

Theatrical Strategies of Testimony in Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* and Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*

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Thompson's *Palace of the End* and Heather Raffo's *9
Parts of Desire***

Sherine Moustafa El Shoura

Abstract

The first decade of the 21st century has been marked by a surge of political writing for the stage. Plays written in response to the events surrounding September 11, 2001 reveal an unprecedented level of theatrical experimentation directed specifically at describing the social, religious, and political forces that continue to transform post 9/11 world.

In response to these forces, researchers have seen a surge of political plays directed specifically at describing this incendiary past decade. The results have been satisfying, partly because more than protesting the profound changes shocked individuals and notions, these plays provoked original and exciting theatrical experiments. These experiments encompass theatre, theatre based on real events and people using transcripts and speeches. They encompass the theatre of testimony where verbatim reportage is combined with the testimony to create first person narratives based on personal experience.

Through text analysis of Canadian Judith Thompson's (1954-) *Palace of the End* (2007) and Iraq-American Heather Raffo's (1970-) *9 Parts of Desire* (2005), this study will chart the course of these experiments, highlight the innovations and attempt to understand their implications for political theatre. Both plays depict real people as fictional characters and both employ monologue speech delivered in direct address to the audience. An emphasis on the individual's personal account and experience of world events is the raw material each playwright has used to fashion characters who exhibit varying degrees of fictionality. But, monologic speech and personal accounts are also the raw material of testimony, and a question is raised whether both Raffo and Thompson are breaking new ground in refining the "literature of testimony" (Felman 114) for the theatre. Furthermore, a question which this study is mainly concerned with whether these dramatic texts have initiated what might accurately be described as an unprecedented development in the political theatre.

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استراتيجية الدلائل المسرحية في أعمال جودث ثومسون "قصر النهاية" وهيثر رافو "9 أجزاء من الرغبة"

شيرين الشوري

ملخص

شهد المسرح موجة من الكتابات السياسية في العقد الأول من القرن الحادي والعشرين، وقد دارت المسرحيات استجابة لما حدث في 11 من سبتمبر 2001 والتي كشفت عن مستوى المسرح التجريبي الذي لا مثيل له لأنّه كان يوجه رسالة مباشرة تصف القوى السياسية والدينية والأجتماعية والتي استمرت حتى ما بعد 9/11.

وبناءً على ذلك رأى الباحثون أن هناك موجة من المسرحيات السياسية والتي كانت تصف بشكل خاص التحرير على العقود السابقة وقد ظهرت النتائج مقنعة إلى حد كبير وذلك لأن التغيرات الإجتماعية المتعمقة صدمت كل الشعوب. لقد حثت هذه المسرحيات على متعة التجربة المسرحية الأصلية حيث أنها تبني الأحداث الحقيقة لأنها تستعمل أشخاص وأقوال طبق الأصل من الواقع.

ومن خلال تحليل مسرحيتي "نهاية القصر" للكاتبة جودث ثومسون و "9 أجزاء من الرغبة" للكاتبة العراقية الأمريكية هيثير رافو فإن هذه الدراسة ستحاول دراسة جدولت التجربة المسرحية السياسية وستحدد الأفكار الجديدة وستوضح مدى اشتراك هاتين الكاتبتين في المسرح السياسي، فقد اختارت كلتا المسرحيتين أشخاصاً حقيقيين لتمثل الأدوار القصصية وأيضاً توظف الحوار المنلولوجي لكي يلقي مباشراً أمام الجمهور. ولقد استخدمت الكاتبتان التجارب الشخصية التي مررت بها لتزيين الشخصيات المسرحية التي تعرض الجانب القصصي؛ ولهذا فإن كل من الحوار المنلولوجي والتجربة الشخصية تعتبر من أهم سمات الدلائل والبراهين التي تعكس وتطور تاريخ المسرح السياسي، معتمدة على المشاهد والجمهور والقارئ.

