and stereotyping in two controversial speeches. Wilson, in 1996 as the keynote speaker during the 11th biennial Theatre Communications Group gathering in Princeton, New Jersey and Albee in 2011 during his acceptance speech for the Pioneer Award presented at the 23rd Annual Lambda Literary Awards in New York City. In my analysis of these two speeches I will examine what each of these men said as it relates to their own perceptions of the categories they have been placed in as well as hypothesize why these men felt the need to make these statements. In

addition I will analyze how their speeches align with their stated goals as playwrights. Finally, I will survey the various responses Wilson and Albee received to the controversial speeches.

Wilson's keynote address before the Theatre Communications Group in 1996 was titled "The Ground on Which I Stand" a transcript of which was published in the September 1996 issue of *American Theatre*. After acknowledging the Western roots of theatre as well as prominent black artists who came before him, Wilson centers himself in the historical lineage of the Black Power Movement of the 1960s, referring to it as "the kiln in which I was fired" (14). This is important to Wilson because, as he notes, he has difficulty separating himself as a black man from his views on the American theatre (15). In fact, not only does Wilson associate himself with the Black Power Movement, but he refers to himself as "a race man." "I believe that race matters," Wilson says in the speech, "that it is the largest, most identifiable and most important part of our personality" (16). For Wilson, his race is more than just the color of his skin, "it denotes condition, and carries with it the vestige of slavery and the social segregation and abuse of opportunity so vivid in our memory" (16). Wilson's speech was more than simply a declaration of his views on the importance of race. He accused theatre funding organizations of privileging "institutions that preserve, promote and perpetuate white culture" (16). Ultimately, the speech was a call to action to provide funding to establish black theatres and to provide opportunities for black artists to "become the cultural custodians of our art, our literature and our lives" (72).

Why would August Wilson, a playwright who had achieved great success in what he calls "white theatres," stand before a mostly white audience and accuse them of denying a voice to his race? In this speech, Wilson is doing more than denouncing white theatre producers and funding organizations. He is embracing what psychologists refer to as one of his primary categories: his race. Primary categories include race, gender and age. According to David Schneider there are several reasons why a person would champion one of their primary categories:

First, race, age, and gender cues are perceptually salient. Second, both essential and identifying features tend to have at least some biological involvement for these categories. Third, age, gender and skin color may have evolutionary significance, as our ancestors needed to distinguish people on the basis of accumulated wisdom, reproductive potential, and likelihood of belonging to the same group. Fourth, these categories form the basis of dominant hierarchies in many cultures. Fifth, such categories are among the first social categories that children learn . . . sixth, such categories are culturally important (96).

Based on the above ideas and the vitriolic nature of his speech, one could easily accuse Wilson of essentialism—"the psychological belief that

there are essential and immutable differences between social groups” (Mahalingam 46)—or ethnocentrism—“a tendency to favor one’s own group and to derogate other groups” (Schneider 230). But, I would suggest that rather than merely proclaiming that whites and black are inherently different or that African-Americans as a race are somehow “better,” Wilson’s speech and his views on race derive from the desire to provide a more positive self-identity for himself and African-Americans in general. Wilson’s ideas follow what psychologists call Social Identity Theory which asserts that antagonism towards other groups is only used as a means to make one’s own group appear more positively (Schneider 233). This idea will be developed in more detail later, but it is important to note the possibility that Wilson was not merely seeking to denigrate white culture in his speech but also to raise the self-perception of members of his own race.

Critic Robert Brustein, whom Wilson referred to as a “cultural imperialist,” in his speech offered a response to Wilson’s remarks in the October 1996 issue of *American Theatre* magazine. In his comments, Brustein referred to Wilson’s speech as “the language of self-segregation” (“Subsidized Separatism” 26). He also notes that Wilson has failed to take into account that we live in an increasingly racially mixed society, and Wilson’s suggestion that we need specifically black theatres fails to acknowledge those artists who have multiple racial backgrounds (“Subsidized Separatism” 26). Although Brustein does not address this, his comment regarding racially diverse individuals is especially apt given Wilson’s own familial heritage. Finally, Brustein notes, as indicated above, that all of Wilson’s plays received their world premieres in the very institutions that Wilson accuses of not providing opportunities for African-American artists (“Subsidized Separatism” 27). British novelist and critic Christopher Bigsby commented on this aspect of Wilson’s speech by acknowledging Wilson’s rise to success through the theatres he now decried but, Bigsby noted, Wilson “had very few alternatives and this process was not one that could be expected to foster black playwrights, technicians, designers, or, indeed, audiences” (13). In the November and December 1996, issues of *American Theatre* other theatre practitioners, including Wilson, debated the merits and faults of Wilson’s speech. I have excluded them here because, for the most part, they do not address the issues of stereotype but rather focus on the minutiae of Wilson’s comments regarding color-blind casting or the state of theatrical economics in America. Regardless of the reaction of Brustein and others to Wilson’s view of the state of theatre in America, it is clear that Wilson’s stance regarding his opinions of his race touched a nerve, especially among those outside of Wilson’s primary category; Albee’s speech would also illicit strong reaction, however the

negative response to his speech, as we shall see, came from members of his own category: the homosexual community.

On May 26, 2011, Edward Albee was honored at the 23rd Annual Lambda Literary Awards and was given the Pioneer Award, meant to acknowledge individuals who have “broken new ground in the field of LGBT literature and publishing” (“Pioneer Awards”). Albee’s most controversial comment in the speech, available on the Lambda Literary website, was the phrase “I happen to be gay . . . but I am not a gay writer” (Albee). Albee’s remarks in accepting the award illustrate what women’s and African studies professors Layli Philips and Marla Stewart deem a problem with the currently available studies on identity in the social sciences: “the fact that many people maintain some psychological affiliation with multiple social groups simultaneously” (379). By stereotyping or categorizing himself as “only” a gay playwright, Albee feels he would be limiting himself and the potential of his work. Albee clearly considers himself a member of numerous categories, “I am a member of many minorities,” he said, “I am male, I am white, I am educated, I am creative, I live in what passes for a democracy, and on and on, and I will not accept any definition of my sexual proclivities to be a limitation of me” (Albee).

Interestingly, this is not the first time Albee had publicly made these types of comments. In 1991 he was invited to speak at the OutWrite convention before a group of LGBT writers and playwrights. In that speech, Albee referenced what he saw as a separatism occurring within the civil rights movement which he viewed as a type of “ghettoization,” and he worried that the same thing was happening with the gay rights movement (Léger). Ghettoization, according to Albee, refers to a writer who, because he is gay “feels that his identity . . . is established only by being gay, and [who feels he] has an obligation to write about gay subjects with gay characters” (Bernstein 186). I believe Albee’s definition of ghettoization is closely aligned with the psychologists’ definition of stereotyping, “people are put in ghettos by other people,” says Albee, “people don’t become a community because they’re made a community by other people. They become a community because they wish to be. Ghettoizing is always imposed from without. That’s why it’s destructive” (Bernstein 189). Because Albee sees the stereotype of “gay playwright” as being imposed on him from the outside, he rejects the idea that his plays (or any plays by other members of this category) should focus solely on gay themes (Bernstein 186). As he told Renee Montagne in an interview on National Public Radio in response to the controversy surrounding the Lambda Literary Awards, “any definition [or stereotype] which limits us is deplorable” (Montagne).

Albee is not rejecting the category he has been placed in with his acceptance speech; he is simply noting that there are more categories which comprise his identity than “only” that of a homosexual. As Suzanna Danuta Walters proposes, “the historical conditions of growing up ‘gay’ or ‘lesbian’ in a homophobic culture may, in fact, produce categories of identity that are more fluid, more flexible than the categories of other identities, such as heterosexuality” (492). In other words, Walters is suggesting that because Albee is a gay man living in an often homophobic world, he chooses not to define himself as “only” homosexual. His self-identity is “more flexible” than that. For Albee, the idea that a playwright can only write about issues surrounding the categories of which he is a part is ridiculous, as he says in his speech, “I think it’s a writer’s responsibility to become whoever they write about . . . we must be able to transcend ourselves . . . when you write about straight, gay whatever you must become that or your work is going to be superficial” (Albee). Albee sees his role as a playwright as chronicling the world around him and “any definition which is going to limit us is unfortunate and goes beyond that and is deplorable” (Albee). The closing remarks of his acceptance speech reveal that the only singular stereotype Albee is willing to consider falls under the category of *playwright*: “one is not a gay playwright, one is not a straight playwright, one is a playwright. The only difference is is one a fucking good one or a fucking lousy one” (Albee).

