

COMMITTED DRAMA WITHIN POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE:
A STUDY OF CONTEMPORARY GERMAN LANGUAGE PLAYS

by

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A thesis submitted to the

Faculty of the Graduate School of the

University of Colorado in partial fulfillment

of the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Theatre and Dance

2010

This thesis entitled:
Committed Drama Within Postdramatic Theatre:
A Study of Contemporary German Language Plays
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has been approved for the Department of Theatre and Dance

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we
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of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

ABSTRACT

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Committed Drama Within Postdramatic Theatre: A Study of Contemporary German Language Plays

Thesis directed by Associate Professor Oliver Gerland

Keywords: Drama, German Drama, Postdramatic Theatre

This dissertation challenges the view that drama has been divested of its critical functions under the dominant cultural paradigm of postmodernism and its socio-political correlative, late capitalism. To be sure, contemporary cultural circumstances have pressured “committed drama,” that is, drama that invites audience members to reflect critically on the world they inhabit by raising social and political issues, and by challenging mainstream aesthetic norms. On the one hand, the mainstream theatre, while still making use of some dramatic structural features, dissociates drama from any subversive political purpose. On the other hand, the postdramatic theatre theorized by Hans-Thies Lehmann eliminates the ideas of representation and fictionality, privileging instead the spectator’s phenomenological experience in the moment of presentation. This situation has led some critics to forecast the extinction of drama as an artistic form. Through the analysis of six plays written by contemporary German language dramatists--- *King Kongs Töchter* (Theresia Walser), *Transdanubia Dreaming* (Bernhard Studlar), *Täglich Brot* (Gesine Danckwart), *Das Kalte Kind* (Marius von Mayenburg), *Die Frau von Früher* (Roland Schimmelpfennig) and *Monsoon* (Anja Hilling)--this dissertation argues for the vitality, liveliness and resistance of the dramatic form. Drama that engages a critical vision of the world, expressed through the representation of fictional characters, continues to be a meaningful method of communicating social, political and ideological commitments.

DEDICATION

To Mina Müller and Graça Nunes

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the guidance and the help of several individuals who in one way or another contributed and extended their valuable assistance in the preparation and completion of this study.

First and foremost, my utmost gratitude to my advisor, Oliver Gerland, whose dedication, patience and support from the initial to the final level enabled me to complete this research work.

I am heartily thankful to my second readers, Camila Bauer, Elizabeth Jochum, Marcos Barbosa and Kornilia Vasileiadou, whose suggestions, interest and cleverness contributed to the elaboration of obscure passages and to the refinement of categorical ones.

I am heartily thankful to my friends, Marco Briziarelli and Susana Martinez-Guillem, who helped me many times during the process of writing. Our brainstorming sessions were fundamental in helping me with the choice of specific terms.

I am heartily thankful to my professors in Brazil, Regina Zilberman, Marta Isaacson de Souza e Silva, Vera Teixeira de Aguiar and Antônio Marcos Vieira Sanseverino, whose efforts and trust in my capacity made possible the attendance at a Doctoral Program abroad.

I am heartily thankful to the Fulbright Commission for supporting my PhD with a scholarship, and to its employees at the office in Brasília, who were always available and ready to help me when I needed the most: Glayna Braga, Giselle Mello and Mariana Costa.

I am heartily thankful to CAPES Foundation for supporting my PhD with a scholarship, and to its employees at the office in Brasília, who were always available and ready to help me when I needed the most: Maria Luiza Lombas, Sandra Lopes Hugo de Jesus e Silvio dos Santos Salles.

I am heartily thankful to IIE for the continuing assistance, and to Sarah McCormick at the office in Denver, who was always available and ready to help me when I needed the most.

Lastly, I am heartily thankful to my wife, Leila, and to my daughters, Helena and Dóris, who supported me in any respect during the completion of the project.

Paulo Ricardo Berton

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1. INTRODUCTION

The father advances as far as one of the staircases leading up to the stage, and the others follow him.

FATHER – We're here in search of an author.

DIRECTOR (*startled and angry*) – An author? What author?

FATHER – Any author.

Luigi Pirandello, *Six Characters in Search of an Author*

The aim of this dissertation is to show the dynamism, formal sophistication, critical purpose and socio-political importance of dramatic art in the beginning of the twenty-first century, despite the threat to its relevance by the mainstream theater and the proclamation of its death by postdramatic theorists.¹

It is not an attempt to return to the conservative view of theatre as a mere visual reproduction of a play or to the traditional idea of the theoretical dominance of the text in the process of a *mise-en-scène*. On the contrary, this work opposes the current dominant theatrical paradigm which condemns drama as form: postdramatic theatre as formulated by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his well-known book of that same name. Ironically postdramatic theatre undervalues drama in contemporary theatre just as, for decades, performance was undervalued. It is a paradigm that gives privilege to what theorist Bert States calls the “phenomenological” elements of the theatrical art (usually delivered through spectacle² or bodily movements) at the expense of

¹ Term coined by Hans-Thies Lehmann in his book *Postdramatic Theatre*.

² This clear affiliation with Aristotle deserves a brief justification. Spectacle here is not an attack against the sensorial reception of a performance, but when these visual, aural, spatial and kinesthetic elements exist by themselves, only as a phenomenon, excluding any intellectual response from the spectator. By the way, I think Aristotle, when talking about the six elements of tragedy, is misunderstood by those who prefer the preeminence of the spectacular components of a play. He does not neglect those elements but he condemns its isolated use without any relation to the plot or when it solves a plot which has become a Gordian knot.

semiotic meaning.³ Given that theatre is a complex cultural expression formed by various stimuli to different senses--kinesthetic, visual, aural and spatial--the task here is to recuperate a lost balance by re-emphasizing drama despite the postdramatic theatre's rejection of it. In the passionate words of Eric Bentley:

What, by contrast, is the most that theatre could ever hope to offer? Or, at any rate, what is the most it ever has offered? To keep this essay within bounds I shall forget about dance, pantomime and song, and concentrate on the art which can advance the best claim to be the principal theatre art: the drama. (288)

To argue for the subsistence of drama, I will analyze six plays written by contemporary German language dramatists. I have selected these plays and playwrights because all have been recognized with awards or important productions, and are praised as representatives of the new generation of German language playwrights. Besides that, in keeping with the view of drama that I propose, each sees drama as a form capable of social criticism.

Although I could have looked to the United States or other European countries, I am attracted to contemporary German language dramatists for two reasons: first, their work is little known in English language countries meaning that this dissertation will make a genuine contribution to theatre studies in the United States; and second, the primary theorist of the postdramatic, Hans-Thies Lehmann, hails from the same cultural region as these dramatists, an irony that underscores my conviction that his analysis of the contemporary theatre scene is flawed or, at least, short-sighted. In Brazil, by contrast, a country whose theatre historically has been informed by non-literary and bodily theatrical traditions, drama has met barriers. This became true shortly after 1943 and the birth of its national theatre with the *mise-en-scène* of

³ Whereas even Bert States sees the limitations of the exclusions made by the theatre in the postmodern condition, stating that semiotics and phenomenology are complementary perspectives. See *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms* 8.

Bridal Gown, text by Nelson Rodrigues and directed by Zbigniew Ziembinski, the first Brazilian theatrical work not patterned after foreign models. That departure celebrated the wedding between text and performance, with the inspired artistic creations of both playwright and director, but what came after pushed drama away, preferring instead either easy formulas that guaranteed entertainment for the masses or the path of theatre theoreticians who rejected the written text, seeing it as an obstacle in the way of a true and liberating performative experience.

Barbara Heliodora explains the reasons for the poor state of Brazilian playwrighting:

Actually, it is necessary to recognize that the laxity in the mise-en-scène has contributed a lot to make things difficult for the drama. The amount of spectacles badly prepared reflects the confusion of behaviors in actual life depriving theatre of the form it needs in order to translate the image proposed by the text. Besides, we cannot forget that there is talent among the young actors. What they lack is the discipline, the perseverance and the respect for the métier to which they dedicate themselves. The scenic languages are as important as the drama, and none of them can dominate the theatre at the expense of the other. It is necessary to organize things a little bit better.

(Na realidade, é preciso reconhecer que o desleixo na encenação tem contribuído, e muito, para dificultar a dramaturgia. A quantidade de espetáculos mal alinhavados reflete a confusão de comportamentos na vida real, e fica faltando ao teatro a forma de que precisa para se transformar na imagem do proposto pelo texto. Isso, é preciso lembrar, sem esquecer que não faltam talentos entre os atores mais jovens, mas sim a disciplina, a perseverança e o respeito ao ofício ao qual supostamente se dedicam. As linguagens cênicas são tão importantes quanto a

dramaturgia, e nem umas nem a outra podem dominar o teatro em prejuízo de sua contrapartida. É preciso arrumar um pouco mais as coisas.) (98)

Hans-Thies Lehmann's ideas guide the majority of contemporary Brazilian theatre practitioners who reject the dramatic text, supplanting theories advocated by leading figures of ritual theatre like Artaud, Grotowski and Barba who occupied this forefront position in previous decades. In August 2010, Lehmann traveled throughout Brazil, lecturing at some of the most important public universities such as the Federal University of Bahia (UFBA), the University of Brasília (UNB), the Federal University of Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS) and the State University of Santa Catarina (UDESC). Some of the panels' titles---"Beyond the Dramatic Theater" and "The Interruption of the Political in the Theatre"---attest to the aesthetic and ideological affiliation of not only Lehmann but also of the organizers of the events. His influence can be also seen in the 2010 ABRACE (Brazilian Association of Scenic Arts) Congress. Many of the papers presented on that occasion found a theoretical support in his ideas.

The reaffirmation of drama in this dissertation comes from a Marxist perspective. In his essay "On Experimental Theatre," Brecht argues that the proper aim of drama is

to develop a view of life through artistic means, to develop models of the social life of human beings, in order to help the spectator to understand his social surroundings and to help him control them rationally and emotionally . . . Man today, living in a rapidly changing world and himself rapidly changing, lacks an image of the world which agrees with him and on the basis of which he can act with a view to success. His conceptions of the social life of human beings are false, inaccurate, and contradictory, his image is what one might call

impracticable, that is, with his image of the world, the world of human beings, he cannot control the world. (*Experimental* 9-10)

This passage neatly encapsulates the view of drama explored in this dissertation: drama presents spectators with an image of human beings in society that equips them to change their society, to understand and control their circumstances rationally and emotionally. As such, the drama on which I focus belongs neither to the culinary theatre nor to the postdramatic theatre. I call it “committed drama” by which I mean a drama that invites audience members to reflect critically on the world they inhabit by raising pertinent social and political issues, and challenging mainstream aesthetic norms.

The culinary theatre,⁴ whose prototype in the United States can be found mainly on Broadway and the regional theatres that imitate Broadway, has always tried to establish the aesthetic and ideological pattern of theatrical art, considering it basically as a commodity aimed at financial gain.⁵ This pattern is usually dependent on light dramatic theatrical genres, providing the warranty of entertainment for its audience and profit for its producer. Therefore, any other attempt of escaping from the settled model could not be apprehended by this same audience, who would describe it as “experimental” or “avant-garde” theatre, terms, by the way, clearly depreciative from the perspective of the establishment. Theatres of the status quo--the City Dionysia in Athens, the court theatre in the absolutist courts of Europe and, since the French Revolution, the bourgeois theatre--all express the ideology of the ruling classes, which intend to justify and glorify their power. Whenever a playwright menaces the system as Phrynichus, Molière and Ibsen did, only to stay within the periods of time described above, they were

⁴ Term used by Bertolt Brecht to designate the theatre supported by the establishment.

⁵ I mention the U.S. because this dissertation was written and evaluated there, and because according to Baudrillard in *America* it is the land in which all the tendencies towards hyperreality and simulation are most fully realized, a land of glittering surfaces, of the irrepressible development of inequality, of banality and indifference.

censored and their works prohibited. So the culinary theatre, a designation that also conveys a political connotation, affects the drama doubly, both aesthetically and ideologically.

On the other side, since the 1960s and the emergence of the postmodern condition, there have been attempts by some important theatre companies and groups to reject dramatic art. They consider it an old-fashioned and coercive genre responsible for the imprisonment of the theatre since the Greeks, a naïve and reductive allegory of the myth of Pandora, and, consequently, a reduction of its expressive possibilities. One of the most influential books written about the theatre, covering the period from the 1970s to the 1990s, Hans-Thies Lehmann's *Postdramatic Theatre* (1999), suggests, starting with its title, that drama is in danger of extinction. Lehmann seems to regard the reception of postmodern theatrical forms by young audiences and the rejection of rationally organized images of human society by the poststructuralist school (the dominant theoretical paradigm of this historical period) as sufficient reasons to announce the vanishing of the dramatic art.

Squeezed between the a-critical aesthetics of mainstream theatre, which accuses committed drama of being too intellectual and hermetic or too engaged and leftist, and postmodern theory, which denounces drama as the historical villain that imprisoned the poor theatre in a tower for centuries, the dramatic art shows its survival, ironically, in the same country of origin as the author of *Postdramatic Theatre*: Germany.

Germany has historically supported drama and theater due to its fragmentation into many small dukedoms and princedoms until the country's unification in 1871; this fragmentation contributed to a healthy competition among these provinces in terms of the best theater building and the best company. The achievements of Goethe's Weimar Theatre and the Saxe-Meiningen troupe exemplify the benefits of such competition. While not born of aristocratic privilege, the

agit-prop of Piscator and the *Sprechstücke* of Handke, the cabarets of Valentin and expressionistic plays of Toller and Kaiser carried on this tradition of theatrical and dramatic innovation. Even today we see in Germany the strength of a plethora of performing arts genres, such as the dance-theaters of Pina Bausch and Constanza Macras, and the *Sprechtheater* (spoken theater) by the playwrights analyzed in this dissertation.⁶

The dramatic authors selected for study,⁷ chosen to demonstrate the continued intensity and relevance of dramatic art, began writing while Lehmann was completing his book.⁸ The year of 1998 is very significant for the German drama. That year, a troupe of young artists, led by the director Thomas Ostermeier, the dramaturg Jens Killian and the designer Stefan Schmidke organized a small theatrical venue named “*Die Baracke*” (the booth) next to one of the most important theatrical institutions in Germany, the *Deutsches Theater* in Berlin. There they staged plays by Mark Ravenhill and Sarah Kane who, with other significant playwrights such as Anthony Neilson and Patrick Marber, had already initiated a kind of renaissance of the English drama in a style critic Aleks Sierz named “in-yer-face theatre.” *Die Baracke* gave an impulse to a new generation of German playwrights who were writing about different themes, with different styles, but shared a belief in the dramatic art as a way to help spectators understand and alter their society. In this dissertation we will see Roland Schimmelpfennig using the revengeful return of a woman from the past as a metaphor for a society that tries to erase its history in *Die Frau von Früher* and Marius von Mayenburg choosing the genre of black comedy to analyze the

⁶ Although Pina Bausch died in 2009, her influence in the development of the dance-theatre is still very strong and incommensurable.

⁷ It is important to lay stress upon the fact that drama is a force again not only in Germany but also in many other countries like in France, Australia, Argentina, England and the United States. I chose to emphasize German language theatre due to my personal knowledge about that specific theatrical scene but also because it offers a geographical counter-point to Lehmann’s idea of the postdramatic.

⁸ *Postdramatisches Theater* was published in 1999.

society of appearances in *Das Kalte Kind*. The Austrian playwright Bernhard Studlar depicts a microcosm of Viennese society inspired by the Austrian *Volksstück*, in his play *Transdanubia Dreaming*. Theresia Walser examines the social issue of an old people's asylum and the importance of illusion for bearing reality in *King Kongs Töchter*. Anja Hilling's *Monsun* narrates the impact of the death of a child upon two couples. Her social critique of people's inability to communicate and the schizophrenic dismemberment of body and voice, are stylistic influences of two great dramatists of the twentieth century, namely, Pinter and Beckett. And finally Gesine Danckwart in *Täglich Brot* displays the multiple possibilities of dramatic speech to represent the daily boring life of five common workers.

Through their plays, and most importantly, through their choice to use dramatic tools to express their ideas, these writers contradict Lehmann's maxim that "At the same time, the new theatre text . . . is to a large extent a 'no longer dramatic' theatre text" (*Postdramatic* 17).

The dramatic form offers audience members the picture of a society, an ideological perspective on the world that is presented fictionally through the eyes of characters. This presentation allows spectators to take a critical position regarding the play that is being staged in front of them and, I submit, also toward the society of which they are a part and which the drama "feeds back" to them in aesthetic form. The postdramatic, on the contrary, is more interested in promoting in the spectator a sensorial reaction to the performance, emphasizing what Bert States calls the "phenomenological" aspect of theatre. This is why the contemporary German language playwrights examined in this dissertation choose the dramatic form to depict their society. The postdramatic form, with its "postponement" of meaning, would not be able to meet their ideology of using theatre as a forum for critical debate.

The plays analyzed here can be divided into two basic groups: the domestic and the social plays. It is a mistake to think that the domestic plays do not advance a social critique, because as Brecht insists, wherever there are two individuals together, there is already a social formation. This partition of the plays takes into account the microcosms that they represent. On the one hand, there are plays portraying families: *Die Frau von Früher*, *Das Kalte Kind* and *Monsoon*. On the other hand, there are plays joining people who are not related, but who are somehow connected or experiencing the same event: *King Kongs Töchter*, *Transdanubia Dreaming* and *Täglich Brot*. Whereas the first group uses the family and its relationships as a metaphor for social issues, the “social plays” are more explicit, treating themes such as immigration, xenophobia and unemployment.

In sum, these are the following questions my dissertation will try to answer.

First, what is the difference between the dramatic and the postdramatic paradigm? Through a historical panorama, the dissertation will relate these two theatrical forms to the historical contexts in which they arose and developed.

Second, what tools can one use to identify these two forms? When do we know when a text is dramatic or postdramatic? Apart from the importance of this question for this study, the answer to it will be of use to theatre producers, directors, and performers. Just as it is important for a theatre director to know whether a text is a comedy or tragedy, so too it is important for her/him to know whether a text is a drama or an instance of postdramatic theatre.

The third question tests the assumption implicit in the term “postdramatic”. Is it accurate to say that drama is a theatrical form of the past, given the highly celebrated plays and playwrights analyzed in this dissertation?

At last, a question about the importance of identifying these two forms. What does that bring to a producer, to the artists involved in the production of a play, and to the audience?

All these questions will be approached in specific chapters. My intention is not to proclaim an absolute truth, but to offer another perspective about relevant issues of the theatrical field. More important than giving answers or looking for a consensus, this dissertation aims to put questions to the reader, the same way I argue that the contemporary drama is very committed to discuss society and history through the plays.

2. DRAMA

TRIGORIN - This is a beautiful place to live.

(He catches sight of the dead sea-gull) What is that?

NINA - A gull. Constantine shot it.

TRIGORIN - What a lovely bird! Really, I can't bear to go away.
Can't you persuade Irina to stay?

(He writes something in his note-book.)

NINA - What are you writing?

TRIGORIN - Nothing much, only an idea that occurred to me.

(He puts the book back in his pocket) An idea for a short story.

A young girl grows up on the shores of a lake, as you have.

She loves the lake as the gulls do, and is as happy and free as they.

But a man sees her who chances to come that way,

and he destroys her out of idleness, as this gull here has been
destroyed.

(A pause. ARKADINA appears at one of the windows.)

ARKADINA - Boris! Where are you?

TRIGORIN - I am coming this minute.

*Anton Chekhov, *The Sea Gull**

As stated in Chapter One, I shall argue that drama is very much alive today, despite pronouncements to the contrary. But what is drama? By what methods can one usefully analyze a script, so as to clarify its dramatic nature and deep structure? In this chapter, I consider these two fundamental questions.

2.1. WHAT IS DRAMA?

In this section, I will define drama, discuss some of its most important characteristics, and present German literary critic Volker Klotz's view of the two basic categories into which the plots of dramas can be sorted. I will also provide a brief account of drama in Western culture to give readers a sense of its many historical varieties.

The Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre defines drama as a "term applied loosely to the whole body of work written for the theatre" and dramatist as "anyone writing for the theatre" ("Drama"). This definition is unsatisfactory for the purposes of this dissertation because

it allows no distinction between dramatic and non-dramatic texts for the stage. Lehmann assumes such a distinction when he associates scripts by Heiner Müller and Robert Wilson with a postdramatic theatre. On his view--with which I agree--there is a fundamental difference between the printed version of Wilson's *A Letter to Queen Victoria* and Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*. Whereas the latter is properly termed a "drama" the former is better identified as a script or text for the postdramatic stage.

In place of the *Oxford Companion* definition, I offer the following: a drama is a literary work written to be performed by actors that projects the image of a fictive world peopled by characters that interact primarily through dialogue and necessarily come into conflict. "The essential character of drama is social conflict," John Howard Lawson, U.S. playwright and drama theorist, writes, "in which the conscious will, exerted for the accomplishment of specific and understandable aims, is sufficiently strong to bring the conflict to a point of crisis" (168).

The English word "drama" derives from the ancient Greek verb *dran* which means "to do." It was originally conceived as poetry written in verse to be performed by actors in a space designed primarily for viewing (*theatron* = seeing place). Consequently, drama is a hybrid form, constituted by a representative level--its literary instance--and a performative level--the theatrical instance--when the text is materialized in an acting space and becomes a play in front of an audience.⁹ Note that this may be one way in which a drama differs from a text for the postdramatic theatre: whereas Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* was designed to be performed and it can be read as a literary work (it was published before it was performed), Wilson's *A Letter to Queen*

⁹ The contemporary theatre theory has abandoned the bourgeois idea of "stage", what can be seen when Erika Fischer-Lichte contemplates various possible acting spaces: "wird beispielweise in einer Kirche oder auf dem Marktplatz, in einem Gasthaus oder auf einer Wiese, in einer Fabrik oder auf einem Hof, in einer Markthalle oder in einem speziellen Theatergebäude Theater gespielt" (132).