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In response to these forces, researchers have seen a surge of political plays directed specifically at describing this incendiary past decade. The results have been satisfying, partly because more than protesting the profound changes shocked individuals and notions, these plays provoked original and exciting theatrical experiments. These experiments encompass theatre, theatre based on real events and people using transcripts and speeches. They encompass the theatre of testimony where verbatim reportage is combined with the testimony to create first person narratives based on personal experience.

Through text analysis of Canadian Judith Thompson's (1954-) *Palace of the End* (2007) and Iraq-American Heather Raffo's (1970-) *9 Parts of Desire* (2005), this study will chart the course of these experiments, highlight the innovations and attempt to understand their implications for political theatre. Both plays depict real people as fictional characters and both employ monologue speech delivered in direct address to the audience. An emphasis on the individual's personal account and experience of world events is the raw material each playwright has used to fashion characters who exhibit varying degrees of fictionality. But, monologic speech and personal accounts are also the raw material of testimony, and a question is raised whether both Raffo and Thompson are breaking new ground in refining the "literature of testimony" (Felman 114) for the theatre. Furthermore, a question which this study is mainly concerned with whether these dramatic texts have initiated what might accurately be described as an unprecedented development in the political theatre.

According to Patrice Pavis, "Etymologically speaking, all theatre is political, as it presents protagonists within a town or group" (227). In her essay "Personal is Political", Carol Hanisch appears to support this definition when she asserts "that even the most personal

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situations....show how society is organized in ways that disempowered women" (qdt. in Schecher 158). Thus, political theatre addresses anything that affects how people function within the power structures that control them. Theatre has the unique capacity to bring individual stories of life, and it is individuals that shape broader political events. The real story of 'what happened' can be more understood through theatre's capacity to illuminate the behavior and actions of the people involved.

A playwright and theatre manager, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) is a figure of note in the evolution of the intellectual contract between stage and audience-the contract to inform and tell the truth. Lessing's *Hamburg Dramaturgy* was written "---according to a common plan for the public good" (1). Further, Lessing pledged that the public "---shall never contemptuously ignored" (2).

What makes Lessing unique, is that he clearly articulated a dramaturgical approach that saw theatre as a place where people see enacted their ethical behavior; in Lessing's theatre plays would portray the possibilities for changing the way society conducted itself. This is what makes an examination of Lessing writing about theatre in the 18th century essential to the understanding of political theatre in modern time. Hannah Arendt notes that Lessing's plays "were magnificent sketch of what future intellectuals would do" (xiv). Lessing was pointing the way forward to an ethical dramaturgy that foreshadowed the work of Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht, two theatre theorists who would transform the landscape of political theatre in the 20th century.

The main theme of Lessing's dramaturgy as a site for problem solving, a place where moral issues are raised and where the audience is witness to how people resolve moral dilemmas: " 'How shall I act?' is one succinct way of posing the question of ethics. It is also...a theatrical question" (Ridout 5).

This desire to report on theatre in a way that involves the public in its processes depicts a relationship that attempts to elevate the writing and producing of plays to a social discourse between its creators and intended audience.

Inspired by Lessing, Piscator presents his vision of the political theatre. His goal was to create a political theatre that would respond

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directly to the devastation of the Great War. Piscator envisioned "an independent peoples' theatre--which would not offer merely trivial entertainment and flabby drawing-room wit, but which would serve art in its quest for truth" (31). From Piscator to playwright Harold Pinter, discovering the truth lies at the heart of what makes theatre political: "Truth in drama is forever elusive. You never quite find it but the search for it is compulsive. The search is clearly what drives the endeavour. The search is your task" (Pinter, *Nobel Address* 4).