The reaction to Albee’s speech from members of the LGBT community was varied. As Judith Butler notes, “identity categories tend to be instruments for regulatory regimes, whether as the normalizing categories of oppressive structures or as the rally points for a liberatory contestation of that very oppression” (13-14). Most of those who were opposed to Albee’s comments were so because of their own beliefs that a “homosexual playwright” should use his or her platform to help end the oppression of homosexuals. His views caused him to become stigmatized by some members of his own category. Blogger Sassafra Lowrey (who was also honored at the award ceremony for her book *Kicked Out*) found his speech “disappointing,” as did blogger Tom Léger, who thanked Albee “for helping clarify my artistic goals: *the opposite of you*” (original emphasis). The negative response to the speech was mentioned in the *Wall Street Journal*, which kindly referred to the speech as “not warmly received” (Andersen), and Renee Montagne noted that the speech “raised hackles” both during the award ceremony and among the gay community at large (Montagne). Albee was not surprised by this negative response “because,” as he told Montagne, “a number of them make their living off of being gay writers rather than writers who happen to be gay” (Montagne).

Not all of the response was negative, however. Lesbian comic and performance artist Lea DeLaria, who served as host of the ceremony, agreed with Albee's notion that gay art should not be labeled, "I'm looking forward to the day where it's not 'gay books,' it's just 'books'" she told the Literary Awards crowd (Andersen). Actress Stephanie Powers, who presented the award for Gay Fiction, commented that "the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender communities are in a position where they're expected to fill a niche, to make a point of themselves. We all long for the time when nobody has to do that" (Lee). All of these comments surround the issue of stereotyping Edward Albee as a gay playwright. Some argue that even if he is "a playwright who happens to be gay," he still has a responsibility to use his work as a tool to end the oppression against homosexuals. Others agree with Albee that putting a label on a person or his or her work limits them, and the work should be evaluated and appreciated on its own merits regardless of the sexuality of its creator.

René Girard suggests that "there exists in every individual a tendency to think of himself not only as different from others but as extremely different" (115). In their response to the stereotypes placed on them, both of these men have embraced their differentness—Wilson as being "different" from white society and Albee as being "different" from those homosexuals who see their sexuality as their primary sense of self. What have these views had on the work produced by Wilson and Albee?

The opinions expressed by Wilson in his speech correlate with what psychologists call the Social Identity Theory, noted above. One aspect of Social Identity Theory suggests that members of the same group emphasize their own positive traits by creating hostility towards other groups (Schneider 233). Wilson exemplifies Social Identity Theory when he submits that only African-Americans can write about black issues because "whites, of course, have a very different attitude, a different relationship to the history" (Savran 27). This can also be seen in his proposal that there should be separate theatre companies for blacks and whites as well as his desire to have black directors for his plays because, "it is crucial that the exploration of the culture be by those who share in it" (Sheppard 115).

In his plays, however, Wilson has a different goal. He sees the purpose of his work as the creation of an oral narrative in order to provide a distinctively African American drama. He uses his ten-play cycle examining the African-American experience in America to educate other African-Americans. By doing this he is attempting to provide other African-Americans, other members of his stereotyped category, with a more positive self-image. It may not be a conscious decision on his part, but as stated earlier, one's identity is closely related to the categories to

which they belong. When your racial category is imbued with negative stereotypes, as is the case for African-Americans, your self-image suffers. Wilson says:

What I want to do is place the culture of black America on stage, to demonstrate that it has the ability to offer sustenance, so that when you leave your parents' house, you are not in the world alone . . . you have a ground to stand on, and you have a viewpoint, and you have a way of proceeding in the world that has been developed by your ancestors (Sheppard 104-105).

Through his plays he can show African-Americans “the content of their lives being elevated into art” (Lyons 205). We can see Wilson’s socio-political views in his speech before the Theatre Communications Group, but it his politics are also a part of his plays. As he explained in an interview with Bonnie Lyons, he believes that “all art is political in the sense that it serves the politics of someone. Here in America whites have a particular view of blacks, and I think my plays offer them a different and new way to look at black Americans” (205).

Because they view their sexuality as their primary category, many of those who responded negatively to Albee’s speech because they are looking for an artist to assist them achieve a more positive self-identity, much like Wilson attempts to do for African-Americans. In discussing her desire for more “gay plays” and “gay books” blogger “Carolyn” of autostraddle.com suggests that the needs of the audience, in this case the gay audience, should be given more credence by playwrights in general and Albee in particular. Albee, however, does seem to understand the role theatre can play in creating a more positive self-image. In a 1996 interview with Steve Capra, Albee acknowledges that “how we respond to the world around us, socially and politically, is determined by our concept of ourselves. And our concept of ourselves *can* be formulated by the arts. And should be” (182). However, because he views himself as a proud member of more than one category, his plays do not address social and political issues that are only relevant to the gay community. His plays do have a message—although it is rarely overt—but that message is more universally directed. So what does he wish to accomplish with his plays? He wants to make the audience think. He wants us to examine our ideas about the world we live in. He wants us to watch his plays and not judge the characters but use the characters to help us judge ourselves (Bernstein 189). Despite the wishes of many in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender community, he doesn’t want us to question only our ideas about sexuality, but also our ideas about religion, class, race and a myriad of other issues. Like Wilson, Albee considers his plays political in nature. But his politics extend beyond his sexuality. “I have never written a play that was not in its essence political,” he said in an interview

with Guy Flately, “but we don’t need an attack on the specific [i.e. race, sexuality, gender stereotypes] or the conscious. We need an attack on the unconscious” (104). Both Wilson and Albee use their plays to effect change, but because of their differing views towards the stereotyped categories in which they have been placed, their goals for the change they wish to see are different.

The similarities between Wilson and Albee regarding the purpose of their work are evident, but how have critics responded to their work based on the stereotyped categories of which they are a part? Because he wears his stereotype on his sleeve, quite literally, Wilson has been accused of being single-minded. In a review of Wilson’s *The Piano Lesson* in *The New Republic*, Robert Brustein says the “documentation of American racism is a worthy if familiar social agenda, and no enlightened person would deny its premise, but as an ongoing artistic program it is monotonous, limited, [and] locked in a perception of victimization” (“The Lesson” 28). Because of his attempts to distance himself from the homosexual stereotype, Albee has often been subject to a critical response which focuses on attempts to find underlying homosexuality in his plays. Several critics have suggested that married couple George and Martha in Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* are actually disguised homosexuals, an idea Albee vehemently denies (Rutenberg 255). In his review of *Tiny Alice*, critic Philip Roth saw the play as a “homosexual day-dream in which the celibate male is tempted and seduced by the overpowering female, only to be betrayed by the male lover” (108). Because they see him as “only” a gay playwright, many critics are unable to accept his plays on their own merit, seeking instead to pigeon-hole Albee within the stereotype of a gay playwright.

Finally, has the ways in which these playwrights responded to their stereotyped categories had any impact on the reception of their plays by theatre-goers? The answer is no. Wilson was the most produced playwright of the 1990s according to biographer Alan Nadel (9). He has received a Tony for Best Play (*Fences*) and the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for *Fences* and *The Piano Lesson* (“August Wilson”). Edward Albee has received three Tony Awards, including the 2005 Lifetime Achievement Award and three Pulitzer Prizes for *A Delicate Balance*, *Seascape*, and *Three Tall Women* (“Edward Albee”). Obviously, awards and accolades do not necessarily mean that the plays are well received by the general public. But the numerous productions throughout the world of the works of Wilson and Albee, both professionally and by university and amateur companies, suggest that the plays of Wilson and Albee can be appreciated by those within the stereotypes of race and sexuality and beyond.

We have seen that categorizing and stereotyping individuals can be useful and important tools which help us define a person cognitively. By categorizing and stereotyping playwrights we can explain where they fit in the dramatic canon and why. Not only are they useful to outsiders, but they play an important role in shaping a person's image of themselves. One's identity is closely related to the stereotypes placed on a person as well as the categories of which they are a part. In an article titled "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," Stuart Hall suggests that "perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact . . . we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (392). Albee's identity as it relates to stereotyping is certainly "in process;" he does not reject his stereotypes but refuses to be contained within a singular category. Wilson, who has embraced his primary category, would likely agree with Hall's statement, after all his plays seek to illustrate that one's identity is "never complete" and can still be molded in a more positive light. Whether playwrights serve as champions for their stereotype or attempt to distance themselves from a particular stereotype, they can still affect social change through their plays regardless of whether they do that within the stereotype or outside of it.

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The (In)Visible Voices: Theatrical Representations of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Kia Corthron's *Seeking the Genesis* and Lisa Loomer's *Distracted*

LAUREN M. KOTTENSTETTE

With all the strength and love it takes to raise a child it is hard to imagine that no matter what a parent does to improve the life of their child, genetics will still play a role in that child's life. The child's ability to catch a baseball, having violent tendencies, or being diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) are all related to genetics (Hartung, 2011). ADHD is a rather recently discovered mental disorder that is recognized by all major health organizations and is highly studied in an attempt to better understand this condition (Banaschewski et al. 2009). Though quantitative methods are limited, the medical field is not the only faction of our society that produces a legitimate body of knowledge on ADHD.