Victoria was designed to be performed rather than read as a literary work (Marranca's post-performance publication of it in *Theatre of Images* notwithstanding).

Styan, using his good sense to solve the apparent opposition between the two levels, remarks:

And of course the ordinarily honest and intelligent playgoer has always sensed that the good play was both. To reconcile literature and theatre is not to compromise and lose something from each, but rather to understand what dramatic dialogue is and does, why words on the page are not the same in function as words on the stage. (*Elements 2*)

We can find the same opinion in older theorists, such as August Schlegel:¹⁰

Since, as we have already shown, visible representation is essential to the very form of the drama, a dramatic work may always be regarded from a double point of view--how far it is *poetical*, and how far it is *theatrical*. The two are by no means inseparable. (493)

This unique characteristic of drama has led to diverse perspectives about it. Aristotle championed drama as a literary form sufficient in itself: "For the power of Tragedy, we may be sure, is felt even apart from representation and actors" (37). Artaud, on the other hand, expressed disdain for the dramatic text, cutting it to the point of unrecognizability or rejecting its use at all: "We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and *written* poetry . . . beneath the poetry of the texts, there is the actual poetry, without form and without text" (78).

The term "drama" has acquired a *maudite* connotation throughout history. The attempt to isolate drama from other literary genres originates in Plato's *The Republic*. In that work, the

¹⁰ I am quoting Schlegel to counter the idea that theater was considered subservient to drama by every thinker before the twentieth century. Schlegel uses the adjective *poetical* not to imply that the *theatrical* level was not poetic, but because literature and poetry were synonyms by that time.

philosopher sets out a distinction between epic, lyric, and dramatic poetry based on the number of layers between the text and the audience: in other words, he creates the distinction between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. *Diegesis* is related to the idea of “telling,” and because it does not create a concrete imitation of a fictive reality, as *mimesis* does in the act of “showing,” it is closer to the audience and a less condemnable form of imitation. This is the reason why Plato condemns theatre in *The Republic*: “the tragic poet is an imitator and therefore, like other imitators, he is thrice removed from the king and from the truth” (21). In line with his tripartite division, poetry can be narrated (dithyramb), imitated (tragedy and comedy) or it can make use of both (epic). Since then, drama has come to be understood as a “neutral” genre, with the author absent from his work, in view of the fact that we never meet the figure of the narrator in the text.¹¹

The Greek tragedy of Aeschylus was explicitly concerned with large social and political issues, as in the *Oresteia*, but as time went on the tragedians came increasingly to focus on more individual and familial concerns. Euripides, more interested in psychological studies and family relationships, not by chance was coined by Aristotle as “the playwright who depicts people as they really are.”¹² This move could be seen both in the tragic and comic genres. In Sophocles, for instance, the character of Oedipus and his actions have a social impact in *Oedipus Rex* (c. 429 BC), whereas in *Oedipus in Colonus*, his death in the plot affects mainly his close family and friends (presented in 401 BC). Likewise, the comedies by Aristophanes were acid comments on the Athenian society. Menander, who wrote his plays one century later than Aristophanes, never addressed the political issues of the day, choosing instead the private sphere of the family and its farcical *quid pro quos*. In terms of form, the Greek comedy, with the transition from the Old to

¹¹ This idea of a “pure drama” was emphasized during neoclassical France when the unities of time, place and action suggested a genre freed from lyrical or epic interferences.

¹² See Aristotle, chapter XXV of the *Poetics*.

the New, concluded the transition to a more domestic drama. The parabasis that is a “natural break in the action . . . performed by the chorus with the actors off-stage and . . . aimed at the spectators, who are often addressed directly” (Storey and Allan, 184), was one of the formal features of the Old Comedy that became in disuse. This narrowing of the drama’s social focus is echoed in the purification of its form, the exclusion of the lyric chants of the chorus and the epic narrations of messengers and sentries. One can see this purification in terms of genre as well. The soldier messenger in *Antigone* notwithstanding, ancient Greek tragedies were almost exclusively serious; still, it is crucial to remember that they were always accompanied by comic mythological burlesques, the satyr plays that rounded out the tetralogies presented at the City Dionysia. When fifth century tragedies were performed in Hellenistic Greece, it was without these complements, creating a more purely “tragic” experience.

Two millennia later, a similarly narrowed, purified form of drama became codified in Neoclassical France, when the *Académie Française* established the three unities of time, place and action, and imposed the ideology of decorum (*bienséance*). More than that, the quarrel over Corneille’s play *Le Cid* created a strict division among the dramatic genres, condemning any attempt to mingle comic with tragic elements in the same text. The “pure drama”, then, was considered a play without any epic (asides, narratives to the audience) or lyric (soliloquies) elements, as the tragedies of Racine and the later dramas of Ibsen, for instance. In reaction, intermediate genres started to pop out in France less than one hundred years later, revealing the artificial arbitrariness of separating the apparently contradictory elements of tears and laughter, like Marivaux’s *comédie sentimentale*, Diderot’s *bourgeois drame* and De La Chaussée’s *comédie larmoyante*. It is important to mention that other European dramatic traditions, like those of England and Spain, were already experimenting with the fusion of genres, which can be

seen in their dramatic canons as well as in some of their theoretical writings, like Lope de Vega's *Arte Nuevo de Hacer Comedias en Este Tiempo*.

In order to establish more open definitions for Plato's literary genres, Emil Staiger in *Grundbegriffe der Poetik*, published in 1946, suggested the use of the adjectives dramatic, epic, and lyric instead of the rigid categories of drama, epos, and lyric. Following this lead, a drama can have epic and lyric elements--and this is no novelty, as the lyric odes of the chorus and the narrative speeches of the messengers in the Greek tragedy suggest--and still be considered drama, a piece of literature written in order to be staged by actors who impersonate characters in a fictive social world.

Believing in theatre as a tool for social change that makes the audience reflect on their environment, Brecht was unsatisfied with the dramatic theatre as it existed in the early twentieth century. But what exactly was his problem with drama? As his defense of experimental drama quoted in Chapter One suggests, it was not drama per se to which Brecht objected but a certain species of drama that he termed "Aristotelian" in contrast to the drama of his "epic theatre." He thought the Aristotelian form was not able to develop a critical spectator. For Brecht, Aristotelian drama produced a submissive spectator, unable to use his intellect to analyze the events on stage, but instead, drawn through empathy into an emotional reaction named *catharsis*. About the epic drama, Brecht explains: "This dramaturgy does not make use of the 'identification' of the spectator with the play, as does the Aristotelian, and has a different point of view also towards other psychological effects a play may have on an audience, as, for example, towards the 'catharsis.' Catharsis is not the main object of this dramaturgy" ("German Drama" 78). Later, Brecht created the term "dialectical theatre" to condense both dramatic and epic elements in his plays.

After this short journey which introduced the use of the term “drama” and some of its possible permutations, it is important to consider what makes drama a unique form.

At the outset, I agree with Peter Brook’s maxim that theater does not need drama, but drama needs theater. That is, a dramatic text needs to be completed in a theatrical space. On the other side, drama is also a complete work, dependent on its materialization because of the nature of its form (kind of dialogue, length, interaction with the audience) and not because of its incomprehensibility without the staging. For Parilla, “the reading of the dramatic text is a complete internalized dramatic performative act, not a partial experience, and the stage production is an interpretation of this act and not a definitive actualization of the playwright’s intent” (9).¹³

Drama uses dialogue. Dialogue implies interpersonal communication, interaction and relationship. If it is not a dialogue between the characters, it is going to be a dialogue between the character and himself (monologue), a dialogue between the character or the actor and the audience (asides, narratives) or even a mute dialogue through actions (as in the dumb show in *Hamlet* or whole plays like *Request Concert* by Kroetz and *My Foot My Tutor* by Handke). The importance of the dialogue as the trademark of drama is that it confers to it a social aspect, a clear sign that the dramatic form is mainly interested in presenting social relations. These are depicted metaphorically through the addressing of the dialogue to the second person (while the lyric prefers first, and the narrative prefers third person address). As Brecht observed: “the smallest social unit is not the single person but two people” (“Organum” 197). In drama it is through the analysis of the dialogue that we find out who the story is about, assessing the number

¹³ If we learn of Theresia Walser’s constant quarrels with director’s staging her plays (see her interview “A Playwright’s Worries”) we understand better Parilla’s position. It is important to stress though that this dissertation is not making an objection against creative theatre directors, who use the play as a departure point for their own artistic creations on stage, from small cuts and/or additions, to the text as a mere departure point.

of lines and scenes, the number of interactions of the character with different characters, and how much the character is mentioned in other dialogues when he is absent from the scene. This unique aspect of drama as a literary form can be seen as a democratic opportunity for every character to express his or her point of view.

In a dramatic text, we can find a main text--to be spoken by the actors--and a secondary text, which gives technical information about the context of the play, not only to the actors, but also to the director and designers. The visibility of this secondary text will depend on the intentions of the director and on the historical period of the play, considerations that are closely connected. When the playwright was responsible for rehearsing the actors, as with Aeschylus and Shakespeare, there was no need for a stage direction. Conversely, in the epic theatre, when narrative devices explode the Aristotelian form, visually stage directions are used as an alienating effect, sometimes being read by an actor or represented on stage.

Fictionality is another important aspect of drama.¹⁴ Drama is distinct from other performative events such as an academic lecture, a political speech, and a religious sermon, because there is a convention that allows the playwright to create an apparently autonomous “as-if” or subjunctive space. One might be tempted to call the stage a place of lies (as did the Puritans and other anti-theatricalists) but Sir Philip Sidney’s analysis is the correct one: “The poet never lieth because he nothing affirmeth” (172). That is, dramas posit a fictive social world that is both independent of and reflective of the social world inhabited by the playwright and his contemporaries. Rather than holding a “mirror up to nature” as Hamlet asserts, dramas hold up a mirror (sometimes an absurdly warped one) to the world of human social relations. Fiction is not the same thing as illusion. The epic theatre establishes a fiction, but minimizes the illusion of

¹⁴ Even a documentary drama is always seen as a fiction, because the text will always be the result of an edition of reality, an expression of the point-of-view of the author.

reality. Fictionality in drama enables the playwright to make a statement in an indirect way; something like Brecht did when he historicized his plays. Through the device of fiction, dramatists can tell a truth about the social world in which they live; long dead but still performed dramatists like Shakespeare tell truths about social worlds that they could not even imagine.

In addition, drama is a historical product. It is very hard to read a play written in another historical period, because one's interpretive lens will always be a current one. For example, members of a highly individualistic society have difficulty grasping the importance of a Greek chorus. A generation molded by speedy, desperate-to-sell-my-product media will barely tolerate a play written in five acts. So, besides the basic constituents of a dramatic text, it is important to consider the playwright and the audience who belong to a specific society in history and exhibit particular abilities, limitations, and expectations.

Structural analysis reveals a great deal about drama. One of the main criticisms of this genre is related to the rigidity of the Aristotelian principles. Nevertheless, as my brief historical survey suggests, dramas differ a great deal in terms of form. Volker Klotz offers a useful distinction between open and closed forms that enables one to consider a wide range of dramas. It is important to stress, though, that: "*The closed form/open form* opposition is not an absolute one, as the two types of dramaturgy do not exist in a pure state" (Pavis, *Dictionary* 56). Let us examine how these forms are characterized.

The closed form is based on a conflict. There is a protagonist who wants something very much. At the same time, there is an antagonist that presents an obstacle to the protagonist's achievement. Every other conflict in the play is related to the protagonist's main quest. The plot is a logical succession of events, in which one event is the cause of the next event. The tension grows until the moment of the climax. Time is compact, and the place rarely changes. The

dramatic event takes place right before the crisis. Finally, there is usually a small number of characters. This is the classical form of drama, sometimes called “climactic drama,” and we can see in it the influence of Aristotelian precepts and the Hegelian concept of dialectics.

The open form, though it does not follow the classical rules, is still drama because it makes use of a fictional space, is composed of verbal and physical exchanges between characters (e.g. dialogue), and contains stage directions. Here the plot is organized according to other principles. There can be numerous, equally important characters whose conflicts are not hierarchically organized or related to that of the protagonist. The wholeness of the work is achieved by motifs, episodes depicting a similar situation, and repetition; there may even be an intentional lack of logical coherence as in the theatre of the absurd (e.g. Ionesco’s *Bald Soprano*) or an intentional attack on the closed form as in the epic theatre. The open form can incorporate chance events, as in improvisational theater or the *parabasis* of the Greek Old Comedy, when any unexpected reaction from the spectators can arise. Events are episodically arranged. Time is rarely organized in a seamless chain. Sudden changes of place are frequent, demanding a more poetic approach from the director. In terms of the stage, the actors interact with the audience, through asides and direct addresses. The characters may not be exclusively fictional anymore. In the epic theatre, they pass from the instance of character to the instance of actor, in order to stress the illusory nature of drama.

As a conclusion, the current idea of drama has become more complex than the strict neoclassic rules of the seventeenth century, returning to the richness and variety of the Greek drama, which had already encompassed lyric and epic elements and assumed the satyr play as leaven for the spectator’s tragic experience. What is relevant for the purposes of this dissertation is that drama is still a clearly identifiable art through its variety: open and closed forms alike

create the image of a social world (composed primarily through characters' dialogic interactions) to which audience members can rationally and emotionally relate. Lehmann though considers it practically a residual form. He writes, "The plethora of phenomena in the theatre landscape of the last few decades that have challenged the traditional forms of drama and 'its' theatre with aesthetic consistency and inventiveness suggest that it is justified to speak of a new *paradigm of postdramatic theatre*" (*Postdramatic* 24).

Before the exposition of the principles of the postdramatic theatre, I will explain the analytic method employed in this dissertation for the plays.

2.2. METHODOLOGY

There are, of course, many different methods of analyzing a drama, Aristotle's system of plot, character, thought, diction, music, and spectacle being one of the most famous. I propose a two-part scheme using analytic frameworks advanced by French literary critic Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and French theatre semiotician Anne Ubersfeld. I choose Ryngaert and Ubersfeld as my methodological guides not only because they are respected and well-known in the field of literary and theatre semiotic studies, but also because I find them particularly useful as a theatre practitioner, a playwright and director. As I shall demonstrate throughout the analysis of the plays, viewing a drama through their lenses helps to disclose its fundamental structures and to clarify potential points of difficulty for theatre producers. As we shall see in Chapter Three, with the analysis of the play *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* by Heiner Müller, the schemas of Ryngaert and Ubersfeld also help the reader to discern the difference between a drama and a script for the postdramatic stage.

2.2.1. RYNGAERT'S NINE CATEGORIES

Ryngaert in his *Introdução à Análise do Teatro* (1996) offers a comprehensive method of analyzing a dramatic text.¹⁵ According to him, there are concrete elements in a drama that have to be considered in order to get a whole picture of the work. Ryngaert avoids impressionistic statements not supported by textual evidence and he defends the validity of the dramatic text in the theatrical process. Before enumerating his textual analytical tools, he concludes his introductory chapter by affirming that

The study of theatre texts has benefited enormously from the theoretical advances of structuralism and semiotics. Although the specificity of the theatre text is recognized, its practical approach is still problematic, as if it were absolutely necessary to depend on the staging in order for the object to be complete and satisfactory. What is denominated “literary text analysis,” sometimes with a malicious connotation, is promptly refused and its discourse is invalidated due to an original fault, which is competence in the matter of representation.

(O estudo dos textos de teatro beneficiou-se amplamente com os avanços teóricos do estruturalismo e da semiologia. É reconhecida a especificidade do texto de teatro, embora na prática cotidiana sua abordagem continue a ser problemática, como se fosse absolutamente necessário contar com a representação para que o objeto seja completo e satisfatório. Aquilo que chamam, por vezes com intenção maligna, “análise literária do texto” é assim recusado de saída e seu discurso invalidado em consequência de uma falta original, a competência em matéria de representação.) (ix)

¹⁵ This dissertation is using the Portuguese version of the French text, because there is no English translation and it is easier for me to quote from that version.

The first element to be considered is the title of the play. This is our first contact with the work and it generates in the reader/viewer expectations, including misleading ones. Basically a title can be metaphorical or descriptive. Sometimes it mingles both possibilities.

Next follows the drama's genre. Here we must be always careful and consider the historical context. Sometimes, dramatists were obliged to name a genre and consequently to obey imposed dramatic rules for fear of being expelled from the artistic community of their society. It is odd to think in terms of genres nowadays, when their borders have been exploded. Still, like the title, consideration of a drama's genre helps the reader/spectator to engage the audience response as intended by the playwright.

The third aspect Ryngaert emphasizes is the structural organization of the play. Here he is speaking about the form of the plot and not about its content. The way the plot is built--acts, journeys, episodes--tells us about the historical origin and also the ideological intentions of the author. This factor in its turn is closely related to issues of continuity/disruption and how different parts of the text are organized: how they start and how they are connected.

Then, we get to the story itself. The *fabula* of the Russian formalists or the story as a term conventionalized by Genette can only be reconstructed through the plot, or the narration, to use the Genettian term. Creating a list of the actions of the play is the first analytic task in order to get to the fable. While the story is a chronological succession of the actions, the plot reveals the playwright's choice for the structural organization of the actions. Starting the plot *in media res* or starting it *ab ovo* shows the ideological affiliation of the author. Organizing a drama classically, with an exposition, inciting incident, development, climax and denouement demonstrates the dramatist's interests. As we shall see, Anne Ubersfeld's "actantial model" will help to decipher the fundamental action of the play.

Both time and space deserve careful attention, as theater is always both a temporal and a spatial art. Information about time can be found in the stage directions, in the dialogue, in the chronology (linear, circular, and interrupted), in its duration (long or short), in its continuity (dramatic or epic), and in its metaphoric aspect (kind of verb tenses used by each character) and finally in the passages from one chunk of action (act, episode, and picture) into another. The space is revealed as well through the dialogue and the stage directions. Besides that, we can find information about the spaces off stage, which may be a threat for the characters that are visible to the audience. So, too, through the verbs of movement used by the characters, we analyze their subtext, what hides below their speeches. The last item related to space is the idea of territory. We can identify a specific and limited space for a character according to the set described by the playwright. Chekhov is a master in this respect and the plots of *Three Sisters* and *The Cherry Orchard* are about conquering a place.

The speeches in drama are also very revealing about the characters, and consequently about the playwright's ideological inclinations. First we have to find out what kind of verbal exchange dominates the discourse: lyrical monologues, dramatic dialogues or narrative expositions. After that, we find out the main themes of the play according to the speeches. Basic features about the verbal exchanges can be summarized in the following questions: do the characters talk to each other? Do they have long or short discussions? Are they talking about the same subject or do they perform a "dialogue of deaf" as occurs frequently in Chekhov, for instance? The last step in the analysis of the discourse, then, is to establish the social and the relational spheres. The way the discourse is built will reveal relationships of power (authority and submission) and help to clarify the functions of characters in Ubersfeld's actantial model, to be described below.

Information is another item in Ryngaert's analysis. It can be: abundant (enough information to understand the plot) or rare (none or little information that hinders the spectator from understanding the plot); direct (asides, addresses to the public) or indirect (as in the theatre of illusion that makes use of the fourth wall); public (the spectators know everything they need since the beginning of the plot) or private (only the characters, or one character, or the audience knows what is going on); diffuse (spread all over the text) or solid (separated into blocks throughout the plot). The information is an element that allows the audience to have an understanding of the plot, and then, to be able to react ideologically to the play. In mainstream drama, this second instance never happens, as the aim is to entertain. In the postdramatic theatre, on the contrary, it is the comprehension of the plot that is at stake.

Ryngaert's last element, because it is the most complex to analyze, is character. It is easy to fall into subjective reactions as we are dealing with human figures on stage and many times we end up in the processes of empathy, identification and catharsis. Here, the information comes from the stage directions--mainly the list of characters--and the speeches. Furthermore, a list of what the characters say about themselves, about others, and what others say about the character helps to define her/his nature (e.g. is she/he someone interested in herself/himself or in others). The final two metrics in the analysis of the characters are then the configuration (a table showing the number of scenes, speeches, lines of each character as well as the number of monologues and with how many other characters she/he interacts) and the constellation (a visual depiction of the character's relationships through directional vectors).

Summarizing Ryngaert's method for analyzing a play, its items are:

1. Title
2. Genre

3. Structure
4. Fabula
5. Time
6. Space
7. Dialogue
8. Information
9. Character

2.2.2. THE ACTANTIAL MODEL

Anne Ubersfeld is widely recognized as the semiologist responsible for bringing Algirdas Greimas's studies about narrative into the dramatic universe. In the introduction of her book *Reading Theatre*, before presenting a method to analyze drama and an explanation of her version of the actantial model, she offers a couple of important responses to those reticent to use semiotics to analyze drama.