It is important to note that Pinter considers truth "forever elusive", something that must be searched out. This notion of a truth attainable by debate, by showing the clash of opposing ideas, is key to theatre's ability to address political issues. The devices of dramatic writing such as monologic speech and dialogue make the play uniquely suited to turning the stage into a site of contestation.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, new terms have been used by the writers that are related to political theatre. Timothy Youker in *Documentary Theatre* argues:

The term documentary emphasizes the fact that what links the extremely diverse performances within this category is their shared engagement with the media of memory and their shared conviction that theatrical presentation of those media generates some kind of worthwhile intellectual, social, or aesthetic added value. (13)

The documentary theatre is mainly known to tell the stories of those people who are not able to tell stories. This kind of theatre gives the audience a chance to look at historical events with a critical eye. Moreover, it encourages them to analyze and perceive what actually happened. Thus, it offers them the opportunity to judge and through this judgment they came to a conclusion, as well as a comprehensive understanding of their present. The documentary theatre aims at re-shaping and rebuilding of its audiences' senses and sensibilities.

Documentary theatre uses an important technique which is the reading of documents, Youker believes that performing these documents on the stage is far more effective than just reading them. He argues:

Written documents are often spoken aloud in the theatre, and western culture tends to associate speech, far more so than writing, with authenticity and moral authority. The voice that confesses, testifies, or protests is often treated as carrying more weight and conveying a greater sense of social or political urgency than texts or visual media that try to communicate the same content. (19)

In fact, the documentary way of writing for the theatre makes powerful arguments about actual subjects. It depicts real places, people, actions and events that exist or existed before. In *Verbatim: Contemporary Documentary Theatre*, Nicolas Kent makes it clear why docudrama can never be documentary. He explains a distinction between documentary and cases from the historical world and fiction that is “constructed from materials that can only resemble the historical world metaphorically” (133). The first one is based on recent history, a mixture between fictional and nonfictional elements, while the second one is pure verbatim. According to Stephen Bottom, the term documentary “implies the foregrounding of documents, of texts,” whereas the term verbatim theatre “tends to fetishize the notion that we are getting things ‘words for words’, straight from the mouths of those involved” (59).

Some critics argue that verbatim is a technique emerging from the documentary theatre, while others consider it as an art form in itself which takes its subject matter from interviews, recordings, etc. Paget originally coined the term verbatim theatre, in relation to a number of community-based plays which took place in the 1970s in Britain. Paget described it as:

a form of theatre firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with ‘ordinary’ people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things. This primary source is then transformed into text which is acted, usually by the performers who collected the material in the first place. (317)

According to Paget the emphasis on the word verbatim was because “the firmest of commitments is...made by the company to the use of vernacular speech, recorded as the primary source material of their play” (317). Mary Luckhurst observes that in contemporary times,

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the term “verbatim” is being applied to all forms of contemporary documentary theatre. She writes:

From the 1990s, however, the term is applied by some informed practitioners, and more loosely and confusingly by others, too much documentary theatre, from Piscator's model in the 1960s, to play like 'My Name is Rachel Corrie' (2005), based on diaries, notebooks and emails, as well as to plays which incorporate both testimony and invented material, such as Hare's 'Stuff Happens' and Gupta's 'Gladiator Games'. (203)

On the contemporary stage, the verbatim form has progressed away from a reliance on the interview as the primary source material. This reliance on the interview can be observed in definitions provided Hammond and Steward among others who argue that:

The term verbatim refers to the origins of text spoken in the play. The words of real people are recorded or transcribed by during an interview or research process, or appropriated from existing records such as the transcripts of an official enquiry, in which actors take on the characters of real individuals whose words are being used. (9)

Thus, the word ‘verbatim’ describes what is real, or what attempts to be real in the dramatic text: the presence of word for word expects from speeches, text from interviews conducted in print or other media, characters with the names of known persons, and scenes where a re-construction of an event that actually took place are part of the play.