Around the world there are organizations and support groups to help children and families cope with diagnosis and issues. For example, at the University of Wyoming, Dr. Cynthia Hartung, an expert in ADHD, performs mental health screening for ADHD and disruptive behavior disorders in the community. Dr. Hartung works side-by-side with the parents of ADHD children to treat better and more effectively their son or daughter (Hartung, 2011). More so, artists and playwrights are tackling ways of writing about the sociological issues of how families face ADHD by exposing the issue through their artistic ways and offering solutions to the

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struggles and tribulations of dealing with ADHD. ADHD is represented in American contemporary theatre by two playwrights: Kia Corthron (*Seeking the Genesis*, 1996) and Lisa Loomer (*Distracted*, 2007).

Corthron and Loomer offer contrasting perspectives on ADHD, which highlight cultural, social, gender, and economic influences in dealing with ADHD. ADHD is a prevalent medical condition in our society, the myths, misconceptions, and stigmas reinforce how different cultural groups cope with ADHD as demonstrated in the plays by Corthron and Loomer. This essay offers a summary of both plays, examines the cultural context of each play, and analyzes the influences of social, gender, and economic issues of mothers and children coping with ADHD. While it is problematic that the children seem powerless and voiceless, I argue that these plays depict the mother's struggles as they lie at opposite ends of the socio-economic spectrum. *Seeking the Genesis* and *Distracted* advocate for women who bear the burden and share the great truth of protecting their children from ADHD social stigmas.

Hyperactivity in the Inner City

Seeking the Genesis (SG) by Kia Corthron was originally produced in 1996 at the Goodman Theatre in Chicago, Illinois. The story centers on C Ana Talley and her three children, Justin, 15, Kendal, 8, and finally Kite, 6, who appears to “fly” continually around the room (Corthron 6). After Kite's teacher diagnoses him with ADHD, C Ana has to cope with the newfound issues she is faced with: Should she drug her child? If she cannot control Kite now, will he turn out like his gun toting, gang-member brother Justin? Both the teacher and a college professor tell C Ana that his hyperactivity may lead to violence that will land him in trouble later in life. Corthron sets SG in a lower class African-American neighborhood where gang violence is a part of everyday life and poverty is commonplace in the community's culture.

While acknowledging the diversity and complexity of C Ana's relationship with her children and her impoverished experiences of living in the ghetto, we must also recognize that, as an African American woman, her experiences are different from those of Anglo Americans in the United States. C Ana has to work to defy the violence and poverty that stalk her and her children. The thought of genetics being the trigger for violence is hard for C Ana to understand because violence is a prevalent factor in their environment and family. Corthron demonstrates C Ana's character to want a “nurture” rather than “nature” effect. While the opposite is true, at the beginning of the play C Ana believes that the harsh environment is to blame (Corthron 17). When Kite's teacher starts to single him out in class, C Ana has something to say:

I want you stop pickin' on my son! Third day this week he come home the tears. You havin' a bad day? Well Kite's is every single. Saturday, rope jumpin', bang, bang, she fall. Lucky, just her neck grazed, we thought she was done. My kids seen it all, Kite and Kendal missed bein' her cuz she won the fight to jump first. You don't know what kinda tense, you work here go home. My son gotta live here, he got a nervousness. Earned (Corthron 17).

In this passage, Corthron demonstrates that it is more practical for C Ana to blame the social history of her race—the violence that her son is exposed to on a daily basis. Violence that is ever so present is the trigger for Kite's hyperactive nature, not genes—something she can't control. C Ana tries to raise her family out of the danger. Multiple times during the play she attempts to talk her older son out of the gang, just one of the steps she takes to protect her children.

After Kite is diagnosed with ADHD, C Ana's niece introduces her to a college professor, an expert in genetics. In the playwright's notes there is an entry regarding casting the Professor and staging the specificity of race. The entire cast is to be African-American except for the Professor who is Anglo "White." The only leniency with casting and race that Corthron offers is the Pizzaman, whose side business is as gun supplier for the gangs in the ghetto. Corthron as a playwright takes creative liberty to make social, class, and racial distinctions by stating these casting notes. By having the Professor be Anglo "White," it gives him a *stranger in a strange land* quality to him. He knows nothing about Kite besides the diagnoses and is basing studies and theories off rats to come to his conclusions on ADHD. Corthron strategically uses the professor as merely a tool to show the social and racial separation of the two classes. If a white male is cast as the Pizzaman, it brings even more social and racial separation to the plot. Corthron's specific casting notes serve as symbolic messages for the repetition of post-imperialism and post-colonialism in African American communities in the United States.

During the meeting with the "White" Professor, C Ana faces another social and economic disparity. C Ana tries her best to help her children, yet there is only so much she can do financially. She is a single mother, unemployed and on welfare. When the Professor attempts to explain that anti-depressants aren't race specific, C Ana brings up an important economic issue:

I'm on welfare I got mice and occasional heat, I pass food stamps for eggs and cereal, a humiliation, my neighborhood goes bang bang and it ain't the fourtha July. For some people depressed ain't in the budget (Corthron 26).

What is highlighted in this passage is the financial reality that C Ana cannot afford the prescribed drugs for ADHD, just like many people in her community. Moreover, C Ana brings to attention that treating a disease

or a disorder is best understood by social and financial influences. Her perspective furthers the distance between her and the Professor who are exposed to completely different socio-economic structures and opposing views of medical diagnosis.

With the help of a free clinic C Ana is able to start Kite on Ritalin, but with this medication, he becomes a completely different child. He is quiet, tired but can't sleep, losing weight but not hungry and no longer his imaginative self (Corthron 34). Not only does this scare C Ana, but also Justin who considers the medication something that "fries" the brain (41). Justin continuously asks why C Ana is having Kite on the drug, and she finally answers, "I fry his brain so he don't get shot...It'll fix whatever's inside you makes you what you are. Violent... Genes" (Corthron 41). Though C Ana insists that the medication will help Kite's behavior and not fry his brain, she isn't certain and starts to look for other treatment options that don't involve medication. Even though she cannot control the genes that make her sons who they are, C Ana still does everything to encourage them to break the cycle of poverty, ignorance, and violence. C Ana's struggle lies at one end of the socio-economic spectrum. She tries to resist the use of drugs on her son, which translates into a pursuit of advocacy and social justice for the health of Kite.

C Ana represents a cultural perspective and the voice of low-income women who bear the financial burden of treating ADHD. Corthron provides a unique viewpoint that gives us a "nurture" rather than "nature" insight into a cultural intuition of how C Anna resists dominant cultural ways of dealing with ADHD and protects and advocates for Kite—normalcy of childhood in the ghetto. For C Ana, collective experiences and community memory give a qualitative meaning to data on ADHD. C Ana is an active speaking subject who takes part in producing and validating knowledge within a specific cultural ethnic group.

Hyperactivity in the Suburbs

Eleven years after *SG* was first produced, ADHD had become better known through awareness, new treatments, and even more research. After that span, a new play from the other end of the socio-economic spectrum was written to express the ADHD phenomenon that was unfolding in the twenty first century. *Distracted* by Lisa Loomer was first produced in 2007 at the Mark Taper Forum by Center Theater Group in Los Angeles, California. The play focuses around an always multi-tasking mother who is only referred to as "Mama" and who is part of the dominant culture: privileged, Anglo, upper-middle class, and educated.

In a fast-paced technologically driven society Mama and Dad are pulled to a screeching halt when their nine-year-old son, Jesse, is diagnosed ADHD after his teacher insists on him being tested by professionals. Mama is determined to “cure” her son and searches out numerous neighbors, doctors, and homeopathic experts to help. When nothing works, she desperately turns to medication, but Jesse’s personality is lost in a haze of side effects. It isn’t until every attempt fails to “fix” her child that she finally realizes that the best thing she can do for her ADHD son is give him attention.

Everyone in *Distracted* from the psychologist to the sixteen-year-old moody babysitter seems to be distracted by some external or internal force. For many it is technology; phones are constantly ringing, an email is always coming in, the television is always on, or a phone text is waiting for a reply. The message in Loomer’s play begs to ask, with every character, whether patience is being replaced with the need for instant gratification within the newest generations. Dad, who shows ADHD symptoms too, knows his son is unlike others in his class as Dad reminds us; “Kid’s minds *are* different now. Anything they’re asked to memorize, they can get on the computer—faster” (Loomer 49). When doctors are too busy dealing with their high tech toys, Mama turns to other mothers in her neighborhood for advice. These mothers are controlled not by technology, but something else—medication. Her neighbors, Sherry and Vera, are both on Prozac, while their children take medications like Zoloft, Ritalin, and Trileptal. For two of the three children the medication is helping, while the third attempts to self medicate in order to feel better.