First, she explains that her method is only one possible way among others of examining the dramatic text in order to open its possibilities for the performance. Ubersfeld denies the position of owner of the truth, a ridiculous but necessary statement in times when formal analytic procedures in art are constantly attacked. There is no complete play without its materialization on stage, she recognizes. The proof of this assertion arrives when she analyses the performance itself. Her work is an attempt to approximate the textual and the performative signs, because this is the crossroads at which theatre exists. Any radical departure has to be placed separately either in the literary or in the performative field. Finally, to oppose the idea that semiology is a mere close reading of the text without regard to its socio-political implications, she says: "The

semiologist's goal is to explode, semiotically and textually, the dominant discourse--the acquired discourse--which places between text and performance a whole invisible screen of prejudices, of characters, and of passions" (xxii).

The way she considers a theatrical performance gives voice and importance both to the dramatic text and to the director's staging. According to Ubersfeld, any performance can be expressed by the following equation:

$$T + T' \rightarrow P$$

(T = text, T' = staging and P = performance)

Fig.1. Performance Equation. Source: Ubersfeld, Anne. *Reading Theatre*. Trans. Frank Collins. Toronto: U of Toronto Incorporated P, 1999. Print.

Depending on how one sees theatre--and here we are considering the extreme positions of drama as a text complete in itself and theatre only as the staging, or in other words, its performative elements--both T and T' can equal zero.

Theatre is a difficult object to analyze from a semiological perspective because of its double nature, as text and performance, and its polyphony of visual and aural signs. Ubersfeld explains the reason the actantial model has become so influential, replacing psychological and classical ways of interpreting a drama. She argues that

The human body and the human voice are irreplaceable elements. Without them, we have only magic lantern, cartoons, cinema, not theatre. It is therefore normal and indeed obvious that the basic unit for all theatrical activity is the actor--or, at the textual level, the script that contains the actor's particular role. This suggests a naïve answer: the basic unit for the theatrical text is character. (36)

Nevertheless, Ubersfeld avoids the canonical opposition between plot and character, not giving preeminence to either of them. Instead, she refers to Greimas and his hierarchical units which go from the deep level of the actant to the superficial level of the character.

The actant represents the culmination of the search for a theatrical grammar. It condenses in one sole function many character's possibilities, which is the reason the character is not an ideal element for starting an analysis.

Ubersfeld adapted Greimas's narratological model, which, in its turn, was influenced by the studies of Polti, Propp and Souriau. Georges Polti identified thirty-six possible dramatic situations in his homonymous book. For each situation, there were fixed functions, a kind of forerunner of the Greimasian actants. Thus, for instance, the situation titled "Rivalry of superior versus inferior" has the following functions: a superior rival, an inferior rival and the object of rivalry. Polti's *The Thirty Six Dramatic Situations* is of limited use because his main focus is the superficial level of the plot, though his effort to concentrate dramatic variants into a limited number was admirable.

Vladimir Propp made a comprehensive study of Russian folk tales in order to find a common narrative pattern and its agents. He concluded that there are seven kinds of characters, namely, the hero, the false hero, the villain, the donor, the magical helper, the princess and her father, and the dispatcher. Still, the characters are very related to the historic-cultural context of the tales, and any criticism against Propp has to take that into consideration.

Etienne Souriau contradicted Polti and advocated the existence of more than two hundred thousand dramatic situations. He advanced the idea of actants as deep functions which can adopt different genders, races and ages when becoming a character. He kept the seven actants of Propp,

but instead took from them any qualitative denotation. More than that, he showed Greimas it was possible to apply the Proppian ideas to drama as well.

Finally we get to Algirdas Greimas. The actantial model as developed by him is organized graphically as it follows:

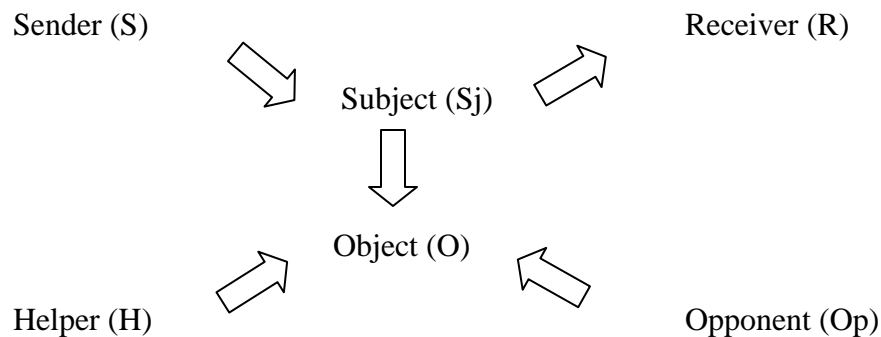


Fig.2. Actantial Model According to Algirdas Greimas. Source: Ubersfeld, Anne. *Reading Theatre*. Trans. Frank Collins. Toronto: U of Toronto Incorporated P, 1999. Print.

This scheme tells a story in terms of action. Different from a description of the epic or the subjective dreams of the lyric, here we have a plot to be unfolded by the active will of the subject, and for this reason it is considered dramatic. Through this model it is possible to visualize all of the elements of a drama and the forces at stake: the strong will of the subject (e.g. the protagonist), the opposition against the subject's intent (e.g. the antagonist), and the rise of the conflict.

The actantial model concentrates in a single structure three different axes, each one dealing with a specific element of a drama and portraying unique characteristics. Let us consider them one by one.

The first one is the helper/opponent axis. It is not enough for the subject to have an objective. Conflict--a basic feature of the dramatic genre--exists when the protagonist encounters

an obstacle between him/her and his/her object of desire. This axis builds an opposition. The helper and the antagonists are always occupying contrary fields:¹⁶ one simplistic (and clearly moralistic) prototype could be the good and the bad angel in Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus*. Occasionally the subject does not have a helper, which makes his journey more difficult. The antagonist, nevertheless, is an indispensable element in the dramatic plot. This is the reason we call the triangle built by the antagonist, the subject and the object an "active" one.¹⁷ Another feature of these two actants is the double possibility of the arrows being channeled to either the subject or the object. If the antagonist is opposing the subject,

It is as if the subject were in possession of something the opponent wanted . . . In this case, the battle shifts in relation to the subject's desire . . . We might say that the opponent is an existential, not a conjunctural, adversary. The very being, the very existence of the subject is threatened. The subject can satisfy the opponent only by disappearing; this is the case for Othello in relation to Iago. (Ubersfeld, 49)

The second possibility in an active triangle is when "The opponent opposes the desire of the subject for a given object . . . In this sense there is true rivalry (romantic, familial, political) with the collision of two desires centered on the same subject. We see this in the case of Britannicus and Nero, rivals for Junie" (Ubersfeld, 49).

Whichever character fills out these two functions, it can become its opposite over the course of the play. This happens mainly when the actant is indirectly fulfilling its function, that is, when she/he is not actively helping or antagonizing the subject. In some rare cases, the same

¹⁶ Antagonist and opponent will be used as synonyms in this dissertation.

¹⁷ Any actantial model can be fragmented into "triangles", being the active, the psychological and the ideological the most relevant ones.

character can be both a helper and an antagonist to the subject. Romeo is a helper to Juliet, in William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, because he agrees to become her object but, at the same time, he is an obstacle for her, due to the families' feud. Last, it is important to note that in many contemporary dramas, the task of determining these two functions is difficult; the positions of helper and opponent pose the enigma of the play. The less dramatic and the more abstract contemporary plays become, the harder it is to fill out these positions.

It is important to stress that antagonists can be of different natures. In melodrama, the antagonist is usually another character. In some plays, the antagonist can be the subject itself who is unable to take action or is psychologically restrained. There are other plays, in which the antagonist is a more metaphysical figure, against which the subject, always a human being or a metaphor of it (take *Chantecler* by Rostand as an example), has not many chances to win. In *Waiting for Godot* by Beckett, the function of the antagonist is occupied by this figure called "Godot" who has the power of deciding whether or not to appear to Vladimir and Estragon, the subjects of the play's main actantial model.

The second axis of the actantial model is the pair sender/receiver. This one has a single direction that goes from the sender to the receiver. It is here where we can detect the ideology of the play by considering what motivates the subject to pursue his object. Historical context plays an important role. We cannot demand motivations that are beyond the horizon of expectation of the character, because he/she is a social individual who is part of an historical community. The sender can be represented by a character, but it can also be an abstract noun. If in Propp's analysis of the Russian folk tales, the function of the sender was clearly a character, in contemporary drama nobody is telling the characters what to do: they have either internalized the ideology or they are completely lost and adrift in life. The receiver, in its turn, is never an

abstraction. It can be a character different from the one that occupies the subject's position, the same character as the subject in a given actantial model or, the actant slot can be empty. This last case happens when the subject despairs of his/her existential situation, without knowing why (receiver) and without knowing for what (object) to go on living.

Finally, the last axis unites the subject and the object. This is the beginning of any semiological analysis because it establishes a perspective. We cannot forget that each character can have an actantial model, even secondary roles.¹⁸ This is very helpful for actors because they show their relationships on stage in terms of proxemics, space and direction. The subject will always try to get closer to his helper and further from his opponent. Playwrights may or may not define the main subject of the play, in other words, the protagonist. Anatol, Medea and Hedda Gabler are undoubtedly the main characters in their homonymous plays, but who is the protagonist in *The Cherry Orchard* or in *The Bald Soprano*? Protagonists are not necessarily the characters who drive the action. We can have more and less active subjects. Sometimes the action is imposed on them, like Othello who is a victim of Iago's strong will. The concept of subject is not essential; it exists always due to the object. Besides that, the object cannot be something that the subject already owns; the action to keep a thing is different than the action to acquire a thing. As a conclusion, the arrow which goes from the subject to the object must be always endowed with a strong will. For this reason it is named the "arrow of desire".

2.3 CONCLUSION

Formal analysis of this kind avoids impressionistic examination of a dramatic text. Such analysis is necessary in order to move towards the final objective of finding out the ideological

¹⁸ The importance of secondary roles would be stressed by Stanislavski's aphorism: "There aren't small parts, only small actors."

affiliations of the drama. This will be the ultimate goal of the study of the dramas in this dissertation. Only by getting to that conclusion will it be possible to find out first what kind of point-of-view is being offered to the audience, and second, why the dramatic form is privileged over the postdramatic one when the playwright's artistic purpose is to discuss his/her contemporary society and its historical context.

3. POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

(Hedda listens a moment at the door. Then she goes across to the writing-table and takes out the manuscript in its package. She glances inside the wrapper, pulls some of the sheets half out and looks at them. Then she goes across and sits down in the easy-chair by the stove with the packet in her lap. After a moment, she opens the stove-door and then the packet.)

HEDDA *(throwing some of the leaves into the fire and whispering to herself).* Now I am burning your child, Thea. You, with your curly hair. *(Throwing a few more leaves into the stove.)* Your child and Ejlert Lovborg's. *(Throwing in the rest.)* I'm burning it – burning your child.

(Hedda Gabler, Henrik Ibsen)

3.1. POSTMODERNISM

Scholars agree that drama came under new pressures in the late years of the twentieth century, resulting in what Elinor Fuchs calls “the death of character” and Lehmann names “postdramatic theatre.” Before considering their effects on drama, it is necessary first to characterize these pressures: what are the social, political, and aesthetic transformations that led so many theatre artists during this period to reject drama in such a fierce way? Postmodernism is the cultural dominant here; the social, political and aesthetic factors that challenged and disrupted drama can be tied to its development after WWII. My aim in the first section of this chapter is to present an account of postmodernism. I will do so with reference to the theories of Marxist thinkers Alex Callinicos and Frederic Jameson and cultural studies scholar Scott Lash, among others.

Callinicos observes that: “Postmodernity . . . is merely a theoretical construct, of interest primarily as a symptom of the current mood of the Western intelligentsia” (*Against* 9). He does not oppose postmodernism to modernism, because he does not see fundamental transformations

in the capitalist system throughout the twentieth century: on his view, “the examples cited of postmodern art place it most plausibly as a continuation of and not a break from the fin de siècle Modernist revolution” (*Against* 15). According to this author, if we cannot talk about a “new wave” or a “new phase” of capitalism, it does not make sense to accept a new concomitant artistic period. Many other scholars disagree with Callinicos, arguing that postmodernity is the consequence of: first, a widespread disillusionment with European civilization following WWII; second, a reorganization of the capitalist system in the latter half of the twentieth century; and third, the astronomic growth of the media as a tool for shaping the minds of the masses: global media has enforced a uniformity of thought and behavior, through sophisticated communications technologies unknown to the modernists. Collective political reaction against governments and corporations that control media outlets (newspapers, radio, television, movies, etc.) is very difficult in the postmodern world. As Jameson states, “this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world” (5). This principle is verified when we consider how media-controlling super-powers like the U.S.S.R and the U.S.A. suffocated, in a direct or indirect way, revolutionary regimes claiming freedom and an independent path after 1950, for example, in Hungary (1956), Brazil (1964), Czechoslovakia (1968) and Chile (1973), only to cite some of them. “Not only does belief in a postmodern epoch generally go along with rejection of socialist revolution as either feasible or desirable, but it is the perceived failure of revolution which has helped to gain widespread acceptance of this belief” (Callinicos, *Against* 9).

Critics of Enlightenment ideals view the disastrous political experiments of authoritarianism in Italy, Japan, Germany and Russia in the first half of the twentieth century as

the logical consequence of a rationalist modernism.¹⁹ On their view, “World War II, with its unprecedented savageness and destruction, with its revelation of the brutality at the core of high technological civilization, could appear as the culmination of a demonic modernity, a modernity that had finally been overcome” (Calinescu 267). It is important to understand, though, that the collapse of modernism is not the exhaustion of its style, but the collapse of the class that sustained its artistic ideas, namely, the industrial bourgeoisie. Callinicos explains the relationship between modernism and the industrial bourgeoisie:

Modern society represents a radical break from the static nature of traditional societies. No longer is humanity’s relation to nature governed by the repetitive cycle of agricultural production. Instead, particularly with the onset of the Industrial revolution, modern societies are characterized by their efforts systematically to control and to transform their physical environment. Constant technical innovations, transmitted via the expanding world market, unleash a process of rapid change which soon embraces the entire planet. Tradition-bound social relations, cultural practices and religious beliefs find themselves swept away in the ensuing maelstrom of change . . . What could be more natural than to see Modernist art as an aesthetic response to the experience of modernity’s permanent revolution? (29-30)

Callinicos clarifies a key Marxist theoretical precept: that the art of a period expresses the economic conditions of that period.

Let us next consider what kind of economic changes collaborated to install the postmodern *Zeitgeist*. Fredric Jameson subtitles his already classic book about postmodernism

¹⁹ Gerald Graff in his book *Literature Against Itself* corroborates my argument: “these anti-rationalists are confusing reason and objectivity with certain historical *uses* and abuses of reason and objectivity” (xiii).

“the cultural logic of late capitalism.” What happened to capitalism that led it into a late phase? Basically, the stable Fordist-Keynesian regime of accumulation succumbed with the oil crisis in 1973.²⁰ Since then, a more flexible mode of regulation has become the *modus operandi* of capitalist economies. This new regulatory regime took advantage of weakened labor unions and huge reserve work forces in underdeveloped countries, leading to new forms of short-term contracts and part-time jobs.²¹ Consequently, in order to keep up profit levels, the economy became globalized. This was not a fairy-tale globalization, a worldwide celebration of cultural difference, but rather a planetary market system dominated by the most advanced forms of capitalist production and exchange. As this market system became more volatile and competitive, and the profit margins narrower, the eruption of what has become one of the trademarks of the postmodernist condition, consumer culture, balanced the possible losses.

Consumer culture, in its turn, is intrinsically connected to mass media. Under the banners of novelty, speed and rejuvenation, media-fed consumerism established the basic features of postmodernism. Many cultural studies scholars, like Mike Featherstone and Scott Lash,²² state that just as the French Revolution affirmed the ideals of the social class then in ascension, the bourgeoisie, so, too, postmodernism represents an attempt of self assertion on the part of the new ascending postindustrial bourgeoisie, i.e. the corporate executives, marketing experts, software engineers, bankers and lawyers that manage the business of consumer media. According to art

²⁰ According to the Business Dictionary, “Fordism” is a “manufacturing philosophy that aims to achieve higher productivity by standardizing the output, using conveyor assembly lines, and breaking the work into small de-skilled tasks. Whereas Taylorism (on which Fordism is based) seeks machine and worker efficiency, Fordism seeks to combine them as one unit, and emphasizes minimization of costs instead of maximization of profit. Named after its famous proponent, the US automobile pioneer Henry Ford (1863-1947).”

²¹ This switch can be observed in our own lives in comparison to the ones of our parents and grandparents. Then, it was considered a positive deed if one worked for the same company for his whole life. Nowadays, the liquid times imply that the good worker is the one who stays no more than three years in the same place, carrying over his stamina, know-how and talent to a next job.

²² See *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* by Featherstone and *Sociology of Postmodernism* by Lash.

critic Clement Greenberg, this yuppified class rejects the modernist tradition and embraces postmodernism because it “is a way, above all, to justify oneself in preferring less demanding art without being called reactionary or retarded (which is the greatest fear of the newfangled philistines of advancedness)” (14). Greenberg was clearly opposed to postmodernism as its prevalent aestheticization of popular culture undermined the modernist distinction between high art and mass culture. Lash develops three theses about postmodernism, including one that identifies this dominant paradigm as a figural cultural formation. This idea remounts Guy Debord’s spectacular society but also connects it to the flows of libidinal energy and desire traced by many postmodern theorists such as Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze and Guattari. Lash summarizes the opposition between modernist and postmodernist thought through the opposition of discursive/figural methods of expression:

Discursive signification gives priority to words over images; it privileges form while in texts it simultaneously stresses (discursive) meaning; it has, since it is ‘a sensibility of the ego rather than of the id,’ a rationalist view of culture; and it creates distance between the artistic object and its audience. Figural signification, in contrast, privileges the visual over the discursive, is dismissive of formalism, rationalism, and didacticism, is interested in the (sensuous) impact rather than the (discursive) meaning of texts, and ‘operates through the spectator’s immersion,’ the relatively unmediated investment of his/her desire in the cultural object. (175)

Lash’s succinct but effective comparison points toward the rejection of the discursive by the postdramatic theatre, and its condemnation of both Kant--who argued that sensibility does not allow man to make meaningful thoughts--and Brecht who maintained that the spectator’s immersion was the first element of the Aristotelian theatre in need of reform.

Before moving to discuss theatre, let us consider three traits of postmodern art in general: purposeful incoherence, pastiche, and the promotion of contingent meaning.

Unlike Callinicos and many others, Jean-François Lyotard sees post-modernism as a break with modernism, “since we are beginning something completely new, we have to re-set the hands of the clock at zero” (“Defining” 6). Modernism for him “is an aesthetic of the sublime” (*Condition 79*) in which “the form, because of its recognizable consistency, continues to offer to the reader or viewer matter for solace or pleasure” (*Condition 79*). Postmodernism on the contrary “denies itself the solace of good forms” (*Condition 81*). As Callinicos puts it: “Postmodern art therefore differs from Modernism in the attitude it takes up towards our inability to experience the world as a coherent and harmonious whole” (17). Consequently, the condition *sine qua non* for a detached perspective is stolen from the spectator, who becomes unable to establish a coherent meaning for the work because he/she does not experience it as a whole. If meaning does not play a role, “One might argue that Postmodernism is nothing but . . . an art of the surface, the depthless, even the immediate” (Callinicos 21).

Fredric Jameson offers a definitive formal feature of postmodernism: pastiche. Different from the modernist parody, which retains reference in order to establish a criticism, pastiche is defined by Jameson as “the neutral practice of mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists” (17).

The last thinker I would like to mention is Gianni Vattimo who started the debate about the end of modernity in Italy, and introduced a very clear and useful, frankly partial, dichotomy. As explained by Callinicos, for this Italian philosopher: “the end of modernity brings about the

emergence of ‘il pensiero debole’ or ‘weak thought’, a typically postmodern mode of reflection that is in direct opposition to ‘metaphysics’ or ‘strong thought’ (a thought that is domineering, imposing, universalistic, atemporal, aggressively self-centered, intolerant in regard to whatever appears to contradict it, etc.)” (272).

Let us now consider the possibility of a theatre with the fragmented, hybrid, depthless, immediate nature of postmodernist art.

3.2. WHY NOT POSTMODERN THEATRE?

Although some people use “postmodern theatre” to designate the theatre practiced in postmodernity, Pavis has a clear and succinct assessment of the term. He states that it is rarely used by critics “because of its lack of theoretical rigour” (*Dictionary* 279). Even Lehmann recognizes the difficulty of using the term “postmodern theatre” because it suggests so many ambiguous key-words, namely:

Ambiguity; celebrating art as fiction; celebrating theatre as process; discontinuity; heterogeneity; non-textuality; pluralism; multiple codes; subversion; all sites; perversion; performer as theme and protagonist; deformation; text as basic material only; deconstruction; considering text to be authoritarian and archaic; performance as a third term between drama and theatre; anti-mimetic; resisting interpretation . . . without discourse but instead dominated by mediation, gestuality, rhythm, tone. Moreover: nihilistic and grotesque forms, empty space, silence. (*Postdramatic* 25)

These key-words “can neither be cogent individually . . . nor can they collectively offer more than catchphrases which necessarily have to remain very general . . . or name very heterogeneous

traits” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 25). Pavis goes further, stating that: “More than a rigorous instrument for characterizing dramaturgy and staging, the term *postmodern* is a rallying cry” (*Languages* 279). He perceives its geographical, historical, and cultural origin and consequently its ideological implications “particularly in the United States and Latin America” (*Languages* 279) where it is “a convenient label used to describe an acting style, an approach to production and reception, a ‘current’ way of making theatre (*grosso modo*, since the 1960’s, after the theater, with the emergence of performance art, the happening, so-called post-modern dance and dance-theatre)” (*Languages* 279). If these leading theatre scholars reject the term “postmodern theatre,” how then should we name the theatre of postmodernity?