Another term that has been used in the 20th century is the epic theatre. It is referred to Bertold Brecht, a name so closely linked to 20th century political theatre that the term Brechtian is often considered synonymous with the form itself. The epic theatre tells the audience what is going to happen in advance of its taking place. Actors stand outside their characters, a technique of performance that undermined the impulse for the audience to become emotionally involved. The spectator is encouraged to question and be critical of the characters' actions, and of what is about to take place. Brecht's main aim is that the theatre must be a theatre in which people can learn and realize something. He describes the epic theatre saying:

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As we cannot invite the audience to fling itself into the story as if it were a river and let itself be carried vaguely hither and thither, the individual episodes have to be knotted together in such a way that knots are easily noticed. The episodes must not succeed one another indistinguishably but must give us a chance to interpose our judgment. (181)

It is Brecht's goal to re-invigorate theatre as a force for change. The theatre of this day was mired in a "field where darkness still reign, namely that of the relations which people have to one another during the exploiting and dominating process" (184). Thus, two themes dominate Brecht's philosophical approach: truth and power. "Brecht sees it as imperative to ensure that a play becomes a truly productive event, a catalyst to action in the modern world" (Turner & Behrndt 47).

A political play can be described as theatre that seeks the truth, challenges traditional power structures and responds to the issues of its day. The techniques used to pursue these goals may change over time, but always in evidence is the playwright's passion.

Political theatre with all its terms is a conversation with its audience and with history; it elevates the act of seeing into one of witnessing, it turns the observer into someone with a task and a responsibility. It seeks to make the spectator active rather than passive. All political theatre seeks to awaken the astonished eye, because change begins with a new perspective on what currently exists.

A new perspective on what happened is what Thompson and Raffo are attempting to illuminate in *Palace of the End* and *9 Parts of Desire*, plays that focus on the testimonies of individuals struggling under the umbrella of larger events. According to Aleida Assmann: "History and memory, then, are no longer considered to be rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past" (263). One of the most obvious characteristics of both *Palace of the End* and *9 Parts of Desire* is that they are written almost exclusively in monologic speech. This raises the question of whether there is such a thing as a purely monologic address in the theatre. According to Anne Ubselberg in *Reading Theatre III: Theatrical Dialogue*, "Non-dialogues-

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monologues and soliloquies—are by nature dialogical, and indeed doubly so: first because they presuppose, by virtue of their being theatre, a present but silent listener, the spectator" (25). But, "they are further dialogical in that they almost necessarily include an internal split as well as the presence, within the speech of any giving speaker, of an "other enunciator" (25). This "other enunciator" would be the voice of the playwright. As we view these plays through the lens of the theatre of testimony we will see that the presence of monologic speech and its many internal other voices both complicates and enriches the testimonial voice in the theatre.

Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* is written as three one-act plays: it begins with *My Pyramids* inspired by Lynndie England, the American soldier convicted of prisoner abuse in Iraq's Abu Ghraib prison. The Soldier—she doesn't have a name in the play—is nine months pregnant. She is confined to an office where she has been assigned a mundane "paper pushing task" (Thompson Palace 15).

The second monologue is entitled *Harrowdown Hill* and is based on the circumstances surrounding the suicide of Dr. David Kelly, a British weapons inspector accused of leaking secret government documents to the tree. Kelly is sitting under a tree, dying of a self-inflicted wound.

The third monologue, *Instruments of Learning*, is drawn from a written testimony concerning the arrest and torture of Nehrjas Al Saffarah by Saddam Hussein's secret police. Nehrjas is sitting next to a window in her home in Beghdad overlooking a date palm.

Thompson's play portrays three separate individuals in three separate worlds delivering testimonies all linked in some way to history of conflict in Iraq.

Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* features the stories of nine women who speak monologues, relating experiences that begin during the first Gulf War and eventually encompass the events of 9/11 and the 2003 invasion of Iraq. All the characters share one costume or prop, the abaya: "The abaya is a traditional black robe-like garment that has long been worn by both women and men in Iraq. It is not a veil, and it never covers the face" (Raffo 66). This

cloth is worn by all the characters in many different ways, but it is a visually unifying image that signals a shared history with Iraq.