The doctors in this particular environment set a social norm that medicating a child is ordinary, while the neighbors have a keeping-up-with-the-Robinson’s response and must get on the medication train. Mama tries to fight against the idea of medicating her child for most of the play by trying new diets, behavior modification, and alternative medicine such as homeopathic remedies. When Mama starts to explain yet another alternative treatment plan to her neighbor, Sherry has her own opinion regarding the stigma of medicating children:

Oh shut up. Do you think I *wanted* to give my child drugs!? Do you think any mother—? My child was in pain! He knew he was different—he just didn’t have a name for it! He just thought he was stupid! A dumb ass. A stinky brain. A zero. My child was hurting and I wanted it to stop. I wanted it to end. Listen to me, every day, every day you “explore” some “alternative”...your child is in pain (Loomer 64).

Sherry is one example of the different opinions offered in *Distracted*. Loomer depicts both sides of the medication spectrum as well as the

positive and negative side effects children can experience. This allows for the audience to understand the mother's who are part of the dominant culture, like Sherry as well as Mama, and the different outlooks parents can have.

One of the reasons why Mama has many failed attempts to help her son is because she herself may have ADHD. It is never proven in the play, but Dad suspects she has ADHD and genetically passed it onto their son, while she believes the father's genetics are to blame. When Mama and Dad have an argument about putting Jesse on Ritalin, it reaches a point where Mama cannot stand Dad's resistance to a possible treatment:

You always have to start a fight, don't you? You know why you always have to start a fight? Because you're trying to get your pre-frontal cortex up! That's why! And if you'd been paying attention the first time I tried to explain it to you, you'd know it was because YOU HAVE ADD! (Loomer 50).

This leads to a back and forth blame game that only hurts their relationship. It is possible that both parents have ADHD. Neither one has the patience to stand their ground when a rule is put in place, which teaches Jesse that if he acts out he will be able to overturn anything. All he has to do is shout, complain, or not listen, and Mama and Dad will eventually give in. When it comes to the different treatments, there is a strong possibility that none of them work because the parents are too impatient.

Mama keeps within the mothering gender role as a stay at home parent who recently quit her job to be able to "focus" on her child (Loomer 15). When the only child is having behavioral issues at school and home, the father is the one that continues to be head of household, while Mama quits her job and becomes a housewife. She wants the best for her child and works hard in her attempts to cure something that is incurable. Dad is distant and hard headed. Loomer makes a bold choice by never telling the audience Mama's real name; instead, she is called Mama, Mrs. Cara, or Jesse's Mom. The only identity that she has is through her mothering role; she cannot interact without it. This is not exclusive to Mom, as Dad is the same way. The parents become so involved with their son they cannot function without him.

Distracted represents the extreme economic measures a mother will reach when she has money, or at least a credit card, to help her child. Act One reveals that the Cara family has money; after all, they can afford for her to quit her job to stay at home and focus on Jesse, while her husband designs crash tests. In the second act a holistic doctor believes Jesse has "allergies," and Mama and Dad are so desperate they tear up the carpet, buy a new mattress, and toss out half the food in the kitchen. Mama

goes to the health food store and tells the audience how she spent three hundred dollars on groceries (Loomer 63). Mama is so determined to help her son that money is not a problem, until she spends so much on alternative medicines and doctor visits while not paying her bills that her credit card is declined, and she cannot receive the next ADHD remedy.

Collective experiences and community memory give meaning to data on ADHD—to be a speaking subject who takes part in producing and validating knowledge within a specific cultural/ethnic group. As an Anglo woman with economic means, Mama is able to protect and cure her child. She depicts the mother's struggles on the opposite end of the socio-economic spectrum from C Ana.

Hear My Voice: A Mother's Struggle With ADHD

Many cultural, social, gender, and economic issues separate C Ana and Mama, but their pursuit of advocacy and social justice for the health of their children binds them. C Ana and Mama show resistance to traditional medical approaches regarding medication. Even after each attempts such practices, they defy the pills and address the failure such traditional medical paradigms may ignore—the child. In this manner, the mother's function serves as intermediary between the child's environments and helps to shape the child's voice.

Both C Ana and Mama represent nurturing mothers who are struggling to provide the best life possible for their young ADHD sons despite the uncontrollable variables in their environments. The two mothers are from completely different ends of the socio-economic spectrum: low class verses upper-middle class, urban versus suburban, unemployed verses stay at home mom. Yet, there are bonds that connect them—resisting drugs, protecting their children, and serving as their voice. In *SG* and *Distracted* the mothers are the advocates for the well being of the children. Both C Ana and Mama protect their ADHD children from the social stigmas that come with the diagnosis.

Though there are many role models and guardians for Kite and Jesse, the main person who supports them are their mothers. Kite has no father; he is never mentioned in the play by anyone. While there are plenty of people who care about Kite's wellness including his brother, cousin, sister, and teacher, the one who is first in line is C Ana. C Ana is the one who stands up to the teacher when she starts to single him out in class. C Ana is the one who goes out to learn about ADHD and what treatment options she can find and wards off Justin when his ways start to endanger the family. She is also the only one who honestly appreciates Kite for his good qualities, instead of focusing on only the bad.

In *Distracted* Mama is clearly the advocate for Jesse's well being. Mama tries every alternative treatment that she can find before she turns to medication. When nothing works she is willing to try medication for Jessie's sake, unlike Dad. Mama is able to push past her own pride and acknowledge that her son needs help, and Ritalin may be the best a way to get it. Dad is too concerned with his own beliefs that the mere mention of medication makes him want to leave the room in a huff. When the world seems to be crashing down around Mama due to her negligent money habits, she is willing to come to terms with her problems in order to help Jessie with his.

As protectors of their children both mothers blame themselves for the genes that have been passed down to the next generation. In *SG*, C Ana is trying to scrape out a life for her three children in a dangerous neighborhood. She has tried to keep her oldest son out of the gang but has failed. She raises Kite to the best of her abilities, but she cannot control genetics. "Probably ain' your [Justin's] fault. Probably me. Bad gene I passed on to you, your brother" (Corthron 41). In *Distracted* Mama is quick to blame her hyperactive husband for passing the genes onto Jesse, but at the end of the play she realizes she shares many ADHD traits with her son. When Jesse tries to explain his behavior to his mother she responds, "I know, me too" (Loomer 67), suggesting that she is willing to admit she too, has ADHD. Blaming themselves doesn't make the disorder go away but allows for some understanding to be found, even if it is misplaced.

When Kite and Jesse are on medication they both suffer from the major side effects like lack of appetite and loss of creativity. C Ana watches as Kite loses more and more weight. When she tells him how he's going to get a big bowl of spaghetti that night, he insists that he isn't hungry (Corthron 34). Mama sees the same thing happen with Jesse's creativity. Instead of painting with watercolors or making *hors d'oeuvres*, he would rather sit and watch the weather channel (Loomer 57). There is a struggle for the mothers when they see their child suffering, yet the steps they take in an attempt to help them doesn't work.

As they try to protect their sons from the stigmas that ADHD brings along with the diagnosis, they inadvertently show them that something is "wrong" with them. The mothers were trying to help their sons by giving medication, but with so much focus on pills, the message that comes across is that the boys must have it to be worthwhile. This realization is a wake up call for both mothers that their current treatment approaches are not the best. C Ana starts to consider Ritalin as only one treatment they can try, and when she starts to give it serious thought, Kite's teacher is there to help find alternatives. In *Distracted* Mama hugs Jesse, which symbolically communicates that he is worthy of being loved.

Conclusion

Corthron and Loomer highlight cultural, social, gender, and economic influences in dealing with ADHD by offering contrasting perspectives on ADHD. ADHD is a prevalent medical condition in our society. The myths, misconceptions, and stigmas reinforce how different cultural/ethnic groups cope with ADHD as demonstrated in Corthron and Loomer's plays. Moreover, these plays address the failure of traditional medical paradigms that have distorted or omitted the history and knowledge of how mothers deal with their ADHD children. Though similar bleak stories exist in specific segments within the medical field, acknowledging a mother's perspective in medical research is virtually unprecedented. Seeking the Genesis by Kia Corthron and Distracted by Lisa Loomer offer collective experiences and community memory to give a qualitative approach to ADHD. Corthron and Loomer become speaking subjects who take part in producing and validating knowledge within a specific cultural/ethnic group.