3.3. THE IDEA OF THE POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

This section will first consider some historical and critical works that appeared in the 1980s and suggested that deep transformations were taking place in society and in art at the time; these transformations will be connected to the postmodern paradigm. Next the dissertation analyses Lehmann’s *Postdramatic Theatre* and its thesis about the relationship between drama and contemporary theatre.

The fall of the Berlin Wall quickly led to the exhaustion of socialist governments in Eastern Europe in the beginning of the 1990s and gave space to some controversial claims made by champions of the capitalist system. Francis Fukuyama’s *The End of History and the Last Man* suggested that the ruin of the Soviet Union as a superpower meant the incontestable victory of neoliberal capitalism and projected that no fundamental transformation would ever again take place in the world economy. It was not a book about theatre or drama, but the ideology behind it was clear. Fukuyama proclaimed a new era in world history, one that--as I shall suggest--is

strongly connected to the postmodern paradigm and the claim that drama is a residual cultural feature.

Consider as well Elinor Fuchs' *The Death of Character*. She tells us that she first detected discomfort with drama as a form in 1979, when she saw a production called *Leave It to Beaver is Dead*. She identifies the 1980s as the decade in which postmodernism invaded the theatre, generating several performances that are the subjects of her late chapters. Fuchs connects the ascendance of spectacle in politics (symbolized by the election of the former Hollywood star Ronald Reagan as President of the United States) to the crisis of the legitimacy of political institutions and ideas. This political crisis had a cultural correlative famously framed by Jean-François Lyotard as the collapse of metanarratives. Fuchs argues that this conjunction--spectacular politics plus suspicions about historical narratives--caused the death of the idea of character in theatre. She quotes Debord and his *The Society of Spectacle* as the groundwork of the cultural and literary theory of postmodernism. Debord provides a clear analysis of the lack of contextualization in the postmodern world, which dehistoricizes culture and society through spectacle.

Like Fuchs's *The Death of Character*, *Postdramatic Theatre* charts the demise of drama from the 1970s to the 1990s. This book was written by a Professor at the Institut für Theater-, Film- und Medienwissenschaft at the Goethe University in Frankfurt am Main, Hans-Thies Lehmann.

The main idea of his book is related to the emergence of a new theatrical paradigm in the postmodern era: the postdramatic theatre.²³ This paradigm includes plays but mainly features theatrical events not based on dramatic texts--although he opens the possibility of a postdramatic

²³ Lehmann tries to get rid of any ideological commitment to his work, claiming that his study merely: "attempts to develop an aesthetic logic of the new theatre" (*Postdramatic* 18).

mise-en-scène based on dramatic texts--that depart from key dramatic principles. I identified these key dramatic principles in chapter 2, e.g. conflict, fictionality, dialogue as the main form of speech, and the presence of two texts, the main one and a secondary one.

For Lehmann, postdramatic theatre accords with the contemporary audience's perception of reality. At the very beginning of the book, he claims that theatre and literature are not mass media anymore due to what he calls a "shift of perception" which is "gradually faster and more superficial" (*Postdramatic* 16). The postdramatic is a postmodern phenomenon, but its symptoms started to be detected "from about 1880 onwards" (*Postdramatic* 49). Peter Szondi, in *Theory of Modern Drama*, sees the exhaustion of the pure drama as the cause for the ascendance of modernist drama, i.e. of the epic theatre which, for Szondi, is the modernist dramatic form par excellence. Lehmann makes a similar claim in *Postdramatic Theatre*. Here, though, what is exhausted is the drama itself, the epic theatre included. Postdramatic theatre renounces dramatic principles, and moves closer to other forms of performing art such as dance and performance art. This trend of abandoning the dramatic text as an element of the theatrical performance, he argues, starts in the Modernist period with Gertrude Stein and Antonin Artaud. Later on, in the 1950s, it was consolidated through pop culture and artists like composer John Cage, dancer and choreographer Merce Cunningham, and painter/writer Alan Kaprow.

Contemporary examples of postdramatic theatre abound in Lehmann's book. Some are restricted to the European scene, but others are well-known to U.S. audiences, such as the work of Robert Wilson and The Wooster Group. The postdramatic nature of their works becomes evident when we consider, mainly, their rejection of fictionality on stage.

Although he admits the existence of drama in the postmodern world, Lehmann states many times in his book that it is no more than a weakened form in decay, a residual force in the

theatrical world: “With the end of the ‘Gutenberg galaxy’ and the advent of new technologies the written text and the book are being called into question” (*Postdramatic* 16). One page later, he continues: “At the same time, the new theatre text (which for its part continually reflects its constitution as a linguistic construct) is to a large extent a ‘no longer dramatic’ theatre text” (*Postdramatic* 17). Lehmann mentions Heiner Müller who “found it increasingly difficult even to articulate himself in a dramatic form any longer” (*Postdramatic* 21), and then he once again affirms that: “Dramatic theatre ends when these elements [illusion and representation] are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art” (*Postdramatic* 22). According to him, “the reality of the new theatre begins precisely with the fading away of this trinity of drama, imitation and action” (*Postdramatic* 37). It is not only in the postmodern period that drama plays a minor role: “even throughout the modern era, the modern theatre for its devotees was an event in which the dramatic text was only one part – and often not the most important” (*Postdramatic* 30).

Statements such as “the new theatre text is no longer a dramatic text” and “illusion and representation no longer regulate theatre” pave the way for Lehmann’s conclusion in his chapter about drama: “From the perspective of the newer development of art and theatre forms, which seek to depart from the Gestalt as totality, mimesis and model, Hegel’s presentation of the ancient development strikes us as a model for the dissolution of the dramatic concept of theatre” (*Postdramatic* 45).

Lehmann argues that drama is a residual form that does not conform to a contemporary audience’s perception of reality; it is a thing of the past. He presents postdramatic theatre, by contrast, as a possible dominant paradigm in the theatre of postmodernity. He says: “The adjective ‘postdramatic’ denotes a theatre that feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time

‘after’ the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre” (*Postdramatic* 27). However, if on one hand, the term postdramatic “signals the continuing association and exchange between theatre and text” (*Postdramatic* 17), on the other hand, this text cannot be considered dramatic because it lacks the traditional elements of drama.

The relationship between theatre and text returns us to the traditional matter of the hierarchy among theatrical elements, an issue disputed since Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk* at least. For some modern theatre artists, theatrical production should be subject to the text. Stanislavsky, for example, writes: “In contrast to some theatrical directors who consider every play only as material for theatrical repetition, [this] writer believes that in the production of every important drama, the director and actor must go straight for the most exact and profound conception of the ideal and mind of the dramatist, and must not change that ideal for their own” (883). Most likely, Stanislavsky was opposing his directorial approach to that of his auteur-like countryman Vsevolod Meyerhold, but his reference to those who consider a play “only as material” for theatrical production applies equally well to Artaud and Grotowski. Lehmann reports that for postdramatic theatre artists “the text . . . is considered only as an element, one layer, or as a ‘material’ of the scenic creation, not as its master” (*Postdramatic* 17). He goes on to explain the principles of the postdramatic theatre: “When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificial imposed ‘manufacture,’ as a mere sham of a logic of action that only serves clichés . . . then theatre is confronted with the possibilities beyond drama” (*Postdramatic* 26).

In conclusion, I shall emphasize five points about Lehmann’s argument. First, the idea of postdramatic theatre arrives at the same time other “endings” are being celebrated, e.g. by Fukuyama and Fuchs, following the collapse of the socialist bloc and the apparent victory of

capitalism as an economic system. Second, Lehmann suggests that postdramatic theatre replaced drama as the theatrical form par excellence in the postmodern era. He sees the postdramatic as a consequence of a shift of perception, mainly in young audiences raised in the media-fed, image-saturated consumerist environments of late 20th century Western culture. Third, postdramatic theatre is an heir of ideas and practices that have been developing since the end of the nineteenth century, i.e. in the works of avant-garde figures like the Futurists, Dadaists, and Artaud. Fourth, though drama has not disappeared completely, Lehmann charts a clearly declining trend; although it still exists, drama is becoming an increasingly residual element in the panorama of contemporary theatre. Finally, the absence of a hierarchical distribution of theatrical elements is a hallmark of postdramatic theatre. The text, if present, is only one of the elements used by the auteur director/designer/producer. There is here a return to the idea of “total theatre” and the romantic Wagnerian idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*.

3.4. PERFORMANCE AND THE POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

My aim in this section of this chapter is to articulate a correlation between two theatrical forms that are aesthetic expressions of the culturally dominant paradigm of postmodernity, namely the postdramatic theatre and performance. Then, I will establish the differences between performance and postdramatic theatre.

Many books about postmodernism lack examples of postmodernist theatre, usually drawing examples from architecture, literature and film. Similarly, Lehmann does not cite many examples of playwrights in his list of postdramatic theatre artists. At the end of the section “Names,” he makes the following observation: “Authors whose work is *at least partially* related to the postdramatic paradigm: in the German language countries above all Heiner Müller,

Rainald Goetz, the Vienna School, Bazon Brock, Peter Handke, Elfriede Jelinek” (*Postdramatic* 24).²⁴ Postdramatic theatre’s shift away from the written text correlates to its shift toward performance art, that is, to “live art by artists” (9) in Roselee Goldberg’s definition. Pavis agrees with Fuchs who sees performance art as the postmodern theatrical form par excellence. As Lehmann remarks, he is “Like Fuchs and other critics who relate . . . performance to postmodernism” (*Postdramatic* 1). Pavis goes further, affirming that “postmodern theatre is already an endangered species” (*Dictionary* 280).

Given that performance art is the postmodern theatrical form par excellence, it is important to understand why performance art--and postdramatic theatre as well--differs from dramatic theatre.²⁵ I have already attempted to describe essential characteristics of drama in the second chapter. Now I shall try to catalog the properties of performance art.

First of all, performance artists are not interested in the signified. Wolfgang Matzat “diagnoses the danger that an ‘extreme emphasis on the theatrical presentation’ lets the theatre appear ‘strangely empty’: ‘The presented actions become signifiers without signifieds, symbols without meaning’ (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 136).

Second, performance art does not refer to another reality, as drama does through its fictionality. “The accent is on the ephemeral and unfinished nature of the production rather than a completed work of art” (Pavis, *Languages* 261). The emphasis is exclusively on the performative--hence the nomenclature--with the deletion of the representational. The performer tends to play not a fictional character on stage, but himself. For this reason, many performance art events feature non-actors or non-professional actors. As a result, in direct opposition to

²⁴ Hans Bertens, in his comprehensive study *The Idea of Postmodernism*, explains the meaning of the word in painting, architecture, literature, film, dance and photography, but he does not mention theatre at all.

²⁵ See Lehmann’s citation on *Postdramatic Theatre* 41 defending this idea.

Stanislavsky's concept of an actor becoming a character, the performer's body becomes the center of attention in the performance. It is neither the fable and plot nor the character, but the actor's autobiography and his body at risk that are emphasized.

Third, Wagner's romantic concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk* returns with strength, replacing the hierarchy of elements in the modernist theatre.²⁶ The innovation in relationship to Wagner is the incorporation into the work of technology and pop culture following the breakdown of the prejudice that culture consists only of what is imposed, created and consumed by the ruling classes.

Fourth, performance art breaks down the barrier between audience and artist. For Richard Schechner, performances are ritualized behaviors conditioned by play. An important characteristic of the genre, for this author, is the transgression of the barrier between spectator and performer. The origin of the Greek word *theatron*, to see, loses its meaning when audience members do not go to a theatrical event in order to keep a critical distance from it, but instead, are invited to take part in the ritual where, to reference Nietzsche, they lose their *principium individuationis*.

Lehmann describes the proximity of postdramatic theatre and performance art:

The changed use of theatre signs leads to a blurred boundary between theatre and forms of practice such as Performance Art, forms which strive for an experience of the real. With reference to the notion and practice of 'Concept Art' . . . postdramatic theatre can be seen as an attempt to conceptualize art in the sense that it offers not a representation but an intentionally unmediated experience of the real: *Concept Theatre*. Since the immediacy of a shared experience between

²⁶ Each modernist theatre thinker privileged a determinate element. For Artaud: "the domain of theater is not psychological but plastic and physical" (Artaud, 71). For Craig: "action is the most valuable part. The Art of Theatre has sprung from action – movement – dance" (Craig, *Dialogue* 73)

artists and audience is at the heart of Performance Art, it is obvious that the closer theatre gets to an event and to the performance artist's gesture of self-presentation, the more a common borderland between Performance and Theatre develops. (*Postdramatic* 134)

As this passage shows, Lehmann locates postdramatic theatre between drama and performance art, suggesting that it is closer to the latter than the former. Their proximity is also apparent in their shared thirst for unmediated physical presence: "For performance, just as for the postdramatic theatre, 'liveness' comes to the fore, highlighting the provocative presence of the human being rather than the embodiment of a figure" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 135).

Next Lehmann distinguishes postdramatic theatre from performance art, arguing that the transformation in the former is external to the body of the actor, while in the latter "the action of the artists is designed not so much to transform a reality external to them and communicate by virtue of the aesthetic treatment, but rather to strive for a 'self-transformation'" (*Postdramatic* 137). In this way, performance art avoids repetition, a key feature of theatrical art even of the postdramatic kind. His examples show that these transformations are physical, like having "someone fire a shot at him" or "cut into the tip of her own tongue with a razor blade" (*Postdramatic* 137). He summarizes the gap between these two performance forms: "In other words, even in theatrical work oriented towards presence, the transformation and effect of catharsis remains (1) virtual, (2) voluntary, and (3) in the future. By contrast, the ideal of performance art is a process and moment that is (1) real, (2) emotionally compulsory, and (3) happening in the here and now" (*Postdramatic* 138).

After situating the postdramatic in "the area of overlap between theatre and Performance Art" (*Postdramatic* 137), Lehmann creates eleven characteristic "Theatrical signs"

(“Theaterzeichen”). My discussion of them illuminates how far they can be considered unique and different from elements found in drama and in performance art. I will use these categories to analyze the plays in Chapters Five and Six.

1. Parataxis – according to Lehmann, this is the “universal principle of postdramatic theatre” (*Postdramatic* 86), a “non-hierarchical structure” (*Postdramatic* 86) of the theatrical elements. This principle echoes Wagner’s *Gesamtkunstwerk*, a complete fusion of the arts that together create the theatrical event: “*The solitary unit is unfree*, because confined and fettered in un-Love; *the associate is free*, because unfettered and confined through Love” (Wagner 780). It aims “to avoid harmony and comprehensibility” (*Postdramatic* 86) and “to postpone the production of meaning” (*Postdramatic* 87).

2. Simultaneity – closely related to parataxis, here the idea is that the theatrical elements are presented at the same time. It is an extrapolation of theatre itself whose visual semiotic signs are always presented simultaneously, forcing the spectator to select elements for attention, e.g. the costume, the set, the action, the light, etc. Once again the purpose is to destabilize the audience and create a situation where “comprehension finds hardly any support” (*Postdramatic* 88).

3. Play with the density of signs – “There is either too much or too little . . . The viewer perceives a repletion or conversely a noticeable dilution of signs” (*Postdramatic* 89). It is interesting to note the mix of classical (constrictive) and baroque (extravagantly abundant) tendencies. Lehmann gives priority to the minimalist tendency, exemplifying it through the empty space of Peter Brook and the theatres of Peter Handke and Robert Wilson which are characterized by “little action, long pauses, minimalistic reduction, and finally . . . muteness and

silence” (*Postdramatic* 90). However, this minimalist style is discordant with the bombardment of images seen in the first two categories of the postdramatic.

4. Plethora – similar to the former category, here is meant the deformation of the form, its recursion to extremes. Through the lack of “unity, self-identity, symmetrical structuring, formal logic, readability or surveyability” (*Postdramatic* 90), postdramatic theatre artists aim to communicate “a sense of chaos, insufficiency, disorientation, sadness and horror vacui” (*Postdramatic* 90). Because the postdramatic does not present viewers a familiar form, they have difficulty finding an intellectual orientation to it; instead the audience’s reaction to a postdramatic work is primarily sensorial and emotional.

5. Musicalization – “music” here is understood as “the musicalization of voices and sounds in theatre” (*Postdramatic* 92). The postdramatic aesthetic develops an “independent auditory semiotics” as opposed to the spoken meaningful language of dramatic theatre.²⁷ Lehmann quotes artists defending the idea of “theatre as music” (*Postdramatic* 91) and celebrating “incomprehensible foreign language sounds” (*Postdramatic* 92). Musicalization in this sense is one of the most powerful moves toward the definitive burial of drama and meaning. “From a methodological point of view it is crucial to consider such phenomena not merely as (perhaps thoroughly original) extensions of dramatic theatre. The analytical perspective must ‘switch over’, so to speak, and recognize even in stagings of drama the new and no longer dramatic language of theatre” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 93).

6. Scenography, visual dramaturgy – Lehmann seems to abandon the idea of parataxis: equal importance for every theatrical element for “the possibility of dissolving the logocentric hierarchy and assigning the dominant role to elements other than dramatic logos and language. This applies even more to the visual than to the auditory dimension” (*Postdramatic* 93). Thus, he

²⁷ Weren’t the frogs in the homonymous play by Aristophanes already making use of this artifice?

establishes a hierarchy of elements in the postdramatic theatre, which is regulated by a “*visual dramaturgy*” (*Postdramatic* 93). He specifies the historical momentum of this postdramatic dramaturgy recognizing that “until in the 1990s one could observe a certain ‘return to the text’” (*Postdramatic* 93). The refusal of a critique of this phenomenon is clear when he says that “what is of critical interest about the ‘theatre of images’ from our point of view is not whether it is a blessing or a catastrophe for the art of theatre; neither is it important, in a historiographical sense, whether its time has run its course” (*Postdramatic* 93).

7. Warmth and Coldness – For Lehmann, “theatre possesses a certain ‘warmth’” (*Postdramatic* 95). For this reason, the audience is provoked when it sees cold bodies on stage (Lehmann uses the war scene in Robert Wilson’s *The Civil Wars* as an example). On the opposite side: “the autonomization of the visual dimension can lead to an *overheating* and a flood of images” (*Postdramatic* 95). The German author is repeating the same theme developed in the opposition between constriction and abundance in the section discussing the density of signs.

8. Physicality – The actor’s body does not refer to anything else in the postdramatic theatre, it merely fascinates the spectator due to its presence: “postdramatic theatre often presents itself as an *auto-sufficient physicality*” (*Postdramatic* 95). Here recurs the preference for the phenomenological at the expense of the semiotic. This physicality has to be “shocking” (*Postdramatic* 95) and the body might be “deviant . . . through illness, disability or deformation . . . [which] causes an ‘amoral’ fascination, unease or fear” (*Postdramatic* 95). And so Lehmann suggests that postdramatic theatre gets really close to the effects of tragedy as articulated in the *Poetics*. Postdramatic theatre seems to be closer to dance than to theatre, through its variant of

the dance theatre, which “uncovers the buried traces of physicality” (*Postdramatic* 96).²⁸ This call for the body is not a postdramatic uniqueness; since Stanislavski we have been attentive to the importance of physical actions. What is characteristic here is that “the *body is absolutized*” (*Postdramatic* 96), the concept of mimesis dissipates, and the performer’s technique becomes the centre of attention. This kind of theatre gets close to acrobatics, circus and dance.

9. ‘Concrete theatre’ – Lehmann prefers to use the term “concrete” instead of “abstract” to refer to a non-mimetic theatre.²⁹ “Here theatre *exposes itself* as an art in space, in time, with human bodies . . . as much as in painting colour, surface, tactile structure and materiality could become autonomous objects of aesthetic experience” (*Postdramatic* 98). Lehmann turns theatre into “an extreme of the principle of ‘visual dramaturgy’” (*Postdramatic* 98) when he considers that “what remained a marginal experiment in theatre at the time has become a central possibility of theater aesthetics thanks to the new possibilities of combining media technology, dance theatre, spatial art and performing practice” (*Postdramatic* 98). Theatre becomes “an aesthetic formalization without compromise” (*Postdramatic* 99). Lehmann introduces in this section an important term of his vocabulary.

In a frame of meaning that has become porous, a concrete and sensuously intensified *perceptibility* comes to the fore. This term ‘perceptibility,’ captures the virtual and incomplete nature of the theatrical perception that is produced or at least intended here. While mimesis in Aristotle’s sense produces the pleasure of recognition and thus virtually always achieves a result, here the sense data always refer to answers that are sensed as possible but not (yet) graspable; what one sees

²⁸ If postdramatic theatre is all about bodies, movement, physicality, visuality and absence of plot, can’t we call it dance theatre instead?

²⁹ That becomes an ontological question that this dissertation is unable to answer due to the time and space the question demands: can theatre be an abstract art?

and hears remains in a state of potentiality, its appropriation postponed. It is in this sense that we are talking about a *theatre of perceptibility*. (*Postdramatic* 99)

10. Irruption of the real – staging and performance are different concepts, although they overlap during a show. Postdramatic theatre is interested in exploring the “failures” and accidents of the actors, as theatre is a performing art and “takes place in actu” (*Postdramatic* 100). It is the sum of the aesthetic and the extra-aesthetic elements. The audience does not know anymore if the action is part of the staging or an improvised intrusion into the text, and this is “the main point” (*Postdramatic* 101).³⁰ If we had the “theatre of perceptibility” (*Postdramatic* 100) before, here we are graced with the “aesthetics of undecidability” (*Postdramatic* 100). For Lehmann, “theatre is at the same time material process . . . and ‘sign for’” (*Postdramatic* 102). This opens semiotic possibilities that have been denied so far in his text: “It [theatre] implicitly invites not only performative acts that confer new meanings but also such performative acts that bring about meaning in a new way, or rather: put meaning itself at stake” (*Postdramatic* 102).