In Thompson's *Palace of the End* and Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*, the audience is faced with the dramatic depiction of real events and real people, so the narratives are shaped as testimonies. Therefore, the issue of truth is the main concern in both plays, however, the question is whether the historical narrative—based on the character's experience, sometimes deep trauma, and partly fictionalized---can still make a valid contribution to the historical record. Deirdre Heddon exclaims, "The politics of the personal is that the personal is not singularly about me" (161). Heddon states that the significance the personal story lies in the fact that it contains a meaning beyond the space of just one individual (161). A testimony is an experience imbued with an authority and truth that must be heard. The reason that story must be heard—or more specifically 'witnessed'—is because the event described had a long lasting and devastating effect on the individual. The legacy of event is transmitted through the individual's act of remembrance, a conscious act to make a trace element, a temporary memory, into a document of history.

According to Kelly Oliver, in her article "Witnessing and Testimony", the value of testimony lies in the fact that, "the facts of history cannot disclose the significance or meaning of historical context" (85). Oliver suggests that: "Our inaccuracies and false beliefs also have meaning that can reveal something true about our desires and fears" (85). Therefore, the testimony allows the audience to understand not just what occurred, but how it made people feel. In this way, the testimony is personal, historical and undeniably political. Both plays of Thompson and Raffo are based on real people. Both of them have acknowledge using interviews and in some cases transcripts to create their characters: both plays describe Iraq's history of war with Western powers from 1953 where Saddam Hussein was powerful, to the 1990-91 Gulf War, to 9/11 and 2003 invasion. Both plays portray characters from or living in Britain, the United States, and Iraq, and both plays feature a series of monologues that directly address the audience.

To begin with Thompson's play, *Palace of the End* does not

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have a beginning, middle, or an end. Pfister considers the play as, "this is not the type of dramatic text that develops a linear plot divided amongst a set of figures in the way that is implied in the conventional interpretation of the world plot. It is a dramatic text with an extremely episodic structure in which each figure is both a primary and/or episodic figure to the same extent" (175). The episodic structure of *Palace of the End* resembles "a panopticon", with each actor is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible" (Foucault *Discipline* 200). Each scene there is one different character: Soldier in Scene One, Kelly in Scene Two and Nehrjas in Scene Three. This sense of the panoptican is underscored by how the characters make their initial entrance at the beginning of the play: "A SOLDIER, DR DAVID KELLY, and NEHRJAS AL SAFFARH all enter, as if through a looking glass, and take their places" (Thompson 5). The entrance of the characters is as if they were witnesses in a courtroom who enter all at once but, take turns testifying. Each character speaks individually but while each character occupies his or her own world, all three worlds are simultaneously present. The characters do not interact except once during the Soldier's speech, and at the end of the last monologue.

In Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*, the playwright introduces seven of the nine characters one by one. After this introduction, there is the repeated appearance of the character of Layal, an artist under the protection of Saddam Hussein and she has painted numerous portraits of Saddam. Layal is a character that underscores the fact that for all these women, surviving in Iraq is a process of negotiation. Despite her dominate role, she does not interact with the other characters. Even at the end of the play when Nanna refers to Layal, it is because she is trying to sell one of her paintings, not because the two women have met.

9 Parts of Desire is a play with no unifying plot; the nine individuals relate separate stories and do not appear in each other's scenes. In spite of that, there are events in the text that link the separate stories of the nine women. In scenes 16, 18 and 20 the audience hears the voice of Uncle on the phone from Iraq. He is trying to find out if his American niece is safe or not during the 9/11

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attacks on the World Trade Centre. Conversely, the American woman is portrayed trying to contact her relatives in Baghdad to know if they are alive as American bombs fall on the city during the 2003 invasion occurs. This link between the American woman and an Uncle in Iraq gives suspense to the audience that may be any of the nine characters can know each other.