Therefore, one of the major contributions of this essay is an emerging articulation of performing a new perspective in the medical research of ADHD. The mother's narratives of resistance and fighting their environmental influences gives license to both mothers to uncover and reclaim their own cultural/ethnic subjugated knowledge. Corthron and Loomer allow some freedom to interpret their own personal experiences outside of existing medical paradigm. Indeed, I hope that others will read this article and think about their own myths, misconceptions, and social stigmas that come with the labels of ADHD. Borrowing from Corthron and Loomer's narrative, cultural/ethnic structures may help us to raise more appropriate sociological, economical, and historical questions and avoid asking questions based on a *cultural deficit* medical model or incorrect stereotypes. In doing so, we may focus on questions that will expose important school issues and community experiences that are otherwise not visible, as both Corthron and Loomer bring to the stage.

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Staging the Impossible: Joanna Baillie, the Gothic, and the Theatre of Cruelty

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The history of criticism on Joanna Baillie, (1762–1851), one of the major British Romantic women dramatists, has been dominated by literary critics who focus on her work as a written text. Sir Walter Scott argues that, “[Baillie] was certainly the best dramatic writer who Britain has produced since the days of Shakespeare and Massinger.”¹ Though admired as a dramatist by some, her plays have been described by theatre critics as presentable only through the written text or staged reading but unrepresentable in terms of action on the stage. Critics of her time dismiss the artistic development in her comedies and tragedies.² They generally categorized her plays as “closet drama,” to mean plays that were not meant to be acted out on stage but rather read.³ Modern literary scholar,

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- 1 In a letter to Miss Smith, Sir Walter Scott writes to her stating glowing remarks about Joanna Baillie and her literary and dramatic writing skills. March 4, 1808, in *Familiar Letters of Sir Walter Scott* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1894) vol. 1: 99.
 - 2 The *Edinburgh Magazine* and *Literary Miscellany* praises Joanna Baillie for the poetry of her plays but argues that they are not written to be staged (“Remarks” 1818: 517-20.). In Daniel P. Watkins’ book, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* (1993), he echoes the feelings of many literary critics who felt that Baillie was “writing plays that were utter failures on stage in her own day and that continue to baffle (and often bore) would-be sympathizers today” (39).
 - 3 For a concise definition of “closet drama” see W.W. Greg, vol. IV of *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration* (Oxford University Press, 1959), p. xii. 4 vols.

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Daniel Watkins, in his essay, “The Gait Disturb’d of Wealthy, Honour’d Men” chastises Baillie and merely downplays the artistic qualities in her tragedy, *DeMonfort*.⁴

DeMonfort has been all but forgotten by literary history is no doubt partly attributable to shortcomings in the play itself—it is long, melodramatic, and ill-suited for the popular stage. *DeMonfort* works not so much through action and dialogue as through ideological disclosure, which Baillie achieves by focusing on social relations rather than individual events. This focus necessarily slows the pace of dramatic action—and thus damages stageability—but the payoff is an astonishingly comprehensive and profound picture of personal life drenched in the many currents of social circumstance. (58)

While Watkins’ criticism is admirable in widening the scope of Baillie’s plays, he still argues against its stageability. To take in consideration another example in most recent scholarship, literary critic, Adrienne Scullion, in her thought provoking study of Joanna Baillie’s plays states:⁵

Although only a minority of her plays were ever performed, the position as *grande dame del letters* during the early and middle decades of the nineteenth century was secure. The majority of these plays were written to be read, being closer to the genre of “closet” plays that the era allowed for and celebrated than to active engagements in the theatre industry. (lix)

Clearly, most literary scholars would rather discuss Baillie’s work as a “closet drama”—as texts rather than an artistic project meant for the stage. These literary critical approaches are problematic in that they ignore the artistic intention of her plays. As Baillie states in her “Introductory Discourse” that she is not writing for the closet but rather for the stage. Her vision is to see her plays on the stage that suits their theatrical shape and cultural project, as J.O. Bailey suggests is “the most radical experimentation with the Romantic verse plays...and a third contender in the struggle for survival between the verse drama and the evolving melodrama” (26).⁶

The philosophical roots of Joanna Baillie’s staging and performance practices have gone largely unexplored by contemporary theatre directors and theatre artists. When you approach the plays as a director the real possibilities of Baillie’s theatrical project becomes clearer. As one scholar

4 See *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* (1993) by Daniel P. Watkins in his chapter “The Gait Disturb’d of Wealthy, honour’d Men” Joanna Baillie’s *DeMonfort*, pp. 39-59.

5 See Adrienne Scullion, ed. *Female Playwrights of the Nineteenth Century* (London: J.M. Dent, 1996), pl lix.

6 J.O. Bailey, *British Plays of the Nineteenth Century: An Anthology to Illustrate the Evolution of the Drama* (New York: Odyssey Press, 1966).

notes regarding the aesthetics of Baillie's plays, Jeffrey N. Cox in his essay "Staging Baillie," states that, "for her plays to retain their tragic richness, they must be staged"⁷ and "in that her tragedies are filled with hatred, murder, ritual violence, witchcraft, and supernatural fears, they at times seem closer to Artaud's theatre of cruelty" (147, 154). Cox mainly argues that Artaud (1896-1948) and Baillie share an aesthetic where they both call for an intimate and experimental theatre that allows for spectacular cruelty and self-conscious reflection upon violence as a theatrical pleasure in witnessing suffering.

In Cox's observations, there are hints for the complementary theories of Baillie's understanding of staging violence in Gothic Drama and Artaud's recommendations in "theatre of cruelty" for staging violence, both of which created prescriptions for moral instruction and revolutionized the theatre of their times. In this presentation, I would like to bring to light Baillie's dramaturgical narrative and propose staging Baillie's play, *De Monfort*, in the context of Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" beliefs and practices. In this performative context, Baillie's play can be staged to mirror violent passions that the audience might otherwise be reluctant to admit about themselves. I argue that Artaud's "theatre of cruelty" provides an important staging mechanism for understanding Baillie's artistic approach to violence and eroticism in re/presenting *De Monfort*.

In the possibilities of staging *De Monfort*, Baillie creates a theatre of immediacy that rejects Aristotelian notions of "dramatic action" to communicate elemental truths. Instead of action being the central focus of her play, she draws upon the aesthetics of sensory and spectacle as the experience to evoke passions which ameliorate the language of suffering. The experimental theatre of Baillie and Artaud rely upon spectacle of passions to make human connections and suffering as a way of forced engagement in the process of moral education. As Baillie succinctly proposes in her "Introductory Discourse," we must see ourselves in these violently passionate characters and that "it is the passion and not the man which is held up to our execration" (65).⁸

Over a century removed from Antonin Artaud's (1896-1948) surrealist theories, Baillie's play, *De Monfort*, can be staged productively in following the performance theory of Artaud's *The Theatre and Its Double*, specifically "theatre of cruelty." Baillie and Artaud show significant parallels

7 See *Joanna Baillie, Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays* edited by Thomas C. Crochunis.

8 For her "Introductory Discourse," I used the first edition (1798). For *De Monfort*, I have used *Plays on the Passions* (1798) edition edited by Peter Duthie.

in how they rejected classical models in staging suffering, violence, and passions and in how literary critics have treated their material. Both Baillie's "closet drama" and Artaud's "impossible theatre"⁹ have been handicapped by literary criticism approaches which refuse to address the nature of the plays as "plays." Their plays are intentionally meant to reject an Aristotelian model of contained social violence on stage. For Baillie and Artaud, staging extreme violence rejects the Aristotelian notion of theatre as "cathartic" in favor of theatre as "truth." The passions that define humanity according to Baillie and Artaud are violent and ugly, but still represent the core of the human psyche.

Turning now to what I consider to be Baillie's best example of her "theatre of cruelty play," *De Monfort* (1798),¹⁰ I discuss it briefly to use as an example of some of the claims made above. Joanna Baillie's tragedy, *De Monfort*, was published in a collection of three plays entitled *Plays on the Passions* in 1798. The collection contains two tragedies, *De Monfort* and *Count Basil*, and one comedy, *The Tryal*. Baillie's best-known tragedy and famous historical stage production of *De Monfort* took place at Drury Lane in 1800 with John Phillip Kemble as De Monfort and Sarah Siddons as Jane DeMonfort. *De Monfort* is Baillie's examination in the genre of tragedy of the passions of hate, fear, violence, suffering, and eroticism. This play is a psychological drama set against social, historical, and cultural realities of 18th Century private and public life. The play's title character, De Monfort, is plagued by hatred for Rezenvelt ever since they were young boys. Psychologically, De Monfort is disturbed by his passions. As the play reveals, De Monfort succumbs to hatred and murders Rezenvelt. In the final scene of the play, De Monfort dies at the side of his loyal servant, sister, and friend, before he is publicly executed.