11. Event / situation – Theatre becomes blurred with performance and one is not able anymore to differentiate these two specific forms of art.³¹ They hold in common the idea of *event*, that is, “the execution of acts that are real in the here and now and find their fulfillment in the very moment they happen, without necessarily leaving any traces of meaning or a cultural monument” (*Postdramatic* 104). According to Lehmann, both postdramatic theatre and performance art

are characterized by a loss of meaning of the text and its literary coherence. Both work on the physical, affective and spatial relationship between actors and

³⁰ The *V-Effekt* in the epic theatre is another irruption, though a planned one, of the real, yet with the purpose of awakening the critical awareness of the spectator.

³¹ Lehmann perceives that it is not theatre anymore: “If some people no longer want to give the name theatre to such a practice situated between ‘theatre’, performance, visual art, dance and music . . .” (*Postdramatic* 107)

spectators and explore possibilities of participation and interaction, both highlight presence (the doing in the real) as opposed to re-presentation (the mimesis of the fictive), the act as opposed to the outcome. Thus theatre is defined as a process and not as a finished result, as the activity of production and action instead of as a product, as an active force (*energeia*) and not as a work (*ergon*). (*Postdramatic* 104)

The a-politicization of the postdramatic theater is recognized by Lehmann himself, for whom “nowadays action art has its energetic centre no longer in the demand for changing the world, expressed by social provocation, but instead in the production of events, exceptions and moments of deviation” (*Postdramatic* 105).

3.5. DRAMA X POSTDRAMATIC THEATRE

Two different methods of analyzing theatre have been presented in this dissertation. The first, designed to address the dramatic text, is composed of the analytic system developed by Jean-Pierre Ryngaert and the Greimasian actantial model restructured by Anne Ubersfeld. The second method of analysis, related to postdramatic theatre--which includes both texts and non-text based spectacles--is the result of Lehmann’s research. These models can help scholars distinguish between a dramatic and a postdramatic theatre text. One would expect difficulties when applying Ryngaert’s categories to a postdramatic theatre text, for example, just as one would expect difficulties when applying Lehmann’s categories to a conventionally dramatic text.

To test this hypothesis, I will use the Ryngaert/Ubersfeld model to analyze Heiner Müller’s text *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* (1981). As we shall see, although the Ryngaert/Ubersfeld model captures certain elements in Müller’s text, it fails to capture the work as a whole.

3.5.1. AUTHOR

Heiner Müller (1929-1995) was a German playwright who developed a very unique style that is considered representative of both postmodern writing and the postdramatic theatre. He lived in the German Democratic Republic and his plays were censored and criticized by the ruling communist party. Aesthetically he is seen as a follower of Bertolt Brecht in dealing with social and political issues, but his form deviates from epic theatre. Müller prefers to create a collage of fragments that results in a highly intertextual work with densely packed references to classical literature and contemporary life, literature, and politics. This “synthetic fragment” style is clearly non-aristotelian. Audiences apprehend Müller’s plays through an associative rather than a logical process; they engage with his densely packed often post-apocalyptic imagery because there is no linear suspense structure.

Müller was highly regarded outside the GDR³² and was invited to visit many different countries, but mainly West Germany. Some of the plays staged in the West that helped to build his name are: *Mauser* (Austin, TX 1975), *Hamletmaschine* (Paris, 1979) and *Germania Death in Berlin* (Munich, 1978). His widespread recognition as one of the most important playwrights of the twentieth century forced the GDR to ameliorate the censorship of his work. In the 1980s he was readmitted to the Academy of Arts and the Writer’s Association. In 1992 he became one of the co-directors of the prestigious Berliner Ensemble, the theater founded by Brecht in East Berlin. He died in 1995.

3.5.2. SYNOPSIS

³² German Democratic Republic.

Heiner Müller's plays defy attempts to interpret them, especially when read. They are scripts awaiting a stage. Campbell says: "Müller's text is purposefully dense and complicated, and many variant interpretations are possible from section to section, line to line, and even word to word. Determining meaning from Müller's texts is a puzzle with which many critics have struggled" (96). Adding to the complication is the fact that Müller frequently makes reference to previously written, often classical texts. If the reader or audience member does not understand those references, it is difficult to understand the meaning of the contemporary elements that he uses.

Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts has three parts. The first and third parts read as disjointed monologues narrated by an unnamed character or characters. The middle part is a dialogue, first, between Medea and the Nurse and, then, between Medea and Jason.

In the first part of the play, the unnamed voice/voices describe a devastated landscape. This section ends with a description of Medea and the fragments of her brother around her.

Medea, the Nurse and Jason are recognizable characters in the second segment. The author follows the myth accurately, showing Medea's anger when confronted by Jason's betrayal and marriage with Creon's daughter.

The last segment is another destroyed landscape, set on a "dead star." There is a reference to the myth in its title, but again, understand this depends on the acquaintance of the audience with the Greek story.

3.5.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – The title of the work can be divided into three parts like the work itself: 1) Despoiled Shore; 2) Medeamaterial; 3) Landscape with Argonauts. Because these are the titles of the three sections, the title of the work as a whole refers to each of the three parts.

Müller's decision to name the play after its formal divisions is unusual. Imagine a drama titled Act One Act Two Act Three or Exposition Intrusion Crisis Climax Denouement. As these examples suggest, there is a formal self-consciousness in the title that one does not ordinarily find in the titles of dramas. Frequently, the title of a drama will identify a figure or metaphor that somehow encapsulates the fictional world that it portrays, e.g. *Emilia Gallotti* or *Bus Stop*. Here, because the world of the play is fragmented, composed of fictional and factual material, set in mythical Greece and the GDR of the 1980s, there is no single figure or metaphor that can capture the whole. If anything, Müller's title is related to the spaces of action: a shore, Medea's house, and a dead star. But even that hypothesis is difficult to maintain since the third section, "Landscape with Argonauts," has a mythological-sounding title. The landscape described in this section seems more like a real post-nuclear landscape than one inhabited by Medea or Jason. The most that one can say, then, is that Müller's title is descriptive of the parts of the play but not its whole.

b) Genre – *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* does not have an indication of genre. The three elements one has to consider in order to define the genre of a play are subject, tone and ending. Let us consider each: Subject--desolation, destruction, violence; tone--somber, apocalyptic, pessimistic; ending--eath, e.g. "I felt the blood draining from MY veins/ And MY body transformed into the landscape/ Of MY death" (9). Given this analysis, the two possible genres would be drama (from the French *drame* = bourgeois serious play) and tragedy. As the main difference between them is the social class of the characters, the former

dealing with the middle-class bourgeoisie and the latter with the upper-class nobility, it would seem that Müller here is welcoming back tragedy as a genre for the contemporary world. Again, though, one must qualify this conclusion. Lines like the following in the third section of the text undercut the nobility of the characters seen in the second part:

The pop of beer cans

FROM THE LIFE OF A MAN

Memory of a tank-battle

My walk through the suburbs I

Between rubble and construction-debris

THE NEW Fuck-cells with central heating

The television spits world into the parlor

Planned obsolescence (7)

c) Structure – On reading the text, *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* has a clear triadic structure. However, the author’s stage direction that “*The simultaneity of the three parts of the text can be portrayed any which way*” (Müller, “*Medeamaterial*”) renders this structural feature suspect; apparently, Müller sees the three parts as occurring simultaneously and gives the director plenty of freedom to stage the play so as to make that simultaneity evident. In suggesting this, Müller subverts any cause-to-effect relationship between the three parts. He also plainly presents the characteristic demand of postdramatic theatre, namely, that the spectators are supposed to build their own interpretations using the elements of the performance. Müller’s stage direction aligns the tasks of the director and of the audience. It is their job to piece together the fragments presented by the play, an activity that necessarily implies the postponement of meaning (because it is not given, but must

be fashioned). This is a key point: what is at stake here is the idea of meaning. A drama creates a fictional world inhabited by people-like characters that overcome obstacles in pursuit of their objectives. Audience members are able to engage this fictional world both rationally and emotionally because they know through their life experience that people overcome obstacles when pursuing objectives. Drama thus creates a world that, in some ways, parallels the real social world occupied by the audience members. This parallel structure allows audience members to experience the fictive world as meaningful; it relates to their life experiences. It also allows audience members to take a critical perspective on the dramatic characters: they can see what the characters want and can consider both the value of that objective and the means by which the characters are working to achieve it. The situation is different in postdramatic theatre where there are no people-like characters pursuing objectives or, if there are, as in the second part of Müller's play, their actions do not carry through the entirety of the performance event. Audience members must construct the meaning of the event from the pieces--including the dramatic pieces, if they exist--that are presented on the stage. This interpretive construction amounts to a postponement or deferral of meaning. The relationship between fictive world and real world is not a given, waiting to be discovered, as in a drama. There is no whole, complete fictive world in the postdramatic theatre; there are only fragments, images, provocations that draw attention to the performance moment itself and trigger a meaning-making response in the audience. Because the meaning of the work is being built inside the spectator's mind, there is no way that he or she can develop a critical distance from it (at least not during the performance itself; in discussions afterwards, of course, individual spectators can compare the results of their interpretive activities). Thus the postdramatic theatre implicates the spectator in the performance

in a way that the dramatic theatre does not while, at the same time, underscoring the always contingent, provisional, and individual nature of the spectator's engagement.

Campbell explains this dynamic with specific reference to Müller's play:

By fragmenting the Greek narrative and subverting the usual communicative dialogue and unified character and plot of most adaptations and, in fact, most western drama, Müller's remaking expresses in its structure and language the violent and fragmented contemporary culture in which it was created. By presenting a landscape of fragmented narratives and characters and refusing to identify or define them specifically, Müller transfers interpretive power to the audience more than most drama and theatre do. (84-5)

d) Fabula – Here it is possible to perceive another breaking point between drama and the postdramatic.

In *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* the audience has trouble understanding what is going on. One of the reasons is the fact that there is no progressive dramatic action. There are three static situations, not necessarily related in terms of the story for many reasons: as explained above, Müller's call for simultaneity breaks with the dramatic logic of cause and effect. As well, the absence of identified narrators in two of the three scenes and the mixture of ancient and contemporary references makes it difficult to identify the who, what, where, and when of the play. In the first and third parts there are descriptions of destruction and two devastated landscapes: one at a shore, but at the same time a lake at Straussberg, and the last one a dead star. The middle section takes place in Corinth. There is no clear connection between these parts in terms of plot and character (apart from the single mention of Medea at the end of the first section and the reference to the Argonauts in the title of the last segment). Müller creates

a juxtaposition of images, or, to reference an homonymous play by him, the “description of a picture.” The fabula in postdramatic theatre has to be constructed by each spectator from the fragmented elements that the playwright is offering. That happens because

Müller rejects the ideal of *Aufklärung* (Enlightenment/making clear) and opts instead for density, inundating the reader/viewer with “piled up” remnants from the explosion of teleological history. This frees the viewer from what Müller has called Brecht’s dramaturgy of A-B-C, of development and didacticism, and forces an active “unraveling” of the entangled (theatrical and historical) texts. Entanglement complicates the process of thinking and tears across rationality, a clear goal of Müller’s theater. (Malkin 83)

A common feature of the postdramatic visible in this play is the insertion of a dramatic section within a postdramatic landscape. The organized second segment, with dramatic elements such as dialogue and character, is subverted by the surrounding parts which are postdramatic par excellence. The resulting incomprehensibility (i.e. lack of intelligibility of the whole) is characteristic of the postdramatic theatre.

e) Time – In Müller’s play there is no explicit reference to the time of the action; however, hints are given in the stage directions and speech. There is a suggestion that the first segment takes place in the present, as Müller compares the space to a peep-show. The second segment returns one to the past as it is deals with the myth of Medea. In the third section, the reader/spectator is returned to the present or, perhaps, projected into the future, since Müller specifies “the landscape may be a dead star, on which a search party from another time or another space hears a voice and finds someone dead” (1). Once again, however, any attempt to

place the events of the play in a linear chronology is complicated by the playwright's statement that there is a simultaneity to the three parts.

f) Space – Although time is not clearly defined in Müller's play, indications of space or place abound. These indications are contradictory, however, leading one to make choices among the options. For example, Müller asserts that "the text needs the naturalism of the scene" but goes on to state that "DESPOILED SHORE can be shown simultaneous with the operation of a peep show" (1). The reader is thus not clear about the locale: is it a peep show or a naturalistically detailed shore. This shore would seem to be in mythical Colchis, were it not for the reference to a "Sea by Straussberg" and the "Dream of a monstrous/ Copulation in Chicago" (1)? The second segment, following Müller's stage directions, takes place: "*at a sea by Straussberg, which is a mud-filled swimming pool in Beverly Hills or the bathing facility of a nerve-clinic*" (1). Here, again, Müller positions the reader among terrestrial absurdities: a lake by Straussberg is not the same as a mud-filled swimming pool in Southern California, U.S.A. The third segment leaves Earth entirely and, as mentioned above, is located on a dead star. Obviously, Müller uses place names differently than a dramatist does: he is not putting the action in any one of these locations; rather, he is using indicators of place to give the director and designers information about the stage setting. Indeed, perhaps the most one can say about the location of the action in Müller's play is that it takes place on a stage. This is in keeping with Lehmann's view that the postdramatic theatre "*exposes itself* as an art in space, in time, with human bodies" (*Postdramatic* 98).

g) Dialogue – There are three basic speech forms in *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*. The prevalence of the narration, despite the dialogue in the second segment, is one of the signs that attest to the play's affiliation with the postdramatic.

The first and the third sections are in the form of narration. This is an epic element that has been present in drama since the Greek theatre (see the opening of Aeschylus's *Agamemnon* with the guard summarizing the protagonist's trip and arrival in Argos). Brecht's epic theatre famously recuperates this mode of speech. When Müller uses it, he does not aim to generate a Brechtian alienation effect. Rather, the narration deconstructs the pure dramatic form and opens the play to numerous interpretive possibilities.

The second part, *Medeamaterial*, on the contrary, uses one of the key-features of drama: dialogue. However, this dialogue is not the kind that one typically finds in a drama, where characters pursue objectives by using language to interact with other characters. The dialogue here expresses feelings and ideas in a more lyric form. For example, in Medea's and Jason's verbal exchange, she has a long soliloquy that seems more like exposition than a propulsion of the dramatic action. It is easier to understand what is happening in this middle section of the play than in the other sections. There is a structure of question and answer, and the situation is made clear. Medea and Jason advance opposing objectives in angry and revengeful tones. It is different from the passages earlier and later in the play where the audience is sure neither of what is going on nor of who is delivering the speech. The presence of dialogue in the play implies the juxtaposition of dramatic and postdramatic elements, one of the characteristics of the postdramatic style.

The third form of speech that appears in the play also appeared in drama long ago: the monologue. The monologue is a lyric element used to reinforce a character's state of mind and spirit. Medea has a long monologue in the second part. It is possible to see Müller's use of this form as another destabilization of the drama, in his search for a more fragmented and less logically coherent writing style.

Lack of punctuation is a hallmark of the play. This practice establishes freedom of interpretation both for the reader and for the director and performers who will interpret the text according to what they think it means.

h) Information – Information delivered by a dramatic text has two functions: to create an understandable plot (the syntagmatic axis) and to make metaphorical references to the historical context (the paradigmatic axis). The audience has the double task of understanding the story and relating it to its social, cultural, economic and political context. The postdramatic theatre text confronts the reader with a plethora of information not necessarily related in a logical way.

In Müller's play, because there is not a clear plot, it is not possible to say whether the information is abundant or rare. Many things are said throughout the play, but since they do not contribute to the building of an understandable plot, it is impossible to assess their value within Ryngaert's system of analysis. There is both direct and indirect information, as there are both dialogues between the characters and narrative chunks of text delivered to the audience. In terms of privacy or publicity of the information, private information is a characteristic of postdramatic theatre, as there is no intention to create a coherent world to which spectators can emotionally and rationally relate.

i) Character – Starting with their names, characters exist only in the second segment of *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*. Another fact to take into account is that the playwright does not offer a list of characters nor does he indicate who delivers the speeches in parts one and three of the text.

In drama it is important to find out the identity of the protagonist because, given the absence of the narrator, this is the figure through whose eyes we see the plot's events. Typically, the protagonist appears in the most scenes, a fact that can be ascertained by creating a character

configuration for the play, i.e. a chart that shows the division of scenes according to the characters in them. The character configuration for Müller's play is:

Table 1

Configuration in *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*

Characters	Part 1	Part 2	Part 3
MEDEA	-	X	-
JASON	-	X	-
NURSE	-	X	-

Obviously, this is not very helpful. As we do not know the identity (identities) of the characters in parts one and three of the play, there is no way to include them in this chart. Looking closely at section two, we see that Medea has more lines than the other identified characters in the play. That might incline one to consider her the protagonist but it is more correct to say, on the basis of this analysis, that Müller is not interested in the construction of a clear plot with a clearly identified protagonist.

Constellation is another tool with the purpose of establishing the relative importance of the characters. Here, again, one would be inclined to place most emphasis upon Medea but she appears only in the middle third of the play. Medea is clearly positioned between Jason and the Nurse, she is the common link between them, but of what value is this information when the majority of the play is given in the voice(s) of an unknown character or characters? Could not a director create a sort of Everyman character who delivers the narratives of "Despoiled Shores" and "Landscape with Argonauts," thereby transforming him or her into the main character of the play, the victim of all human sufferings?

It is possible to use the third tool of analysis, the actantial model, in relation to the second segment of the play, but not to the first or the third segments because there is no indication of

character. Without a character it is impossible to fill the function of the subject that is the basis and starting point of an actantial analysis.

We can recognize Medea's objective, which is to take revenge on Jason. Jason is her antagonist and the nurse is her helper.

A dramatic play has characters with objectives, motivations and conflicts. Medea's actantial model in Müller's play can be graphically described as:

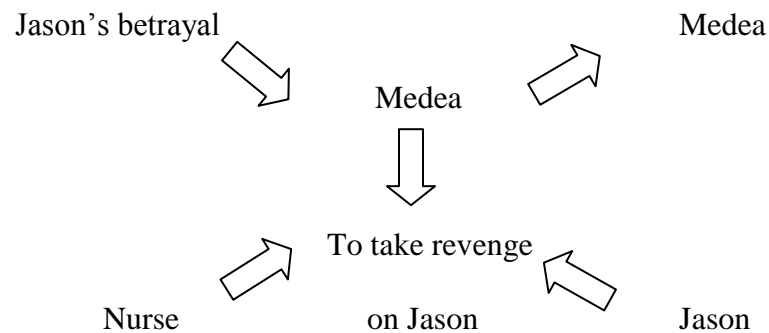


Fig. 3. Medea's Actantial Model in *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*

In a typical actantial model, it is easy to fill the functions, with the exception of the helper which is sometimes absent. Medea has an objective and a conflict with clear antagonists opposing her objective. Because conflict is one of the hallmarks of drama, completing the functions in an actantial model is an exercise in translating elements present in the play and not a free interpretation of the plot. We can apply this model to the second part of the play, but not to the first and third parts.

In sum, as this exercise demonstrates, it is possible to use tools built to analyze a drama for a different purpose: to distinguish a postdramatic theatre text from a drama. Application of the Ryngaert/Ubersfeld model demonstrates that *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* is not a drama, at least not from beginning to end. The very difficulties and

frustrations that arose when conducting this analysis are evidence that Müller has not composed a drama. The absence of characters, the unclear plot, and the unstable spatio-temporal references are the main reasons I draw this conclusion. Let us now consider what sort of non-dramatic theatre text Müller has written by comparing it to Lehmann's categories of the postdramatic theatre.

3.5.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

1. Parataxis – *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* fits very well into this category. According to Lehmann this parataxis aims “to avoid harmony and comprehensibility” (*Postdramatic* 86) and “to postpone the production of meaning” (*Postdramatic* 87). The multiple references not only to the myth but also to modern and contemporary events and people frustrate attempts to impose comprehensibility and create stable meaning. To put it another way, the plot and characters of the second section of the play are not more important than the narrations in the first and third parts of the play, which subverts any attempt to create a traditional hierarchy of the elements.

2. Simultaneity – this is one of the clearest postdramatic elements in the text through Müller's suggestion in the stage directions that the scenes be played simultaneously.

3. Play with the density of signs – Here the abundance of information contributes to the density of the signs. Müller creates a violent eruption of information and the landscape of destruction is reflected in and intensified by Medea's anger, too. Nothing is spared in the play: the different places of action (a lake by Straussberg, a swimming pool filled with mud) are compacted into a single scene and the references accumulate line after line. If the author does not go for minimalism, he still keeps the excess, two of the possibilities allowed by Lehmann when laying out this category.

4. Plethora – The deformation of form in *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* relates more to the deformation of traditional dramatic form and not to the deformation of concrete elements of the stage. Müller rejects the dominion of the dialogue, the presence of identifiable characters in two of the three scenes, and a cause-to-effect plot. His use of collage and montage created a fragmented style in keeping with the postdramatic plethora.