On the contrary of Thompson's panoptic structure in *Palace of the End* where the characters come from different background and occupy separate worlds, Raffo's characters in *9 Parts of Desire* resemble the inmates of a prison camp, where a group of people might have been arrested and put together. Raffo's characters are united because each is suffering from the burden of a country constantly at war. He specifies that "although the solo actress plays nine separate characters, through her the audience sees what could also be conflicting aspects of a single psyche" (65).

This presence of a 'single psyche' is very strong in Raffo's description of the set in his play: "the stage came to represent various levels of Iraq society from the ancient to the modern: crumbling tiles, layers of mosaic, bricks, books, carpets and sandbags. At the centre of the production was a river, a reminder of Iraq's heritage as the cradle of civilization---. Every single item onstage was part of every character's life (Raffo 66). What is noticed in his play is that all the women wear the abaya, this traditional black cloth "works as a unifying prop rather than a costume piece" (66). For example, Layal, the artist, "wears the abaya loosely hanging off her shoulders like a dressing gown or painting smock" (Raffo 12). Amal, the robust Bedouin in search of a husband, "wears the abaya fastened behind her head and flowing voluptuously about her body" (16). In addition to the link of the abaya, when the play was performed, Heather Raffo, the playwright and actress, played all the characters but in her written text she never indicates that we see all the characters at once. The expression of a shared desire, liberation means for each woman and for Iraq, indicates the play's thematic unity. It also assures Oliver's suggestion that "testimonies can reveal something true about our desires and fears" (85). It is obvious that Raffo is not interested in the political debate, rather she is focused on the mixed feelings of the exile who lives safe beyond her country's reach, but whose heart

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is trapped within its borders. This is clear in the character of Huda, the whisky drinking Iraq exile that refuses to join anti-war protestors in London because "I couldn't march with anyone who was pro Saddam" (Raffo 23). At the same time, she opposes the 2003 invasion of Iraq by American and British forces.

People testify for a reason. Their stories are not for our entertainment; they are accounts that challenge a pre-existing or accepted version of events. In Thompson's *Palace of the End*, her character of the Soldier contests the public record she finds on the internet that condemns her as first, ugly, and second, guilty of excessive prisoner abuse, though the former appears to be her greatest concern: "If all of you was right here in front of me now what I would say to you is one thing above all: I am NOT ugly" (7).

Whether or not her superiors directly instructed her and fellow guards to soften up the Iraq prisoners by engaging in such creative abuse as having sex in front of Muslims, but clearly the Soldier feels that she was misled and that her superiors have now hypocritically left high and dry.

None of them higher ups have spoken to me since it all
came crash in down on my head. Since they moved me
here to push around paper; I been wait in on their call, but
the only person ever calls me is Mommy. And my lawyer.
He says I am a scapegoat (9).

The Soldier's testimony is contrary to her interests since she doesn't want to reveal her guilt or complicity. All of Thompson's characters offer testimony that stands as contradiction to a more glossed over or publicly accepted version of the events that landed them where they are. The character of Kelly in Thompson's second monologue, *Harrowdown Hill*, is determined to defeat the image of himself as "That sad little Walter Mitty of a man [who] just couldn't take the pressure" (19). As for Nehrjas, her goal seems to be to speak directly to the audience so that we will understand that "no matter how bad things get in your country---you cannot. I do not want to be rude but I am telling you that you cannot even begin to imagine what life under Saddam Hussein" (31). Each of the three characters in *Palace of the End*, conforms to the theatre of testimony their desire

to add their voice to the public record and alter preconceived ideas.

This desire to correct the public record is also shown in **9 Parts of Desire**. Raffo is determined to take the audience inside Iraq. Mullaya, the first speaker, addresses the destruction of an ecological and spiritual landscape, this land of two rivers that is now dried up. At outset, Mullaya is literally engaged in the “ritual ablutions” of “mourning” (Raffo 9-11). On the contrary to Mullaya, Amal, the husband hunting Bedouin who reveals her cosmopolitan side on a trip to London:

Amal: I like London very much
I stay there
I like to
walk with my friends in this Portobello market---(17).