My comparison begins with the observation that Joanna Baillie's philosophy of staging her tragedy, which contain the interconnectedness of spectacle of violence and suffering, serve as a precursor and bear strong resemblance to the doctrines espoused by Artaud's "theatre of cruelty." In the "Introductory Discourse" to the 1798 *Plays on the Passions*, Baillie identifies the core element of tragedy as passion drives an action:

...unveiling the human mind under the dominion of those strong and fixed passions, which seemingly unprovoked by outward circumstances...we commonly find the characters of a tragedy affected by the passions in a transient, loose, unconnected manner; or if they are represented under the permanent influence of the more powerful ones, they are generally introduced to our

9 See Stephen Barber's *Antonin Artaud: Blows and Bombs* (1993). London: Faber.

10 Throughout the essay, I use Peter Duthie's edited version of *Plays on the Passions* (1798).

notice in the very height of their fury, when all that timidity, irresolution, distrust, and a thousand delicate traits...these passions that may be suddenly excited, and are of short duration, as anger, fear, and oftentimes jealousy, may in this manner be fully represented (90-91).

Baillie contends that describing and staging the passions of a character propels spectators to identify with and experience the suffering of the characters as the main action and theme of the play. For Baillie, the performative practice of enacting passions is the language that is used to convey the action. This highly emblematic language—which relies on more than words to exert power—has violent tendencies due to its striking visual and auditory staging.

Baillie develops her own theatrical conventions to cause the spectator to experience these passions, which has the intended effect of creating social consciousness and social change.¹¹ In her thought provoking study of Joanna Baillie’s “spectatorial language,” Victoria Meyers, in her essay, “Joanna Baillie’s Theatre of Cruelty,” recognizes Baillie’s approaches to creating “a covert aggression in this move from sensibility to Romanticism... this aggression comes to light in relation to two key terms: ‘sympathy’ and ‘curiosity’ to create a visceral theatre of her time” (Meyers 89).¹² Meyers recognizes Baillie’s reform of the theatre first by associating it with Artauds “theatrical language”—“theatre of cruelty,” a revolutionary theatre that is designed to appeal to the senses as a means of subverting the constraints of spoken and written texts. Secondly, Meyers defends Baillie’s staging aesthetics referring to her language as “cruel spectacle” and “sympathetic curiosity,” so that the drama allows for self-conscious spectators (101).

To illustrate what Meyers calls the cruel spectacle, in Act I Scene 1, Baillie focuses on an immediate representation of sound, light, and visceral actions—a tableaux, to give insight into DeMonfort’s character of suffering. The calculated and frenetic staging developments of creating disturbing noises, intrusive lighting on the body, and picturesque image are repeated patterns of actions and gradually intensifies through the final scenes of the play as Bernard, Thomas, and Monks bring in the blood covered De Montfort:

ABB. I hear noise within the inner court, They are return’d; (listening) and Bernard’s voice I hear: They are return’d.

11 This is my own interpretation of Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse” as it relates to the core elements of her theatrical narrative.

12 See Joanna Baillie, *Romantic Dramatist: Critical Essays* edited by Thomas C. Crochunis.

SIST. Why do I tremble so? It is not I who ought to tremble thus.

2D NUN. I hear them at the door.

BERN. (Without.) Open the door, I pray thee, brother Thomas; I cannot now unhand the prisoner. (All speak together, shrinking back from the door, and staring upon one another.) He is with them. (A folding door at the bottom of the stage is opened, and enter Bernard, Thomas, and the other two Monks, carrying lanterns in their hands, and bringing in De Monfort. The are likewise followed by other Monks. As they lead forward De Monfort the light is turned away, so that he is seen obscurely; but when they come to the front of the stage they all turn the light side of their lanterns on him at once, and his face is seen in all the strengthened horror of despair, with his hands and cloaths bloody.)

(Abbess and Nuns speak at once, and starting back.) Holy saints be with us! [a long pause]. (368)

Baillie's intrusion as director is strongly observed here, as in previous to this scene, in which she indicates specific sounds of "owl shrieks," "storm blasts," "piercing human cry," "frantic knocking" on the chapel door (by a monk who has seen the murdered corpse of Rezenvelt), and "howls along the cloisters." These disturbances are compounded by the arrival of yet another audio shock, the sound of men bringing in De Monfort, which leads up to his deranged entrance. With intense lighting, the anxiety escalates as the nuns experience the truth of the murder—De Monfort's bloody face, hands, and clothes. As Artaud might argue in his "theatre of cruelty," this is the moment when theatre is "able to physically jolt the viewer out of their complacency, the pierce beneath their skin: the human skin of thins, the derm of reality" (Artaud).

Baillie then creates, with the same rhythmic patterns of staging, noise, intense lighting, and a tableau that leads to the climactic moment of the play, when the body of Rezenvelt is brought in:

ABB. What noise is this of heavy lumb'ring steps, Like men who with a weighty burden come?

BERN. It is the body: I have orders given that here it should be laid.

(Entering men bearing the body of Rezenvelt, covered with a white cloth, and set it down in the middle of the room: they then uncover it. De Monfort stands fixed and motionless with horror, only that a sudden shivering seems to pass over him when they uncover the corps. The Abbess and nuns shrink back and retire to some distance; all the rest fixing their eyes steadfastly upon De Monfort. A long pause.) 369

Baillie endeavors to use long pauses to imprint transgressive images with such force that the spectator experiences the action firsthand, thereby merging the boundary between the consciousness and the

subconscious, between the aesthetic process and reality. As Artaud would put it, the tableaux, much like the forceful lighting, are like the plague, “the theatre must contain the thrust of an epidemic...it must push men to see themselves as they are” (Artaud). With the agitated noise, forceful lighting techniques, and the tableaux, Baillie created her own “theatre of the cruelty” by understanding her directorial desire of staging violence with an end to illicit the spectator’s identification with the passions depicted and suffering.

Like Artaud’s theatrical language, Baillie’s “sympathetic curiosity” relies on unconventional sensory experiences with sound and light, tableaux, gestures and symbolic movements of the actors to convey a visceral understanding of the passions. By using such elements to stage De Monfort’s destructive and guiding passions—hate and fears—a director could manipulate contemporary theatrical stage technologies to shock and engage the audience in a visceral experience of the action, which we might identify with Baillie’s project and Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty.” Artaud suggests that when we are conscious of another suffering on stage, we feel our humanity, as he states, “Without an element of cruelty at the root of every spectacle, the theater is not possible” (99).¹³ Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty” provides insight in understanding Baillie’s artistic approach to violence. Baillie rejects the Aristotelian notion of catharsis, of purging the emotions of pity and fear and allows the spectator to identify with and take pleasure in De Monfort’s violent behavior through her staging conventions. De Monfort’s suffering propels us to experience fully our own pathos. As Cox sums up, “when we experience violence towards another in the theatre of cruelty, we are aware the other experiences pain so that we may take some sort of theatrical pleasure in that pain” (155).

Joanna Baillie’s dramaturgical narrative creates an interplay between the expressive forms of auditory disturbances, symbolic and literal forces of light, and the evocative pictorial tableaux. The use of the repetitive and forceful staging devices allows for intensified violent behaviors, evokes appropriate moods and responses, and assists, through the use of *tableaux vivants*, in privileging sensory experience and communication above the written text. As spectators, when we engage in Baillie’s theatrical project, we are to experience De Monfort’s anguish in seeing him suffer, as if it were our own. Instead of analyzing the action, we are to identify with De Monfort as a subject on a visceral level and through the process of identification, find a form of pleasure in the common experience of human suffering.

13 Antonin Artaud’s, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. M.C. Richards, New York: Grove Press, 1958.

Artaud and Baillie perceive suffering as essential to awareness and existence. Both altered production methods to privilege sensory information in an attempt to break the cultural, ideological, and symbolic hold on audiences, and consequently to induce audiences to experience the drama viscerally as an actor. By doing so, they engage in the disruption of the accepted Aristotelian narrative and dramatic format. Only through an exploration of the artistic dimensions in Baillie's *De Monfort* can the endless possibilities of staging such drama be re-presented for the contemporary stage.

Churchill, Wertenbaker and Carr Explore the Relationship Between Silence and Violence in Female Characters

LOJO SIMON

Harper's Magazine, October 1965: Writer Tillie Olsen publishes a version of a talk that she gave to the Radcliffe Institution in 1962 on silences in literature. In it, she decries “hidden silences: work aborted, deferred, denied—hidden by the work which does not come to fruition;” silences that result from censorship, imprisonment, illiteracy, poverty and failure to publish. Women, she wrote, “are traditionally trained to place others’ needs first, to feel these needs as their own (the ‘infinite capacity’); their sphere, their satisfaction to be in making it possible for others to use their abilities.” (Olsen)

Motherhood is a particularly silencing burden, Olsen noted. “More than any other human relationship, overwhelmingly more, motherhood means being instantly interruptible, responsive, responsible. Children need one now (and remember, in our society, the family must often try to be the center for love and health the outside world is not). The very fact that these are real needs, that one feels them as one’s own (love, not duty); that there is no one else responsible for these needs, gives them primacy.” (ibid.)