5. Musicalization – speech in the play is more musical than logical; the constantly shifting, unstable contexts force one to respond more to the sounds of the words and the images that they evoke than to their semiotically significant meaning. The meaning is built through association, which leaves space for exploration of the language and the musicality of the performers' voices. Some sentences are presented in capital letters, others in English which Müller's original German speaking audience would have struggled to understand. Such choices attest to the playwright's renunciation of the use of language solely to convey information.

6. Scenography, visual dramaturgy – Müller's insistence that the "text needs the naturalism of the scene" coupled with his graphic imagery--e.g. "Blood-smearred women/ In the morgues"--promises that heavy emphasis will be placed on the visual elements as is characteristic of postdramatic theatre. The director and designers will determine exactly how the spectacle is arranged but the playwright's text already gives strong hints about the possibilities.

7. Warmth and Coldness – The cold bodies to which Lehmann refers can be related to the characters without names in the first and third parts of the play. Given that these figures have no history and, at least based on the text, are not identifiable as individuals, it will be hard for the audience to establish any relationship with them, complicating the possibility of sympathy, antipathy or empathy.

8. Physicality – Here again the figures in the first and third parts of the play are most relevant. Because they do not have a past or, apparently, any relationship to the story of Medea, the audience can relate to them only as bodies (perhaps arrayed in garbs of suffering, but nameless bodies all the same). By contrast, when characters are portrayed, as in the case of Jason and Medea, the audience’s attention is split between the phenomenal (performative) instance and the semiotic (fictional) instance of the character.

9. ‘Concrete theatre’ – The idea of perceptibility that is an idea of incompleteness is present in this play. The senses are more affected than a logic mind. Every image is more potential than definitive, and the purposely lack of clarity leads to a phenomenological appreciation of the work instead of a recognition of the universe portrayed. Fantastic suggested spaces as a dead star or a swimming-pool full of mud help to set the strong imagery of the text.

10. Irruption of the real – Different from other exemplars of the postdramatic theater, Müller does not explore chance in *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*. His emphasis on simultaneity breaks down the cause-to-effect logic of drama (and narrative, generally) but, still, he authors a written text to be staged in the way he conceived. To be sure, Müller gives the director, designers, and performers a great deal of latitude when making creative decisions, but interpretive openness is not what Lehmann means by “irruption of the real.” Nowhere does he invite the active intervention of audience members, nowhere does he solicit their response as in the parabasis of Old Comedy. Although unexpected events can happen during the performance, they are not foreseen in the play itself.

11. Event / situation – Lehmann here is emphasizing the live “event-ness” of postdramatic theatre which, on his view, suggests something unplanned or improvised. There is no indication that Müller is calling for this postdramatic quality in *Despoiled Shore*

Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts. This discrepancy points to the fact that some of the categories described by Lehmann apply more to performances that reject the text. Once again, we can see how irreconcilable drama and postdramatic theatre are. A postdramatic playwright, because she/he is crafting a text to be interpreted for the stage, can hardly fit into some of Lehmann's categories.

This analysis of Heiner Müller's play leads to two important conclusions. First, there are irreconcilable differences between the dramatic and the postdramatic. When meaning is denied, characters disappear and the plot is absent, the driving force of a protagonist does not have a place inside the text. All of these dramatic elements are absent from Müller's play. Instead, he has written a script without a clear meaning that depends heavily on the performance to provide audiences with information necessary to have a critical response. In terms of characters, the three mythological figures in the second segment cannot be considered protagonists of the plot. Definitely, Müller's play is not an example of dramatic art.

Second, the play does not fit into some of the categories developed by Lehmann. Despite its chaotic mixture of elements, *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts* still keeps its fictional status, one of the hallmarks of drama. The real never irrupts and the idea of event, or use of chance, does not belong to the play's universe either.

Therefore, we have a hybrid artistic work that has some dramatic elements and some postdramatic elements, but does not rest comfortably under either paradigm. Following Lehmann, I prefer to stress the non-dramatic elements of *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*, without neglecting the dramatic affiliation of this work.

Let us turn next to the contemporary German language plays, analysis of which is crucial to my thesis that committed drama remains a vital force even in these postmodern times.

4. GERMAN CONTEMPORARY DRAMA

To write to you about the Art of the Theatre I don't intend, because the Art of the Theatre positively does not exist, but one can write about the activity and inactivity of the Theatre, and if you ask me where the Theatre is most active, I reply it is in Germany. The German activity is not only impulsive but systematic, and this combination is going to bring the German Theatre in twenty years to the foremost position in Europe.

*(The Theatre in Russia, Germany and England,
Gordon Craig)*

Although this dissertation concentrates on the period between 1998 and 2004, it is worth mentioning what Birgit Haas, a German studies scholar, says in her book *Modern German Political Drama: 1980-2000*, which covers the period of time immediately before. She sees this as a period of crisis for playwriting in German language theatre for several reasons, including:

Following the postmodern wave of the 1970s, stage directors gained importance, and a culture of so-called 'Regie-theater' developed, a type of drama that gave directors complete freedom in their productions. Many directors shunned 'Werktreue,' the rendering of a dramatic text true to the author's intentions, in favor of experimental performance . . . Postmodern adaptations of classic playwrights also dominated the programs, making it hard for contemporary playwrights to gain recognition. (*Modern 1*)

We can clearly see the irreconcilability between drama and postmodernism, which will appear again through the voices of the new generation of playwrights at the end of the 1990s. The main questions posed as a consequence of the domination of the Regie-theater were:³³

³³ The main representative names of the *Regie-theater* in the 1970s were Peter Zadek, Peter Stein and Claus Peymann.

Is German theater of the post-1968 generation unable to address the burning problems of German politics? Are there no talented playwrights? Did the state's generous funding of the theater stifle all political criticism? Has the art of theater lost its beauty, thus remaining merely a superficial sequence of meaningless effects? (*Modern 2*)

Politically, the conservative wave which started with the elections of Ronald Reagan in the United States and Margaret Thatcher in England arrived in Germany through the election of the Christian Democrat candidate Helmut Kohl. He promoted the idea of an optimistic future, with the embracement of new technologies and a free market economy. That political atmosphere inhibited the acceptance of a more critical drama, with some rare exceptions such as: "Ludwig Fels [who] believes that theater must engage in political discourse and draw attention to the lower end of society in order to stir the audience out of its complacency. According to him, theater is still the fourth power within the state, and a means of enlightening people" (*Modern 3*). Fels was very aware of the young generation's intense engagement with technology and media, calling them "'techno-zombies,' [who] exposed themselves uncritically to B-films that glorify violence" (*Modern 3*).

Haas establishes 1989 and 1990 as the years of an important shift in German drama. A new kind of drama would appear:

To present political topics once again through a realistic theater. This meant the end of postmodern collages that had often tried to reveal and explain the mechanisms of world-wide political injustice in just three hours. Playwrights such as Dea Loher . . . Theresia Walser . . . and Roland Schimmelpfennig . . . to name but a few, focused on the private sphere and showed the impact of politics on real

characters. The slogan ‘Das Private ist politisch,’ once used by feminists in the 1970’s, has become the new maxim of drama writing. (*Modern* 7)

Haas identifies three characteristic features in works by these new playwrights, who replaced the post-1968 generation and could be called the post-1989 generation: focus on the personal, use of the realistic form, and rejection of postmodern features. The development of these features, I submit, is related to the playwrights’ need to explain (or explore) the failure of the capitalist system to reorganize the world in more humane and fair ways after the collapse of the Soviet Union. At the same time, these post-1989 playwrights comment on a world which became globalized but which, paradoxically, also saw the emergence of micro-nationalisms, such as the one that devastated the former Yugoslavia, and violent fundamentalisms like the one that led to the terrorist acts of September 11th. In my view, postmodern art is not built to respond to these social needs. Its aesthetic of self-absorption and hermeticism leads spectators into the work, not out to the world. While the fragmented, disorienting surface of a postmodern work may reflect the experience of fast-changing mediatized contemporary reality, it does not help the spectator to “control” that reality, to repeat Brecht’s verb in the “Experimental Theatre” passage quoted in Chapter One. Spectators may engage the postmodern work and make meaning from parts of it, but that meaning is more private than public, too subjective and provisional to be socially useful. Haas reports:

With respect to postmodernism, Dea Loher, one of the most successful German playwrights today, states: “I am sick of this nonsense of the postmodern lack of orientation which sets the social function of the theatre to zero, because nobody cares about what is going to be staged. (*Modern* 231)

This generation of playwrights, not necessarily their rejection of postmodernism but their very existence, is a response to the postdramatic claim of the disappearance of drama. About the Berliner Theatertreffen 2007, Hamburger and Williams inform us that it is not only the new drama that supports the survival of the genre:

In the early twenty-first century, the scripted drama is often considered to be an endangered species, and the very idea of a canon of plays forming the backbone of a theatrical culture has been consistently questioned. On first glance, the selection of plays for Theatertreffen 2007 seemed to contradict this, as it was dominated by scripted plays, six of which were classics and two of which were key works of the modern theatre; only two plays were new. (378)

The plays I consider in this dissertation are only a slice of the richness and variety of the new German language drama. If they differ in style and theme, they manifest one thing in common: the belief in the dramatic art as a forum for discussion and critique of the people and the world of our times.

Each play analysis is composed of a brief biography of the author, a synopsis of the play, an analysis of the dramatic elements identified in Jean-Pierre Ryngaert's *Introdução à Análise do Teatro* and Ubersfeld's actantial model, and, finally, a comparison with the features listed in Lehmann's categorization of the postdramatic theatre.

5. THE SOCIAL PLAYS

The plays called “social plays” in this dissertation present a group of characters that are not related, but who still live very close to each other. In the first play, *King Kongs Töchter*, we see an old people’s home with its dwellers and three cruel caretakers. In the second one, *Transdanubia Dreaming*, the scenario is Vienna, represented by two very different places: the traditional restaurant managed by an Austrian and the Kebab stand of a Turkish immigrant. Finally, we have *Täglich Brot*. This play introduces five characters who never meet, but who share a very similar daily routine. In this group of plays, the social themes are portrayed directly: work, xenophobia and the situation of elder people are literally included as elements of the fabula. These three contemporary playwrights use the form of drama to show their political commitment and raise relevant political issues of the day.

5.1. KING KONGS TÖCHTER (1998)

5.1.1. AUTHOR

Theresia Walser became a prominent German playwright almost out of the blue. After having worked for one year at an old people’s home (where she was certainly fed with abundant material for the play under discussion) she wrote two plays, for which she received in 1998 the “best young playwright of the year” award from the highly respected magazine *Theater Heute*. That was only the rehearsal. The following year she showed to everyone that her family name was not a mere warranty of literary pedigree.³⁴ She won a more prestigious award from the same

³⁴ She is the youngest daughter of the German writer Martin Walser.

Theater Heute, this time the “best playwright of the year” prize with her play *King Kongs Töchter*³⁵ and since then has become one of the most praised German dramatic authors. An important German theater critic, in trying to identify her unique voice as a playwright, says: “Her plays--and we have to acknowledge it--don’t sound like Strauss or Bernhard.³⁶ They sound like Theresia Walser. Theresia Walser has her own and unique sound” (“Ihre Stücke – man muss es letztlich zugeben – klingen nicht wie Strauss oder Bernhard. Sie klingen wie Theresia Walser. Theresia Walser hat einen eigenen Sound.”; Behrens).

5.1.2. SYNOPSIS

Three women in their late 20s and early 30s, apparently without any purpose in life, carry on the boring and repetitive task of taking care of the dwellers of an old people’s home. Berta, Carla, and Meggie each have an objective in life but they cannot pursue their dreams in the monotonous atmosphere of the home. Instead, they turn their creative energies elsewhere. Like the “three mythological Fates” (Case), they determine the day that their aged charges will die. They dress the octogenarian residents very theatrically, as stars of Hollywood’s golden age like Ginger Rogers and Judy Garland. They then kill the old person on the day of that star’s death. The play follows the murder of Frau Tormann as Mae West, and traces the rising and falling expectations of the young women who hope to leave that place and that condition. Rolfi, an electrician brought to the old people’s home by Frau Greti symbolizes the possibility of escaping from the routine. His accidental death while repairing the lamp, though, frustrates the young women’s expectations. At the end, nothing has changed: they continue working as caretakers, planning the next death performance and waiting for some unexpected event to rescue them.

³⁵ *King Kong’s Daughters*.

³⁶ The playwrights Botho Strauss and Thomas Bernhard.

King Kongs Töchter is a metaphor for a country that prefers to erase its past instead of understanding it in order to avoid the same mistakes. It is not only the old people who are stuck in an historical cul-de-sac; the protagonists, who represent the young generations, are, too. They show an inability to deal with the consequences of WWII and its legacy of guilt and, at the same time, their passive acceptance of the same humiliating job indicates their inability to make any meaningful change.

5.1.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – *King Kongs Töchter* is at the same time a descriptive and a metaphorical title. It is descriptive because it refers to the three protagonists of the play: Berta, Clara and Meggie. Using the title to point to a central group of characters is customary in drama (consider canonical plays with similar titles such as *The Learned Ladies*, *The Trojan Women*, or *The Sisters Rosenzweig*).³⁷ At the same time, the title communicates an image or metaphor: there is the allusion to the homonymous gorilla made famous by the Hollywood film of 1933. In that motion picture, the ape is portrayed as half beast and half human, instinctive and destructive yet capable of love and deserving of sympathy. We get the same impression from the three young women in *King Kongs Töchter*. We feel sorry for the monster in the film, even after we see his wide track of death and destruction. So, too, despite the murders, we feel compassion for the three women because their deeds were committed with an eye to easing other people's suffering. Like King Kong, they feel themselves very lonely and crave human affection. The irony Walser creates is that the gorilla in the film is probably the last of his species but the plight of the three protagonists is widely shared. Like everyone stuck in a dead-end job, Carla, Berta and Meggie

³⁷ Plays written by Molière, Euripides and Wendy Wasserstein respectively.

are dying every day of boredom and their inability to reach their objectives: “I would like to be a specialist . . .” (“Ich möchte spezialisiert sein . . .”; 84).

b) Genre – The author does not indicate any genre in her text. If we would give an affiliation to *King Kongs Töchter*, the concept of dark comedy developed by Styan would be the most appropriate choice.³⁸ Works in this genre have a funny tone, a deep subject and a sad ending--tone, subject, and ending being aspects of a play to consider when establishing its genre--and Walser’s drama certainly has these characteristics. Since dark comedy challenges the expectation of the audience in terms of how to react to the events presented on stage, a work in this genre produces something like the alienation effect of the epic theatre. It invites the spectator to be constantly aware of the illusory condition of theatrical art and gives room for critical evaluation of the situation of the play. Grotesque and doomed as they are, the old people in the play say many humorous things, like Herr Nübel explaining how to spell his name, which becomes a metacommentary on his personality: “Sorry, Sorry, that was me, Mister Nübel, capital N and small übel (“Entschuldigung, Entschuldigung, ich wars, Herr Nübel, grosses N und kleines übel”; 84).³⁹ The sad and melancholic ending is characteristic of this genre. Nothing has changed, and the whole action seems an illusion of reality. The characters usually return to their conditions at the beginning of the play, and Walser makes this explicit: in the final scene, the three daughters of King Kong are sitting on the same balcony as they were in scene one. This time, though, they do not have the olives, spirits, or costumes suggestive of a party.

c) Structure - The play is divided into scenes, which suggests a certain looseness of plot, but the scenes are chronologically arranged and logically connected. We don’t have here parallel

³⁸ See Styan, J.L. *The Dark Comedy*. Cambridge; Cambridge UP, 1968.

³⁹ This translation does not make sense in English, as “übel” in German can mean bad, nasty and wicked.

stories reinforcing each other thematically, without a cause-to-effect connection, but a typical dramatic construct in which all characters are part of the same narrative. The structure's circularity emphasizes the theme, which is the static position of the many Carlas, Bertas and Meggies who hate the past but are unable to visualize a future, experiencing it instead as "My future, this insane and solid future, this giant mass, which is still standing before me" ("Meine Zukunft, diese Irrsinnsmasse Zukunft, dieses gigantische Massiv, das da noch vor mir liegt"; 87).

Another structural consideration is what I shall call "the growth of tension." By this I mean the increasing intensity of the scenes as the protagonists encounter complications or dangers, and move closer to or further away from the objects of their desire. Consider, for example, Gustav Freytag's famous "pyramid" which charts dramatic tension from a low point (exposition), through a high point (climax), and back down to a low point (following the denouement). In *King Kongs Töchter*, one way of evaluating the tension is looking at the length of the scenes. These become shorter as we approach the climax, having the same frantic effect of short film takes.⁴⁰

d) Fabula - *King Kongs Töchter* can be read on two different levels. On a fictional level, the play tells the story of three not so young anymore women who take care of the inhabitants of an old people's home. Sociologically, this is a very relevant theme for countries in which the birth rate is lower than the death rate. The German population is becoming increasingly aged, and there must be found ways to support that slice of the population that is not active in the working world anymore. The play depicts the heavy daily routine of the caretakers, who have to live with demented and sex maniac 80-years old residents, cleaning the chairs full of urine and the dining room floor full of excrement. Meggie describes the bodily secretions she has to face every morning, right at the moment that her character enters the stage for the first time: "It's

⁴⁰ Table 2, when I analyze the item "character", shows the gradual decrease of the scenes length.

when I have to change the little sick bags inside there, to unwrap the small legs with thrombosis, to scoff at their hemorrhoids and to remove the potties full of rubbish that I have only one single wish: more blood, more blood instead of shit” (“Während ich da drinnen die Kottbeutelchen wechseln muss, die Thrombosebeinchen ein-und auswickle, Hämorrhoiden füttere und die Dreckspfannen unter den Betten hervorziehe, dass ich mir nur noch eines wünsche, mehr Blut, mehr Blut statt Scheisse”; 81). What seems an unreal situation, full of grotesque elements, particularly the macabre ritual of dressing the old people as Hollywood stars before their deaths, testifies to the notion that art and life are mutually influential. Haas informs us that this assassin obsession has an echo in real life: “With fatal incidents becoming ever more common at old peoples’ homes, the debate raised the question as to how long it would be before the grotesque situation depicted in *King Kongs Töchter* would eventually become reality. However, the topic is, sadly, not as far-fetched as it seems” (*Modern* 149). Another scholar makes a comment on the social implications of the play: “The play can be read as a dark warning of the crisis facing the aging population of Germany . . .” (Case). The justification for the act is the same one given by Carla in the play as a metaphor: “A swan can become 50 years old, Berta, but that is quite old for a swan, it turns over with every wave, it is barely able to keep his head up and someday it does not take his head out of the water anymore” (“Ein Schwan kann gerade mal 50 werden, Berta, das ist dann aber ziemlich alt für einen Schwan, der kippt bei jeder Welle um, der trägt den Kopf schon nicht mehr ganz oben, und irgendwann zieht der den Hals dann nicht mehr aus dem Wasser”; 80).