After a lonely night in a Dubai hotel room, Amal experiences a painful rejection any woman in any culture might sympathize with when her prospective groom finally calls drunk and cancels his promise of marriage.

Another aspect of testimony is its resolution. Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub in **Testimony: Crisis of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History** trace an important question what makes something a testimony? Their answer is that the text has a “testimonial resolution” (Intro xvii). A testimony is brought to resolution when a person testifying has had their say in public, when what was hidden and unknown is now public and known.

All the characters in Thompson’s **Palace of the End** achieve a resolution. The Soldier finally gives into denial “I did GOOD for my country. I said NO to the enemy. I said you don’t MESS with the eagle...” (16). Despite her denying of being guilty, the audience has learned that she still remains defiant which is credible.

Kelly commits suicides because: “The only way to defeat them is to disappear, do you understand? To be present, but invisible. Like hide and seek. I’m here. But you can’t touch me. I can see you, but you don’t see me. I am the ghost of Harrowdown Hill” (26). Suicide is not a successful resolution, but the real Kelly did die in the woods and Thompson’s narrative is constrained by this fact. A happy ending to her character’s tale would strain the bonds of credibility. It is interesting that Nehrjas who suffered so much does achieve a kind

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of happiness but, she is a ghost. In her version of events, she is re-united with her son, and then joins the thousands of ghosts bearing witness to Iraq's continued struggles. "And so I am here, watching.....And when there is finally peace, Fahdil [her son] will come again and we will fly together, we will fly through the crowns of the Nakhla and into the eyes of Allah" (40). At the end of the *Palace of the End* were left with an image of mother and son united and a country at peace; the resolution is one of desire fulfilled.

In *9 Parts of Desire*, Raffo's main character Layal also finds resolution in death. The rest of the women-to employ Raffo's dominant image of the river-are left "mind-stream". Not one of Raffo's characters is granted to a resolution as a result of their testimony, they have had their say but the future is uncertain. Nana, trying to sell Layal's painting for whatever she can get, has the last word in the play:

Nana: I have to see it [the painting]
I have to eat...
Two dollar? (*Nanna's hand is outstretched and open*).
Two dollar? (64).

A testimony is one technique real people use to deal with real occurrences. The act of speaking aloud reinforces a memory and shares it with others. This sharing is also specific to the theatre of testimony. In the theatre many channels of mediation are present, even when we are receiving a direct address from one speaker.

According to Pfister, in dramatic narrative, the character speaks first the words of the playwright. The actor then interprets the character he believes the playwright has written. Finally, the audience receives both the words of the playwright and the character, as the interpretation of the character by the actor. In Epic theatre, where characters step outside their characters or narrate events in advance, the audience is ever conscious of the voice of the playwright. Lehmann in his *Postdramatic Theatre* exclaims:

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

Solitude (70).

Of all the conditions that would make a monologue a testimony, the requirement that someone is listening is paramount. There are times when the playwright may choose to deliberately underscore the role of the listener by addressing them directly:

Amal: Don't leave, stay with me
Oh, I need to talk everyday this way.
Is this American way?
Tell me what you think
What should I do? (Raffo 22).

Amal is described as a “bright, festive and robust woman of thirty-eight who looks so intently at whomever she is talking to you would swear her eyes never blinked” (16). Her story is about her flight from a sexually repressed husband to various unsatisfactory affairs. From a sojourn in Israel, to a hotel room in Dubai, Amal is a woman in search of love. She is slightly frivolous and funny, she worries about being too fat and is puzzled, not angry, when a man rejects her. In this respect, Amal crosses political borders and reminds us that amid all of Iraq’s suffering there are women who want to find a husband, have family and live in peace.

Iraq’s suffering is paramount through the character of Umm Ghada, guardian of the black hole of the Amiruya bomb shelter. She also addresses the audience directly:

Umm Ghada: La, La, I do not want to show you there
it is too much
the walls are stuck with hairs and skin.
Come, I will take you to the roof
you can see how the hole was made (Raffo 31).