The result: mothers are, perhaps, the most silenced of all people.

Olsen’s essay on silence was republished as the title piece of the book *Silences* in 1965. At the time, playwright Caryl Churchill was house-bound in England with young children; she had just begun to write radio plays as a creative outlet. (Aston and Reinelt). Born in New York in 1951, playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker was barely a teenager when *Silences* was published; and Irish playwright Marina Carr was only a year old.

Lojo Simon will earn her Master of Fine Arts in playwriting this year from University of Idaho, Moscow.

Nevertheless, the silencing of women—particularly mothers—is the central theme of works by each of these esteemed playwrights.

As Olsen notes, silence has burdened women for many reasons for many centuries; however, in the plays *Fen*, by Churchill; *The Love of the Nightingale*, by Wertebaker; and *By the Bog of Cats*, by Carr, silence has an even darker side: suicide and infanticide. All three plays end with the taking of a life. In *Fen*, Val, a Fen woman who lives an essentially invisible life, convinces her lover to slay her. In *Nightingale*, the muted Philomele kills her nephew, Itys, the son of the man who raped and silenced her by cutting out her tongue. Finally, *Cats* ends with the brutal murder of the young Josie Swane by her devoted mother Hester Swane, who has been silenced, shamed and abandoned by everyone that she loved.

Further exploration of these three texts reveals that taking away one's voice (literally and metaphorically) strips a woman of her identity and results in a desperation that leads to acts of violence against self and others. Particularly vulnerable are mothers and children whose entangled commitment to one another complicates the silence and results in deeper estrangement from a supportive and perhaps healing environment.

Fen

Set in East Anglia, England, *Fen* is based on the 1975 book *Fenwomen: A Portrait of Women in an English Village* by Mary Chamberlain. The book is a social and oral history of the women in a small, isolated village in The Fen* called Gislea. "The women, from the young to the very old, talk to Mary Chamberlain about their lives [and] present an extraordinary picture of a community which has changed little over the years." (Chamberlain)

Churchill invents her own characters in *Fen* based on Chamberlain's Fen women who, like Thoreau's masses of men, "live lives of quiet desperation," eeking out a meager agrarian living under the watchful eyes of greedy and corporate landowners, who care about productivity but not about people.

First performed by the Joint Stock Theatre Group at the University of Essex Theatre in 1983, *Fen* begins with a monologue by an unnamed Japanese businessman who has purchased land in The Fen as a business investment. "We now among many illustrious landowners, Esso, Gallagher, Imperial Tobacco, Equitable Life, all love this excellent earth," he says.

In contrast to the corporate landowners, Churchill paints the Fen women as docile peasants who are beholden to their supervisor for their daily wage. As Shirley says in Scene Eleven:

Can't think when you're working in the field can you? It's work work work, then you think, "I wonder what time it is" and it's dinnertime. Then you work

again and you think, “I wonder if it’s time to go home,” and it is. Mind you, if I didn’t need the money I wouldn’t do any bugger out of a job.

The Fen women are disenfranchised, powerless, silenced and economically impotent. “The women live like serfs; they plod from day to day only with the help of such opiates as religion, Valium, booze and sex,” observed *The New York Times* critic Frank Rich in a 1984 review of the New York production of *Fen*. “Their only peace comes in death.” (Rich)

Death is, indeed, the final escape for Churchill’s protagonist Val, who tries to change her life by leaving her work in the field and moving to the city with her lover, Frank. But Val is not an independent woman. She is married and the mother of two young daughters, who keep her tethered to her work, her marriage and The Fen. As early as Scene Three, Val tries to run away, but she fails to do so when she realizes that her husband will never give up the children. “He’ll never let me,” she says when Frank asks her to live with him. “He’ll have them off me.... I suppose I go home now. Unpack.” Val “gets the children and they go.”

When Val eventually makes the decision to leave the fields and move in with Frank, the other Fen women turn on her and call her “wicked,” suggesting that she is “acting funny” by rejecting the working life that has been the staple of Fen existence for generations. This lack of communal support combined with her guilt about abandoning her family is too overwhelming for Val to bear. “I’m the one who should kill himself,” Val tells Frank. “I’m the one who can’t get used to how things are. I can’t bear it either way, without them or without you.” Val then convinces Frank to kill her.

The play ends with Val’s return as a ghost, and it is then that Churchill reveals the real violence that inevitably results from living an invisible and powerless life. In the final scene, Val encounters her friend Angela and Angela’s 15 year-old stepdaughter, Becky. “I want to wake up,” Becky cries. “Angela beats me. She shuts me in the dark. She put a cigarette on my arm....” Angela replies:

Becky, do you feel it? I don’t, not yet. There’s pain somewhere. I can see so far and nothing’s coming. I stand in a field and think. I’m not there. I have to make something happen. I can hurt you, can’t I? You feel it, don’t you? Let me burn you. I have to hurt you worse. I think I can feel something. It’s my own pain. I must be here if it hurts.

Shirley, another Fen woman, stands ironing in a field. “My grandmother told me her grandmother said when times were bad, they’d mutilate the cattle,” she says.

Go out in the night and cut a sheep’s throat or hamstring a horse or stab a cow with a fork. They didn’t take the sheep, they didn’t want the meat. She stabbed a lamb. She slashed a foal. “What for?” I said. They felt quieter after that.

Val's death and the Fen women's stories of multigenerational violence and abuse serve as Churchill's commentary on the dangers that can erupt when a group of people such as the Fen women are repressed. *Fen* was, according to Janelle Reinelt, Churchill's response to Margaret Thatcher, whose conservative economic policies of the mid-1980s largely contributed to an increase in the British poverty rate. "*Fen* offered a different kind of response to Thatcherism," Reinelt wrote. "An attempt to stage the lives of those whose struggles were becoming invisible." (Aston and Reinelt)

Elin Diamond suggests that Churchill "subtly tackled globalization from the perspective of the powerless and the silenced." (Luckhurst) She wrote, "With *Fen* Churchill was remarkably precient about globalization—the reach of financial capital across continents always has local effects, including the demand for docile productive bodies....The only escape for the women comes when narrative logic is upended: Val asks Frank to kill her since she is unable to choose between him and her children." (ibid)

Indeed, the Fen women present a poignant image of peasant labor, but more than that, *Fen* sheds light on the tension many women and mothers feel between family and self-fulfillment. It is a mantle soon picked up by another of Britain's most revered female playwrights, Timberlake Wertenbaker.

The Love of the Nightingale

Like Churchill, Wertenbaker rose to prominence in London theatre. Both served as resident dramatists at the Royal Court Theatre (Churchill in 1974-75 and Wertenbaker in 1984-85) and both are considered to be among the world's foremost feminist playwrights.

Wertenbaker wrote *The Love of the Nightingale* in the late 1980s, and the play was first performed by the Royal Shakespeare Company at The Other Place in Stratford-Upon-Avon in 1988. The play is a retelling of the mythical and ancient story of Philomele, Procne and Tereus. It is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*; and the play accurately reflects both the violence and the poetry of that classical work. But Wertenbaker, raised in the Basque country of southern France, brings the theme of silence into extreme close-up. "I grew up in the Basque country, where language was systematically silenced, and it is something that always haunts me," Wertenbaker has said.

Wertenbaker's agenda is clear from the opening moments of the play, in which the male chorus says, "Everyone loves to discuss war. And yet its outcome, death, is shrouded in silence." The references to violence and silence build throughout the play. In Scene Two, Philomele questions if

she is to blame in a young warrior's death, by asking "Should I have held my tongue?" In the next scene, the Queen silences Philomele ("Quiet, child.") when Philomele asks to go away with Procne.

In her own way, Procne is also silenced. In Scene Four, when she longs for her sister's companionship, Procne asks, "Where have the words gone? There were so many. Everything that was had a word and every word was something... [but now, apart from Philomele] The words are the same, but point to different things. We aspire to clarity in sound, you like the silences in between."

As time passes, Procne loses her desire for words, and when her companions try to reveal the truth about Tereus and Philomele in Scene Nine, it is Procne who silences them. "Enough of your nonsense," she spits. "Be silent." Then Helen: "Silence." Then Echo: "Silence."

By the time Tereus rapes Philomele in Scene Thirteen, *Nightingale's* silence is nearly deafening. First, Philomele laments her "careless tongue." Then, when she tries to speak, her caretaker Niobe urges her to "Keep silent.... Hold back your tongue." When Philomele speaks anyway, Tereus cuts out her tongue, and Niobe laments,

Now I truly pity Philomele. She has lost her words, all of them. Now she is silent. For good. Of course, he could have killed her, that is the usual way of keeping people silent. But that might have made others talk. The silence of the dead can turn into a wild chorus. But the one alive who cannot speak, that one has truly lost all power.