The deep level of the play’s meaning, still in terms of the fabula, deals with the political situation of post-unification Germany. The conflict now is not between east and west anymore, but between the present, represented in the play by Berta, Carla and Meggie and the past,

represented by the old folks in the home. “If there are race differences, I can guarantee that they are between the old and the young” (“Wenn es Rassenunterschiede gibt, das sage ich Ihnen, dann sind die aber zwischen alt und jung”; 88). Yet this opposition between old and young is only apparent. Both generations are lost, and the indiscriminate slaughter that takes place in the house in a very cosmetic way does not help the youth to establish their dominance. This is because the elderly people possess knowledge and memory and, with their eradication, the same historical mistakes can happen once again. The dramatist develops this sense of despair through the dialogue, with many references to birds like “Tock tock tock, the loneliest woodpecker for miles around” (“Tock tock tock, der einsamste Specht weit und breit”; 86) or “Such an old sea gull that sits there on the banister of a ferry and travels the whole day to and fro, because she needs the air of the sea” (“So eine alte Möwe, die sitzt dann auf dem Geländer von einer Fähre, und fährt den ganzen Tag lang hin und her, weil sie die Seeluft braucht”; 83). Despite their relative youth, there is no sense of hope for the daughters of King Kong. Their despair represents the paralysis of a generation that grew up under the long sixteen years of the conservative Christian-democrat Helmut Kohl, whose politics was very much in tune with the Reaganomics of the eighties, which meant among other issues the reduction of the welfare state.⁴¹ In ideological terms, this period set up a feeling of pride and optimism, promoting individualistic values and trying to neglect the disturbing past. “I only wouldn’t like to go back to where I came from, I have already told you that” (“Ich möcht nur nicht zurück, wo ich herkomm, das habe ich dir ja erklärt”; 87). Not talking about the past though means to forget. Thus, the lack of future for the characters is the consequence of their disconnection with the past. Meggie complains: “This is not my job. I

⁴¹ The book “The Political Economy of Germany under Chancellors Kohl and Schröder: Decline of the German Model?” by Jeremy Leaman offers enough numbers and facts that attest the economic affiliation of the CDU policies with the neo-liberalism practiced by the US and England in the 1980s and 1990s.

wonder when the main thing will show up from this crazy insignificant work. I am 32 and I wait daily for the moment my job finally pops up” (“Das ist nicht mein Beruf, ich frag mich, wann aus diesem Nebensachengewurschtel endlich die Hauptsache erscheint. Ich bin jetzt 32 und warte täglich, das hier mal endlich mein Beruf auftaucht”; 84). The tone is incredibly Chekhovian, and the passage reminds us of Olga in *Three Sisters* complaining about her job as a teacher. Walser perceives the historical similarities between pre-revolutionary Russia and post-unification Germany through the disorientation of the characters.⁴² According to a scholar: “Like much of her other work, *King Kong’s Daughters* allows for social commentary without ever retreating from its fundamentally comic core” (Case).

e) Time - From the standpoint of the spatiotemporal organization, Walser respects the unities of time and place. The action takes place on February 12th, as it is told us by Frau Tormann’s son, Winnie “My dear Mom, today, on the 12th of February, blue sky and mild” (“Mein liebes Müttchen, heute an einem 12. Februar, Montag, gewitterblau und mild”; 82) and the next morning, according to the stage directions of scene 12. Because the past is an important theme in the play, dates and hours are constantly emphasized by the characters. “After 10...20 years this is the cleanest firearm locker” (“Nach 10...20 Jahren ist das der reinste Waffenschrank”; 80). “Still better than Frau Franz, October 10th, Ginger Rogers . . .” (“Immer noch besser als Frau Franz, 10. Oktober, Ginger Rogers . . .”; 81). “After all an owl can become 120, and that is not even old for an owl” (“Immerhin, eine Eule kann 120 werden, und das ist noch nicht mal alt für eine Eule”; 83). “Since 1953, Hilde, he is on the way” (“Seit 1953, Hilde, ist der schon unterwegs”; 84). Herr Pott’s poem title is related to time as is the obsession of Carla

⁴² We could sign a couple more similarities between those two plays, starting with the number of female protagonists, who sometimes seem to be facets of a single character; the importance of memory, through its lack and also through how it sometimes betrays us and the absence of perspective for quite young characters.

about the age different kinds of birds can reach. Walser also establishes a sense of despair through the structure of the play, which is circular, ending the same way it started: with the three young women sitting at the balcony and looking at the street, as if they were trapped inside the old people's home. Although the play is clearly chronological, the ending is very influenced by the nihilistic structures developed by playwrights of the Absurdist style, such as Beckett and Ionesco, in which the stress on repetition suggests the lack of purpose of human beings' lives and their inability to change the status quo. At the same time, this literary source implies the need and affection that people develop for each other and their preference for staying together instead of separating from each other. Despite its circularity, the play's last scene is entitled "Endscene" ("Schlussszene"; 89), which suggests the three young women are going to stay together for a long time, if not forever.

f) Space - The unity of space is very neoclassical too. Every scene takes place in the old people's home. The scenes move from the balcony to the dining room and to other non-specified rooms in the house, but all of them convey a sense of imprisonment. No character leaves the space, except for Frau Greti, who comes back with her ostensible lover Rolfi. Winnie's voice on the cassette externalizes their spatial constriction mockingly: "*We listen to his laughter. And suddenly I figure out how free I am. What else is freedom, Mom, but a minute long concert for an in-between*" ("*Man hört ihn lachen. Und plötzlich denke ich, wie bin ich frei, und was ist Freiheit anderes, Müttchen, als ein Minutenwunschkonzert für Zwischendurch*"; 89).

g) Information – The situation is easily understandable through the dialogue and the visual images of the scenes. From the beginning of the play the audience understands where the characters are and what their function in the plot is: they are either residents or caretakers. The only private information, revealed slowly, is what makes the plot unique: the way the old people

die. The author is here purposely inviting the audience first to get an empathy with these three young women, who don't have any other choice than to clean the resident's excrements. Then, she challenges our opinion about the protagonists, through the scene in which they dress Frau Tormann as Mae West. From there on, the spectators are able to choose between two contradictory views of the same character, in this way developing a critical attitude with regard to the play. The quantity of information is abundant. There is nothing hidden from the audience because it is not a melodrama, in which the birth mark is going to be revealed at the end of the plot. Here, what makes the audience follow and care about the protagonists is not how they will react when facing the truth, but whether or not they will be able to break with a life that makes them so unhappy. Scenes one and two, which are very long, contain the exposition. For this reason, the information we need in order to understand the play is concentrated in the beginning of it. This is very common in contemporary playwriting. Authors are not interested to play detective games with the audience anymore. If the well-made play formula is valid, it has to work on behalf of a less artificial depiction of our society. That does not exclude stylization, but playwrights are interested in making audience members face themselves on stage, and not offer a mere entertainment program. When people see Walser's play, they laugh, they get shocked, but they think, and this is what contemporary committed playwrights seek.

h) Dialogue - Language seems to be a key-element. On the one hand, it installs absurdist and grotesque tones, on the other hand, it is beautifully musical and lyrical. Walser creates a fantastic universe in *King Kongs Töchter*. Realistically justified by the murdering instinct of the nurses and the high age of the inmates, the atmosphere rapidly becomes a kind of fairy tale, *Alice in Wonderland* being the most natural referent due to its recognized weirdness. Scene two remits us to the mad-tea party in *Alice* with Frau Tormann as the sleeping Mouse. Berta calls her "Old

little mouse” (“Altes Mäuschen”; 84). Meggie feels herself exploited by the other two caretakers as a kind of Cinderella. Carla notes that Berta collected exactly seven bedside tables using Snow White’s expression of astonishment when the princess finds out the dwarves’ hut: “And exactly seven little bedside tables” (“Und genau sieben Nachttischchen”; 80). The grotesquerie goes on with the routine of dressing the victims as Hollywood-stars on the same day of those artists’ deaths, “July 11th, Judy Garland’s death, we’ve already had that one” (“11. Juli, Todestag Judy Garland, hatten wir schon”; 81), and bizarre elements such as Frau Albert’s removable leg, the attempt of laying Frau Tormann on a sofa too narrow for her, Frau Greti’s trying to coil her toes with Rolfi’s toes and the recurrent voice of Frau Tormann’s son. The playwright is definitely not interested in realism as a style, and some would say that: “Walser writes comedy in a theatrical and grotesque idiom sometimes suggestive of Friedrich Dürrenmatt’s plays” (Case). Certainly echoes of Genet can be found in the play when in scene one Berta and Carla imitate Meggie like the maids in Genet’s homonymous play.⁴³

The musicality of the dialogue appears in many forms. One of them is through the repetitive sentences spoken by many characters in the various scenes like Carla in scene one “What do you want me to say?” (“Frag nicht nach Sonnenschein?”; 80), and Herr Nübel in scene two: “But that’s again exactly the nice thing about it, isn’t it?” (“Aber das ist ja auch wieder das Schöne daran, nicht wahr?”; 82). The verbal exchange is still naturalistic but full of poetry. Behrens says: “What comes to our eyes in Theresia Walser’s plays, or better, to our ears, is her artificial take on everyday language, a take whose melodic beauty she is able to bring out. Walser has an unmistakable flair for sonorous words and for rhythms, which she permissively in a springy way gives preference to. She herself likes to talk about ‘Music of the language.’”

⁴³ Another very plausible comparison would be with *The Balcony*, regarding the deviated sexual atmosphere and the enclosure in a claustrophobic space.

(“Was an Theresia Walsers Stücken unmittelbar ins Auge, eher noch: ins Ohr fällt, ist ihr artifizieller Zugriff auf die Alltagssprache, der sie eine geradezu melodische Schönheit zu entlocken versteht. Walser hat ein untrügliches Gespür für klingende Wörter und für Rhythmen, von denen sie die nachgiebig federnden bevorzugt. Sie selbst redet gern von ‘Sprachmusik’”; Behrens).

Scene 13, a lovely lyrical choir in which the three characters involved are constantly completing the sentence that came before, or starting an incomplete one, is an example of her “Sprachmusik”:⁴⁴

BERTA. Me, the only . . .

CARLA. The only witness . . .

MEGGIE. Of a peaceful Stalingrad.

BERTA. Then I thought

CARLA. Everyone should save the world.

MEGGIE. But that that remains . . .

CARLA. That remains . . .

BERTA. That abandons me.

(BERTA. Ich, die einzige . . .

CARLA. Die einzige Zeugin . . .

MEGGIE. Eines friedlichen Stalingrads.

BERTA. Da dachte ich

CARLA. Es sollen doch alle die Welt retten.

MEGGIE. Aber das, was übrig bleibt . . .

⁴⁴ Once again we see the influence of Chekhov. We have only to think of the last scene of *Three Sisters*.

CARLA. Was übrig bleibt . . .

BERTA. Das überlasst mir.) (89)

Finally, consider Herr Pott and his incomplete poem named “The bird of five a.m.” (“Die Fünfuhrmorgenvogel”; 86) is a literal insertion of a lyric element in the play. Herr Pott’s insistence on reciting his poem throughout the drama suggests the need for a more beautiful language, both in a literal and a metaphorical way.

i) Character – Although each character has a dramatic function in a play, the first task of character analysis is try to find the protagonist of the action. That is helpful not only for an understanding of the story but, on an ideological level, also to understand through whose eyes the story is being told. That is harder to figure out in drama, as there is usually not the figure of a narrator who invites us to see the facts according to his vision of them. Nevertheless, in a play, the configuration is an important tool to find out the main characters.

The configuration table shows how long the characters participate in each scene. If the character’s numerical presence is in brackets, it does not have any speech as it is the case with Frau Tormann in all her scenes. The same happens with Rolfi, whose body is present on stage, but he does not deliver any speech, because he is dead. Winnie, Frau Tormann’s son, is an unusual case of a character whose voice is audible, but he is not on stage. His participation is represented in brackets too. The numbers depicted represent the length of the scene in number of pages. So, scene 1, for instance, has the length of nine pages. Carla and Berta are present during the whole scene, whereas Meggie enters only in the last page of it. In *King Kongs Töchter* we have the following disposition of characters scene after scene:

Table 2

Configuration in *King Kongs Töchter*

<i>Characters x Scenes</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
<i>Scene length</i>	9	9	6	2	2	3	5	6	3	2	1	1	3
BERTA	9	9	6		2		5	1	2				3
CARLA	9	9	6		2		5	1	3				3
MEGGIE	1	9	6		2		5	1	1	2			3
F GRETI		8	6			3		3				1	
F ALBERT		8	6	2		3		1				1	
H ALBERT		8		2				1				1	
H POTT		8	1	2		1		1	2	2		1	
H NÜBEL		8	1	1							1	1	
F TORMANN		(9)			(2)		(5)						
ROLFIE								6	2	2	1	(1)	
WINNIE		(9)										(1)	

If we add up the amount of time spent on stage by each character in the play, the King Kong daughters are the characters that are visible for most of the time. Considering the title of the play, we already get two formal indications of the play's protagonists. A third visual image communicating information about their function as main characters can be seen through the constellation, a graphic that indicates the relationships of the characters.

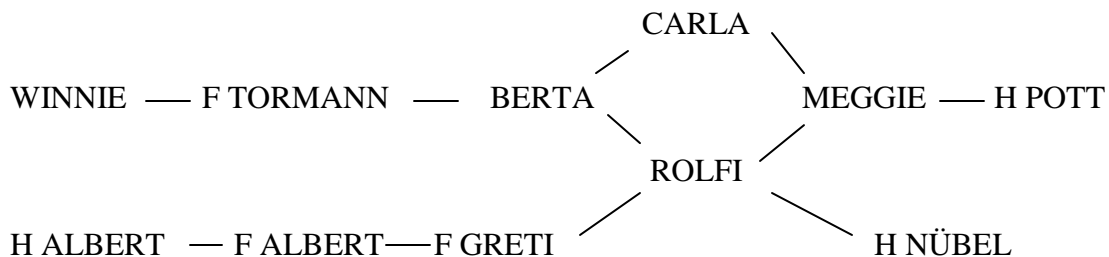


Fig. 4. Constellation in *King Kongs Töchter*

Carla, Meggie and Berta compose the core of the play together with Rolfi. The other characters, basically the dwellers, are in orbit around them.

The three female central characters look very similar with respect to their inability to escape the metaphorical imprisonment of the old people's home, but if we take a look at their actantial models, each one of the three protagonists has a different objective in the play. This

peculiarity gives a coloring that must be understood by both director and actress, or else one runs the risk of portraying characters without personal traits.

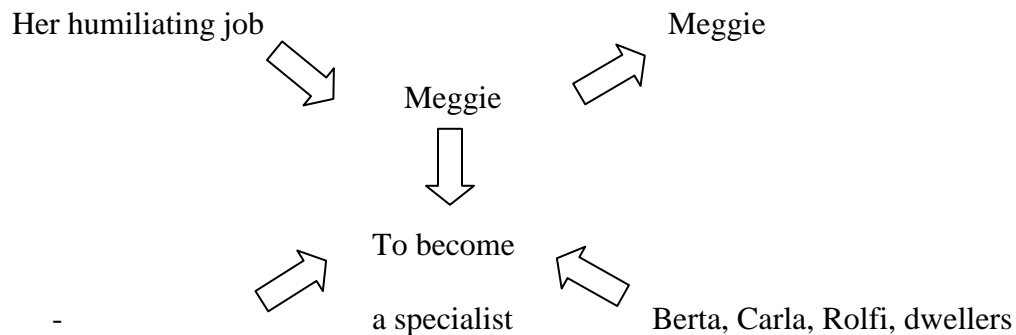


Fig. 5. Actantial Model for Meggie in *King Kongs Töchter*

Meggie wants to become a “specialist”. She is tired of cleaning the excrements of those old people. She complains constantly she is already 32 years old and that her “real” job hasn’t showed up so far. Her objective is not simply quitting her job. She is only going to do that if she has something big waiting for her. “I’d like that people saw my job the same way people recognize a top athlete through her neck . . .” (“Ich möchte, dass man mir meinen Beruf ansieht, so wie man eine Spitzensportlerin am Hals erkennt . . .”; 84). Among the three protagonists, she is the one who works hardest. Berta and Carla are her antagonists because they refuse to do the hard jobs, and Meggie gets annoyed with that: “You are having quite a lot of fun, aren’t you?” (“Ihr habt hier wohl eine ganz lustige Party, was?”; 81). However, she goes on with her obligations as the cleaning lady of the home. Rolfi is not a helper in her pursuit of her objective, because he does not hold the promise of a job. If he lived, and they stayed together, she would be as trapped as she is now.

Berta is different. She is the cerebral member of the group. She even has dreams of being awarded a prize:

BERTA. I have just dreamt that I got an award.

CARLA. Oh really? What for?

BERTA. For my job, for my brave plans. I was insanely happy and I thought finally I am recognized, then I realized who was going to give me the award.

(BERTA. Neulich hab ich geträumt, dass ich einen Preis bekomme.

CARLA. Ah ja, für was den?

BERTA. Für meine Arbeit, für meine mutigen Pläne. Ich habe mich irrsinnig gefreut, dachte, endlich, endlich ist es soweit, dann habe ich erfahren, wer mir den Preis vergibt.) (81)

Like Meggie, she wants to leave but down a different path: “The moment I meet a man...” (“Lerne ich einen Mann kennen...”; 81). Her actantial model can be visualized as:

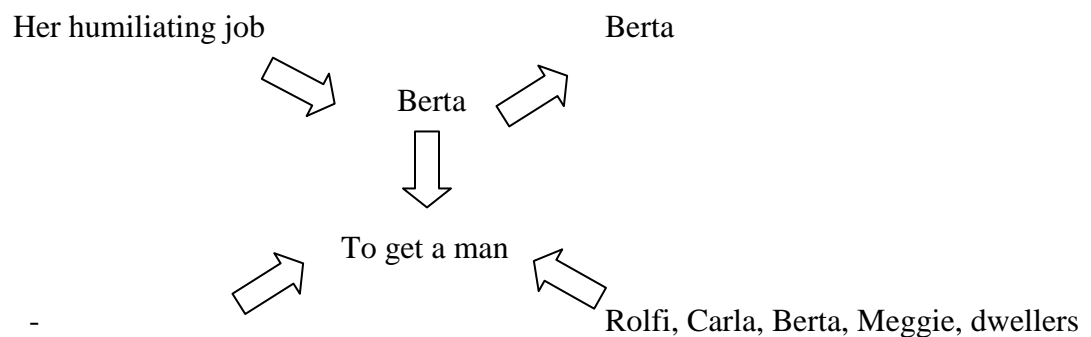


Fig. 6. Actantial Model for Berta in *King Kongs Töchter*

She has many antagonists: Meggie, for having taken Rolfi from her; Rolfi, for having died, erasing the possibility of leaving the home and being with a man; Carla, because of her feelings toward her and also due to Carla’s worship of Berta; and finally Berta, because of her unappealing job and her unattractive hands, dilacerated by the work: “The worst is in the evening before I go to bed, then I’d like to chop them off. These hands, I think, do not belong in my bed” (“Abends its es am schlimmsten, bevor ich ins Bett gehe, ich möchte sie dann am liebsten abnehmen. Diese Hände, denke ich, gehören nicht in mein Bett”; 84).

Carla is the least ambitious of the caretakers, because her object of desire is very close to her, in spite of its inaccessibility. She even tries to grasp it, but the reaction shows its disapproval:

Carla kisses Berta on the mouth.

BERTA. Did you get mad . . . or maybe your brain is not working anymore.

CARLA. You . . . you have just made me so sick . . . that I thought, I could . . . overcome it if I kissed you . . .

BERTA. Ugh, how people don't know each other, ugh.

(Carla küsst Berta auf den Mund.

BERTA. Hast Du den Arsch offen . . . oder ist es bei dir das Hirn nicht ganz dicht.

CARLA. Du . . . du hast mich gerade so wahnsinnig angeekelt . . . dass ich dachte, ich kann . . . das nur überwinden, wenn ich dich küsse . . .

BERTA. Igitt, wie man sich nicht kennt, igitt.) (81)

Her actantial model follows:

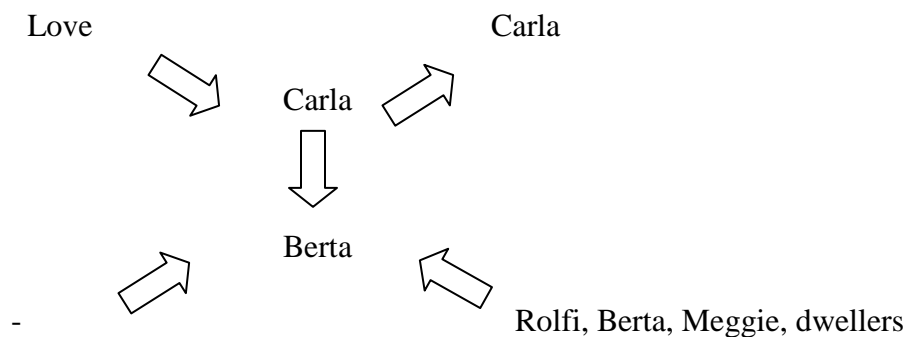


Fig. 7. Actantial Model for Carla in *King Kongs Töchter*

Here, again, the character has to face many antagonists, which makes her pursuit even more difficult. In all actantial models, the dwellers appear as antagonists. If for Meggie and

Berta, they are the physical reason for keeping them away from their objectives, for Carla, their needs reduce her chances of being alone with Berta.

Through an actantial analysis of the three protagonists, we see that Walser renounces the traditional hero, because the German young generation cannot fulfill this function. The defeat of the King Kong's daughters at the end, as none of them gets to their objectives, mirrors the passivity failure of a whole generation.

5.1.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

The only two elements of the postdramatic theatre that one could argue resonate in Walser's play are the plethora and the musicalization, both of them with restrictions though.

If plethora means the deformation of the form in order to create a "horror vacui," then we could say that the grotesque elements collaborate to create this sensation. Nevertheless, the forms are never exaggerated. We still have a comprehensible world in front of us. One could further argue that the grotesque is not an invention of postmodernity, but of the Romans. (After all, the term refers back to the "grottos" of Nero's Domus Aurea palace which were painted with weird, incongruous, and disturbing figures). Later, of course, aesthetic theorists of the Romantic era contrasted the grotesque with the sublime, e.g. Victor Hugo in the "Preface to Cromwell." Therefore, Walser could have found her influences in pre-postdramatic playwrights.

Musicalization, on the other hand, is considered by many critics as the trademark of Walser's playwriting. Lehmann though means something different when he discusses this aspect of the postdramatic theatre. He refers to sounds without meaning as opposed to the meaningful spoken language of dramatic theatre. We do not see sounds without meaning in *King Kongs Töchter*. Walser's word plays and the symphonic structure of her sentences affect the audience

emotionally and sensorially but also rationally. It is musical dramatic dialogue, not postdramatic theatre music.

5.2. TRANSDANUBIA DREAMING (2000)

5.2.1. AUTHOR

The same way that *King Kongs Töchter* catapulted Theresia Walser to an Olympic place among German language dramatists, *Transdanubia Dreaming* was Bernhard Studlar's claim to playwriting fame. Then still a student at the prestigious *Szenisches Schreiben* course at the *Universität der Künste* in Berlin, a school that has trained and revealed many important contemporary dramatic authors, he won the highly coveted first prize at the Heidelberger Plays' Market in 2001 with this play about Austrian identity. Although he authored *Transdanubia Dreaming* alone, Studlar has written many plays in partnership with Andreas Sauter, his former classmate in Berlin, such as *A. ist eine andere*, which received the Kleist Award for young dramatists in 2000. In 2005 Studlar founded the *Wiener Wortstaetten*, an important intercultural initiative to support young dramatists, and was nominated for the Nestroy Theater Award, one of the most important public recognitions in the theatre arts in the German language world.