At the conclusion of her tour of this site of horrors, Umm Ghada invites the viewer: “Come. Now you sign the witness book” (32). The actor does not expect and answer, it would be unusual in the theatre for someone to speak up. However, the playwright speaking through the actor-does expect a response.

Raffo has juxtaposed these two stories to achieve a powerful emotional effect. Amal is the audience’s conduit to the normal, the realization that many women in Iraq might be struggling over the rubble of their country to visit a lover, while women like Umm Ghada are trapped in the graves of their dead.

Theatrical Strategies of Testimony in Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* and Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire*

According to Assmann, writing in "History, Memory, and the Genre of Testimony", "over the past two decades, history has received a potent rival or partner in its claim to access, reconstruct, and represent the past, namely memory" (262). She goes on to say that history and memory are "no longer considered to be rivals and more and more are accepted as complementary modes of reconstructing and relating to the past" (263).

Thus the audience comes to the emotional impact of testimony by sharing the experience of what happened to the individual testifying. Therefore, "the listener to trauma comes to be a participant and a co-owner of the traumatic events; through his very listening he comes to partially experience trauma himself" (Laub 57).

Addressing emotional aspects of testimony Kelly Oliver acknowledges that "Testimonies from the aftermath of the Holocaust and slavery do not merely articulate a demand to be recognized or to be seen. Rather, they witness pathos beyond recognition" (79). Heather Raffo's *9 Parts of Desire* begins with pathos in the character of Mullaya, a professional mourner. Her monologues introduce the audience to the emotional complexity and the depth of suffering to the Iraq women she portrays. War affects family relationships, careers, economic prosperity, the food supply, it poisons the water and the soil, men become invalids, women conceive deformed babies. These are testimonies at the peak of pathos. Raffo's performing play is for the new generations who wish to understand the suffering of Iraq women.

Thompson's characters in *Palace of the End* do not specifically ask the audience to pity them, but addressing the audience directly to the question of whether or not these testimonies is resolved.

Kelly: Is this too much to ask?

That you witness my death? (20)

And later, when death is imminent:

Kelly: Thanks you for witnessing...it won't be long now (2).

Thompson's three characters add up to a collective testimony that captures the dilemma many people faced in 2003. The lack of coherency in the argument to go to war, the differing points of view,

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and the consequences for all nations involved, is forever preserved in a text that can be re-enacted.

None of the characters in either of these plays testifies in a courtroom. They are featured in the landscape associated with their testimonies. In this case, theatre provides the viewer with an enhanced experience of not just what the person is saying, but who they are:

The dramatic strategies that push testimonial language beyond ordinary circumstances---give it the quality of anthropological enactment rather than journalistic reportage---(Brooks 183).

In theatre the audience may be given a more textured understanding of the individual and their life as well as the circumstances of the specific trauma they underwent through set design, lighting, costumes, sound. All these contribute to make the testimony fully biography. The more we understand the meaning of the text, plot and characters, the more likely that the audience will reproduce an effective and accurate testimony; complete with all its inherent anthropological and biographical information.

The end of Raffo's play is a clear message that Iraq's cycle of war and destruction goes on. It would be impossible for Raffo, writing and performing her text while the real war in Iraq was ongoing to offer a satisfying resolution to these women's lives. Also, after witnessing the testimonies of all three characters in Thompson's play, there is no answer to the definitive question whether or not the 2003 invasion should have taken place. But we do know that war brings suffering to individuals, and that it is that suffering needs to be part of the permanent historical record.

Neither *Palace of the End* nor *9 Parts of Desire* offers a resolution. The effect of these texts on the audience is similar to a criminal trial where the testimony held an element of risk, and the people testifying were exhausted from reliving the experience, yet hopeful that their testimony had made some difference. But, consistent with any testimony ,especially in political theatre, whether or not the reenactment of these lives will lead to understanding, recognition or change, will depend on the witness, the audience and the reader.

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