Although physically silenced, Philomele eventually communicates with her sister. However, telling her story fails to quell the rage inside her, and she seeks revenge by murdering Tereus' and Procne's young son, Itys. Silence leads to violence.

Wertenbaker has acknowledged that the link between silence and violence in *Nightingale* is intentional. "I was actually thinking of the violence that erupts in societies when they have been silenced for too long," Wertenbaker wrote in her introduction to *Plays One*. "Without language, brutality will triumph."

And again in *The Guardian*, Wertenbaker is quoted as having said, "If you silence a people, if a culture loses its language, it loses its tenderness. You lose your countryside, your parent, and because culture is essentially verbal, you lose your history. I have a fear of enforced silence. Silence leads to violence." (Bush)

Wertenbaker's words are echoed by UC-San Diego theatre professor Marianne McDonald, who wrote of a 1994 production of *Nightingale*: "This is a play about speech and silence, who speaks, for whom, and who

is silenced. It is also about imperialism and oppression at the same time as individual passion. *Mythos* means word, and it is speech that is stolen from Philomele.”

Sophie Bush agrees with McDonald that Wertebaker is speaking of silence and violence not only on a personal and mythical level, but also in the realm of the political. “From the very beginning, the importance of language to identity formation has been as crucial a concept to post-colonial thinking as it has to feminist theory,” Bush wrote in the *University of Edinburgh Postgraduate Journal of Culture and the Arts*. “[N]ative language suppression is used as a weapon by colonising forces wishing to exercise control over a native people. Wertebaker was raised in Basque France where, even as a young child, she claims to have been aware of the systematic devaluation of the Basque language by the French authorities, and the negative affect (sic) this could have on the local population.”

Bush again quotes Wertebaker:

The threat of the loss of language is one of the greatest threats. I grew up in the Basque country of France where the language was systematically eroded and destroyed so I feel very strongly about language. The French government told parents that speaking Basque was backward and would hold children back in society, while learning French was better for children’s futures. As a result the Basque language practically does not exist any more although there are some attempts to revive its use.

A decade after Wertebaker penned *Nightingale*, Carr’s *By the Bog of Cats* is similarly concerned with the preservation of localized language. In fact, the use of idiomatic, heavily accented English spoken in the Midlands of Ireland is a significant feature of many of Carr’s plays. (Leeney)

By the Bog of Cats

By the Bog of Cats, first produced at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin as part of the Dublin Theatre Festival in 1998, is loosely based on Euripides’ *Medea* and features three generations of women: 40 year-old Hester Swane, her seven year-old daughter Josie Kilbride, and although she does not appear in the play, Hester’s mother, big Josie Swane.

Big Josie Swane haunts Hester through the voices of the Ghost Fancier, who has come to take Hester’s life; the Catwoman, a village crone who raised Hester when her mother abandoned her; and Hester’s dead brother, James, whom Hester murdered in a jealous rage. Likewise, the themes of motherhood, abandonment and the desperate desire to be recognized and honored by one’s community weave throughout this magical play as Hester tries and ultimately fails to regain the love and respect of her former husband, Carthage Kilbride. But Carthage is marrying another

and is insisting that Hester leave her home by the Bog of Cats to make room for Carthage's new wife.

Hester refuses to become invisible. "Ya think ya can wipe out fourteen years just like that..." she says. "You cut your teeth on me, Carthage Kilbirde, gnawed and sucked till all that's left is an auld bone ya think to fling on the dunghill, now you've no more use for me."

When Carthage confronts Hester again in Act Two, she says, "The truth is you want to eradicate me, make out I never existed." And later, "...Ya want to forget I ever existed. Well, I won't let ya. You'll remember me, Carthage..."

Hester's attempt to stay in her home by the bog*, where she waits for her mother to return, is intricately linked to her role as a daughter and a mother. When the Ghost Fancier first comes for her, Hester says, "I can't die—I have a daughter." At the end of Act One, when little Josie is getting ready for her father's wedding to his new bride, Hester dresses Josie in her communion dress, then tells her, "Ya know the last time I saw me mother I was wearin' me communion dress too.... And I watched her walk away across the Bog of Cats. And across the Bog of Cats I'll watch her return."

In the end, Hester plans to commit suicide, but her daughter Josie interrupts her, and Hester cannot bear to abandon her daughter as Hester's mother abandoned her. Instead, Hester first takes her daughter's life, as Philomele took the life of a child as revenge for her rape and the violent removal of her tongue. With her daughter dead, Hester then cuts out her own heart—like Val in *Fen*, her only means of coping with having been made invisible.

By the Bog of Cats is not Carr's first work about motherhood and violence, as Lyn Gardner pointed out in *The Guardian*. "Marina Carr's plays aren't a good advertisement for motherhood," Gardner wrote. "An early work, *The Mai*, took its title from a figure in Irish mythology who destroys her young. The heroine of her best-known work, *Portia Coughlan*, meanwhile, can empty a brandy bottle before 10 am, dreams of mutilating her children and ends up drowning herself." (Gardner)

A mother herself, Carr responded by saying, "Sometimes I think we women writers are no further advanced than Elizabeth Gaskell grappling with writing and home life, and Virginia Woolf talking about that room of her own. The truth is that family life with children is mayhem. It is hard to carve out a creative space for yourself." (ibid)

One of the most poignant and delicate moments in the *By the Bog of Cats* suggests that this tension between children and self-realization is something only mothers know, and that it isolates women with children

even from other women. Just before she intends to commit suicide, Hester is visited by Carthage's bride Caroline. "I just wanted to say... I'll be very good to Josie whenever she stays with us," Caroline reassures Hester. "I won't let her out of me sight—I'll go everywhere with her—protect her from things." Caroline goes on to talk about her wedding and how she misses sharing it with her mother, who is dead. "None of it was how it was meant to be—none of it," Caroline says. To which Hester replies: "Nothin' ever is, Caroline. Nothin'. I've been a long time wishin' over me mother too. For too long now I've imagined her coming towards me across the Bog of Cats and she would find me here standin' strong." Instead, Hester admits that she is broken, and that she is afraid she will lose her daughter. When Caroline offers to stand up for Hester, Hester knows Caroline doesn't have the strength. "You're only a little china bit of a girl," Hester says. "I could break ya aisy as a tay cup or a wine glass. But I won't. Ya know why? Because I knew ya when ya were Josie's age, a scrawky little thing that hung on the scraps of my affection. Anyway, no need to break ya, you were broke a long while back."

In the end, Hester finds no support from her community, no love from the man she loves, no desire to live as a shunned woman whom no one listens to or respects. So she kills her daughter and then herself. Silence leads to violence once again.

Speaking for the Silenced

In all three plays, the playwrights rely on their facility with language to explore issues related to the loss of language and the subsequent anger and violence that erupts from the depths of the oppressed. Ironically, in *Fen*, *Nightingale* and *Cats*, the initial violence associated with oppression, poverty, war, rape, divorce, loss and rejection—because they was never permitted to be spoken about—results in a dangerous return to rage.

As Deirdre Lashgari explores in her introduction to *Violence, Silence and Anger: Women's Writing as Transgression*, many women, such as Val, Philomele and Hester, live in cultures in which the expression of anger is discouraged, and as a result, their silenced emotion leads to destructive behavior. "Poet Janice Mirikitani calls us to shed our debilitating silence, to 'birth our rage' from the 'mute grave' of patriarchal history," Lashgari notes.

But rage can be dangerously transgressive. Cultures vary greatly in the comfort or discomfort of their members feel with overt anger or any direct expression of conflict. Anger is a form of energy that can be constructive or destructive depending on context. Aimed at the perpetrator of violence rather than at the violent act, it merely replicates the problem. (Lashgari)

Churchill, Wertebaker and Carr, unlike their characters, give voice to a constructive response to anger, rather than perpetrate actual violence. They ultimately endow their characters with the ability to tell their stories, even if their stories cannot be told solely with words. Through their voices and through story, these playwrights and their characters reveal truths that oppressors can no longer silence, on stage or off. In this way, they create a counter-voice to the monologue of the dominator and offer audiences a new opportunity to hear the voices of women who have for so long been silenced.

* *A fen is a type of wetland fed by surface water, groundwater or both. Water in a fen is neutral or alkaline, whereas a bog, fed primarily by rainwater, is acidic. The fen in Churchill's play is located in Eastern England. Bogs are found throughout Europe, the Americas and in Siberia. The bog in Carr's play is in Midland, Ireland.*

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