Studlar's work reminds one of the opening sentences in Maeterlinck's "*The Tragical in Daily Life*": "There is a tragic element in the life of every day that is far more real, far more penetrating, far more akin to the true self that is in us than the tragedy that lies in great adventure" (383). According to a critic, Studlar's plays: "Deal with the unreasonable demands of the daily routine. Large tragedies are initiated by trivial things. 'If for someone it is already difficult to buy some bread because he is too shy, then it's in this trifle that lies the tragedy of his

life', says Studlar" ("Handeln von den Zumutungen des Alltags. Von kleinen Dingen, die große Tragödien auslösen. 'Wenn für jemanden schon schwierig ist, ein Semmerl kaufen zu gehen, weil er zu schüchtern ist, dann liegt in dieser Kleinigkeit doch bereits die Tragödie seines Lebens', meint Studlar"; Cerny). Studlar definitely cares about his characters. Moritz Rinke, in a speech at the *Heidelberger Stückemarkt* in 2001, explains the reason for the audience's empathy with Studlar's characters:

These depressed characters delight us because the author obviously really likes them, perhaps even loves them, which is rare in recent theatre since as soon as writers set about prospecting human beings' blackest depths they act as referees and stand high above their creations. Studlar allows his characters to take precedence and thus tells their story without any arrogance. Perhaps this absence of arrogance is to some extent the secret of comedy in drama. The author himself must first restrain himself in what is said through his characters so that the public can let rip with their imagination or laughter. ("Transdanubia Dreaming")

5.2.2. SYNOPSIS

Manfred is an ordinary Austrian citizen, but he is also a contemporary age Everyman. He is not happy with his job; he is a lonely person; he thinks other people are happier than he is. Karli and Eva share their love, while Manfred complains about his own loneliness: "Well at least he had a girlfriend" ("Na wenigstens hat er a Freundin ghabt"; 62). Herr Josef "was in Greece last summer" ("war in Griechenland letzten Summa"; 62), while Manfred has been going to the same places all his life. One of his usual hangouts is his friend Prinoszil's restaurant. There, he meets many types that are representative of the Austrian society but he also encounters Jennifer,

with whom he spies the possibility of a closer relationship. That expectation fails when Heinz, her drunken husband, arrives and takes her home by her hair. Manfred then goes to another friend's place, which is Sheriff's Turkish food stand. There he meets Hansi, a xenophobe taxi driver, who will eventually set fire to the stand. At the end of the play, Manfred faces both Jennifer and Hansi. Representing his personal happiness and his social consciousness, these two characters pose a conflict for Manfred; it may be Studlar's way of suggesting that the personal and public spheres exist at the expense of each other.

Music is an important element in the play. Jennifer sings, Herr Josef sings and we listen to Turkish music on the radio in the scenes at the Kebab Stand. This sound element is important to establish first the melancholic and wistful atmosphere of the play and second to make a reference to an environment in which music has always played a historical important role, namely, the city of Vienna.

5.2.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – *Transdanubia Dreaming* begins us thinking about a cliché, one of the hallmarks of this play. The Danube is the river that flows through Vienna and is the motif of many songs, but particularly waltzes. The rhythm of a waltz is usually gay and frantic, but there are some that are more contemplative, suggesting the melancholy of a sunset at the river bank as one sips a glass of wine, or as the Austrians usually say, “a Viertel Wein.” The “Dreaming” in the title relates to the fact that many Austrians have not awakened from the privileged imperial condition they enjoyed until WWI. They still look down on others from a position of hierarchical superiority. This is seen in the play through the widows Wurm and Merlicek, when they complain about Jennifer. In the same way, the xenophobic taxi driver Hansi runs down the

Turks. Yet the “dreaming” in the title also refers to the personal dream of Manfred who looks forward to the day when he can no longer feel himself a loser. The prefix “Trans” carries this thought as well since it connotes transcending something, evoking both the idea of a country that needs to transcend its political condition and the idea of a person who wants to transcend his miserable existence. The title here, different than *King Kongs Töchter*, is more metaphorical than descriptive. It does not refer to a character in particular (which calls for other formal indications of the protagonist of the play), but to a dream that Manfred has in the second part of the play. It works better as a metaphor. Since Manfred is the only character who does not have a stable life, or at least, who is not satisfied with the life that he has, the dream of transposing one’s reality (Danubia) belongs to him.

b) Genre – The author does not indicate any genre in his text. There is a subtitle and an epigraph by his compatriot playwright Thomas Bernhard, which implies an affiliation with twentieth century Austrian playwrights.⁴⁵ We can literally start with Thomas Bernhard, and the cliché that all Austrians are apathetic. Arthur Schnitzler is alluded to in the play, when Manfred thinks about drowning himself, like Johanna in *Der Einsame Weg*. We can feel Hörvath’s legacy in the portrayal of these outsider characters and less obviously in a reference to his stupid death in Paris:

HERR JOSEF. Listen to this: During the storm yesterday someone was hit by a tree. *Reads*. “The 35-years old installation contractor Ferdinand R. was going home from his girlfriend’s house, when he was hit by a falling branch of a chestnut tree.” *Shakes his head*. A tragedy.

⁴⁵ “We are Austrians, we are apathetic” (“Wir sind Österreicher, wir sind apatisch”; 61).

(HERR JOSEF. Stell da vor: Bei dem Gewitter gestern is ana von an Bam derschlogen worden. *Liest.* “Der 35-jährige Wiener Installateur Ferdinand R. befand sich auf dem Heimweg von seiner Freundin, als er von einem herabfallenden Ast einer Kastanie getroffen wurde.” *Schüttelt den Kopf.* A Tragödie.) (62)

This multiplicity of references suggests that Studlar is contemplating different authors and their styles: the psychological study of characters in Schnitzler, the depiction of middle and lower class characters in Hórvath and the nihilism of Bernhard. If we had to decide upon one genre, as the theme is serious and the tone is funny, the end of the story would give the final word. Is it a sad or a funny ending? The next to last scene of the play is a relief for Manfred, after so many mishaps: Jennifer being taken by her husband, the fire of Manfred’s friend’s kebab stand, and the jealous dream with Joseph and Jennifer together. Yet the ending is dubious. Is Manfred going to risk his happiness fighting with Hansi? Is he going to behave apathetically as, according to Bernhard, all the Austrians do? If we decide for a happy ending, it is a comedy. If we decide for a sad one, it is a dark comedy. However, if the text does not allow us to go for one or for the other genre, then we conclude how insufficient the traditional genres are to include every existing drama.

c) Structure – Following the structure used by Büchner in *Woyzeck*, *Transdanubia Dreaming* is the journey of a man throughout different situations. Remitting us to Dante, it is Manfred’s passage through Purgatory (his unhappiness confronted by the happiness of other people, for instance Eva and Karli), Hell (Sheriff’s stand’s fire) and Heaven (his final union with Jennifer). The play is divided into four “parts.” It is an unequal division, but the lengths of the parts suggest the curve of dramatic intensity, with the climax in part three, and the fourth part as

an apparent Chekhovian fourth act in which people are saying goodbye. Studlar, though, builds an unexpected fourth part, with Manfred eventually finding the change in his life that he was looking for. The number of scenes in each part also suggests the choice of the climax in part 3, returning to the effect of short scenes already described in the analysis of *King Kongs Töchter*:

Table 3

Number of Scenes of the Parts in *Transdanubia Dreaming*

PARTS	# OF SCENES
1	8
2	6
3	3
4	5

One of the most unexpected scenes in terms of structure (thinking in terms of traditional patterns) is scene 4, part 2. This is called a “Dream play” by the author. It is when Manfred experiences a delirium involving almost all the other characters of the play. Also unexpected are the in between scenes called “Zwischenspiel.” They never involve Manfred, the protagonist. These are parallel stories of characters connected to Manfred in different ways that function to advance the plot or highlight elements of Manfred’s life.

d) Fabula - Studlar wrote a play about a society, “a slice of Vienna.” So, besides his protagonist, Studlar populates his play with representative types of Austrian society. Interestingly, there is not a binary opposition between young and old, as we saw in *King Kongs Töchter*; there are at least three identifiable age groups, symbolizing the present, the past and the future of the country. If we take the classical Roman division of the human life, we have an interesting and balanced division of the characters.

Table 4

Division of the Characters According to Their Ages in *Transdanubia Dreaming*

<i>Adolescentia</i> (15-28)	<i>Virilitas</i> (29-49)	<i>Gravitas</i> (50-70) and <i>Senectus</i> (over 71)
Karli Eva Ünal	Manfred Jennifer Heinz Sheriff	Herr Josef Hansi Frau Merliceck Frau Wurm

The past is represented by Herr Joseph, the owner of the restaurant (and as an actant in Manfred's actantial model, the helper of the protagonist), and by two widows, who rigidly keep Austrian traditions as represented by their food preferences in the following excerpt of dialogue.

WURM. Would you please tell us, Mister Josef, what are the specials of the day?

MERLICEK. Do you have Topfenstrudel?

HERR JOSEF. As if you didn't know that Mrs, Merliceck. And for Mrs. Wurm an Apfelstrudel, right?

Both ladies nod greedily.

(WURM. Sagens Herr Josef, was hams den für a Mehlspeis heut?

MERLICEK. Gibts an Topfenstrudel?

HERR JOSEF. Als wenns des net wissen taten Frau Merliceck. Und für die Frau Wurm einen Apfelstrudel, ned woa?

Die zwei Frauen nicken gierig.) (62)

The last member of this old people's group is the nationalist and xenophobic taxi-driver Hansi. He is constantly voicing patriotic cries like "Austria first!" ("Österreich zuerst!"; 65) or "For the homeland!" ("Auf die Heimat!"; 65). The other side of the coin comes with his hate against foreigners, represented in the play by two Turkish characters. Hansi doesn't mince his words: "I don't take any foreigner in my car" ("Ich nehme keine Ausländer in mein Auto"; 65). He even justifies the reason for xenophobia. "The foreign infiltration is splashing over. *Thinks it over.* I

mean, there will be more and more foreigners, aside from me and the stupid Simmel. How can't you become hateful" ("Die Überfremdung schwappt über. *Denkt kurz nach.* I man, es wern immer mehr Ausländer, ausser mir und der bladen Simmel. Wennst da kan hass kriegst"; 65).

The present is the core of the play, in which we have the main character (Manfred), his object of desire (Jennifer), the antagonist for this specific object (Heinz), and a Turkish character (Sheriff). Sheriff's placement in the "present" category implies that these foreigners have not just arrived. Indeed, they helped to build the welfare state of many European economies which had a shortage of workers after WWII.

The young characters suggest the future. There will be Turks living in Austria, like Ünal, and their optimism contrasts with Manfred's depressed state. For Eva, the feeling of happiness is enough: "*Laughs.* I'm surprised with myself that I am so happy. Till the evening" ("*Lacht.* Mich wunderts selber, dass ich so glücklich bin. Bis am Abend"; 69). Karli, in his turn, does not care about the future:

EVA. What do you wanna do?

KARLI. Marry you.

EVA. Idiot.

KARLI. How's that?

EVA. Because one has to earn money before he gets married. Well, any idea?

KARLI. No idea. *Pause.*

(EVA. Was willstn du einmal machen?)

KARLI. Dich heiraten.

EVA. Depp.

KARLI. Wieso?

EVA. Weil ma zuerst ein Geld verdienen muss, bevor ma heirat. Also, weisst es schon?

KARLI. Ka Ahnung. *Pause.*) (65)

In building a concrete future through characters visible on stage, we could say that Studlar's vision is more optimistic than that of Walser. The same belief in the human race will show up when Manfred and Jennifer get together at the end of the play, notwithstanding the subtle irony of the "happy ending." It is not possible to wholly believe in the happy ending: first because it is not the very end of the play; second, because it includes a metatheatrical speech; and last, adding the kitsch element of the roses, Studlar immediately reminds us to the dream world of Strauss and his "Roses of the South" Waltz.

JENNIFER. . . . Jesus!

MANFRED. What's up?

JENNIFER. Your friend forgot the flowers in his hurry.

MANFRED. No, they belong to me. *Takes the bunch of flowers.* Actually they are for you.

JENNIFER. Me?

MANFRED. Here. *Gives her the roses.*

JENNIFER. Thank you. *Kisses him on the cheek.*

MANFRED. *Kisses her for a long time on the mouth.* I love you.

JENNIFER. Hey, hello.

They kiss each other. Herr Josef leaves the building with the sandwiches.

HERR JOSEF. Well, it took some time . . . There you go. Well, now look at me.

Stands embarrassed in front of Jennifer and Manfred. And who's going to eat the

sandwiches now?

MERLICEK. We are.

WURM. Now it doesn't matter anymore.

HERR JOSEF. *Sitting with the widows.* Enjoy.

Blackout.

(JENNIFER. . . . Jessas!

MANFRED. Was is?

JENNIFER. Ihr Freund hat seine Blumen vergessen in der Eile.

MANFRED. Na, die gehören mir. *Nimmt den Strauss.* Aber eigentlich sinds für Sie.

JENNIFER. Mir?

MANFRED. Da. *Gibt ihr die Rosen.*

JENNIFER. Danke. *Küsst ihn auf die Wange.*

MANFRED. *Küsst sie breit auf den Mund.* Ich liebe dich.

JENNIFER. Na hallo.

Die beiden küssen einander. Herr Josef mit den zwei Broten aus der Gaststube.

HERR JOSEF. So. Hat a bisserl gedau . . . Hoppala. Na da schau her. *Steht verloren vor Jennifer und Manfred.* Und wer isst jetzt die Schmalzbrot?

MERLICEK. Wir!

WURM. Jetzt is auch schon wurscht.

HERR JOSEF. *Setzt sich zu den Witwen.* Mahlzeit.

Black.) (70)

The relationship between the characters can be grasped in a better way, through the visual representation of the constellation:

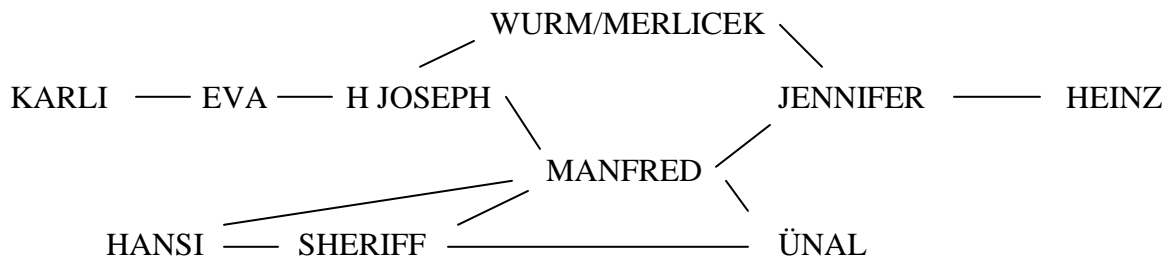


Fig. 8. Constellation in *Transdanubia Dreaming*

Through this scheme, it is possible to see the privileged position of Manfred in the plot. His is the story being told. It is the story of a sad guy, who frequents the same beer garden every summer and who witnesses other people's lives, while his flows without a clear purpose.

e) Time – The play is chronological and the only scene which does not respect the logic of time is Manfred's dream in scene 4, part 2. There are indications of time throughout the play. Indications of day and hour of the day--“Early Saturday afternoon” (“Früher Samstag Nachmittag”; 61)--and of the season: “I'm glad that summer is there” (“I bin froh, dass jetzt Sommer is”; 61). There is almost a unity of time. The first to third parts take place in a Saturday afternoon and the day after. The fourth part, though, takes place some weeks later. Again we see the Chekhovian intention of dissolving the tension established in the third act. We are brought back to a Saturday afternoon, and the idea that “things never change” is in the air. Studlar contradicts Thomas Bernhard's premise and makes Jennifer and Manfred active figures. That breaks the possibility of a circular structure.

f) Space - The unity of space is respected too. There are only two places of action: Herr Joseph's beer garden and Sheriff's kebab stand. Both environments are outside. This suggests that the characters are metaphorically homeless; they don't have a place to call their own. This is

a clear social comment by Studlar, who once again is exploring the union of the personal and public spheres. And food is an important element. Both spaces are eating places. The opposition of a native and a foreign place, one firmly rooted on earth (the Vienna Forest) and the other at the bank of the Danube river, suggesting the closeness to an ephemeral natural element like water, shows how Austrian society privileges its native elements. The kebab stand is provisional, as can be seen through its furniture: camping chairs and a plastic table.

g) Information – Following Ryngaert’s discussion information, we can say that the information is abundant. We know exactly what is going on, who the characters are and what their objectives are. The time and space of the action are made clear both by the stage directions and by the dialogue. The information is concentrated, that is, there is an exposition that gives us all the necessary elements for understanding of the plot. Finally, the information is accessible both to characters and audience. The only information feature that is held private until the end of the play is the identity of Hansi. The audience and Manfred know that Hansi was the one who put fire on the kebab’s stand, but the other characters do not. That gives a bigger social responsibility to him to unmask the incendiary. Apart from that, the information is very accessible to the characters and to the spectators.

h) Dialogue - The dialogue of the play is another dependable and concrete textual source that informs us how the characters relate to each other. It allows us to create what Ryngaert denominates the “relationship table” and the “social table.”⁴⁶ The first table establishes the relationships between the characters--love, family, friendship, commitment--which helps to

⁴⁶ See from this author, *Introdução à análise do Teatro*, p.113.

situate the audience in the plot. It can appear both in the main and the secondary texts of a drama, according to Roman Ingarden.⁴⁷

The second table deals with social linguistic codes, and the analysis aims to determine if those codes are respected or not, according to the social position of the characters. This is where we find the biased relationships that characterize Austrian society, creating tensions between generations and between native and foreigner citizens. The old widows employ very formal vocatives, implying their high education and social standards, regardless of their intimacy with their interlocutor: “You are so right Mrs. Helga” (“Sie ham ja so Recht Frau Helga”; 62). By contrast, the young generations use less formal pronouns with each other: “What about you?” (“Und du?”; 62).

Another notable aspect of the dialogue relates to the use of dialect. All the characters speak in the Austro-Bavarian dialect. This choice has the effect of intensifying the provincialism of the Viennese people, but it also reminds us of the important Austrian playwrights of the nineteenth century, mainly Johannes Nestroy and his remarkable use of dialect and language.

We cannot appreciate the form that the social criticism of Studlar takes, if we do not have knowledge of the Golden Age of the Austrian theatre in the first half of the nineteenth century. With the defeat of Napoleon, the European monarchies became very powerful again through the Holy Alliance which condemned democracy, secularism and revolution. The Austro-Hungarian Empire Minister of State, Prince von Metternich, was the prototypical diplomat of this *ancien régime*. It was natural that the arts suffered a considerable level of censorship in Vienna. Franz Grillparzer was the first important playwright of the period who had problems with the censor. He was followed by Ferdinand Raimund, who different from Grillparzer, favored the farce and

⁴⁷ Roman Ingarden in *The Literary Work of Art* establishes two different texts inside one: the “Haupttext”, represented by the dialogue and the “Nebentext”, represented by the didascalía.

the posse (which included spoken and sung parts, like *Transdanubia Dreaming* in a certain sense), two comical genres that depicted Viennese society in a realistic way but with fantastic elements. The third talented playwright was Johann Nestroy.⁴⁸ Instead of the romantic fantasies of his predecessor, he wrote corrosive comedies that parodied Austrian society through his use of word play and music. Metternich was still at the height of his power, and Europe was being swept by liberal revolutions. Nestroy, though, knew how to mislead the censors, inserting social criticism and satire into apparently inoffensive genres such as the operetta and burlesque comedies.

Thus through its widespread use of music, dialect, and clichés, *Transdanubia Dreaming* is firmly anchored in the tradition of the Austrian theatre. The clichés have the double function of setting the kitsch atmosphere and operating in a Nestroyan way, as a self-critique. The *Wienerwald*, the roses, the glasses of wine, the blue Danube, the *Apfelstrudel*: these are all key references to the universe of the play and to the historical context of the characters.

Most important of all is the fact that the WWI closed a chapter in the history of the country, a five hundred years power in the heart of Europe that saw itself reduced to forty percent of its original size, namely, to its alpine and Danube provinces. And then in WWII, Austria suffered the *Anschluss* by Nazi Germany which justified its action on the basis of their common language. These national humiliations created a sense of inferiority and apathy that is reflected through the different behaviors of the native characters. Some are alienated from social issues like Karli, some are apathetic like Manfred, some are aggressive like Hansi, and at last we have the Austrians who still think they live in the center of an empire, and that everyone else is inferior to them. Studlar created a hilarious couple of widows to represent this slice of the

⁴⁸ Nestroy inspired two important stage works in the USA. Thornton Wilder adapted Nestroy's *Ein Jux Will Er Sich Machen* in *The Matchmaker*, which on its turn, became later the musical *Hello Dolly*.

population. One of them complains by the end of the play: “What can we say about that, Helga. What a slut. Ungrateful woman. She leaves us, after we consoled her in her sadness, simply sitting” (“Was sagt man dazu, Helga. So ein Flitscherl. Undankbares Weib. Lasst uns, die wir sie auffangen haben in ihrer Trauer, einfach sitzen”; 70).

i) Character – Conflict is a crucial aspect for determining whether a text for the theatre is dramatic or not (there are other ones such as the dialogue, for example). The many conflicts in *Transdanubia Dreaming* certainly qualify it as drama. Manfred is the play’s protagonist. Except for three scenes, and the “Zwischenspiele,” he takes part of every scene in the play.⁴⁹ The audience follows his journey from Prinoszil’s Wine Garden to Sheriff’s Döner Kebab Stand and back. Manfred is an echo of Musil’s protagonist in *The Man Without Qualities*, a character with the same age and same passivity.⁵⁰ The first speech of the play, given by Manfred himself, is definitive in establishing the character: “This is the terrible thing about my life. That I wake up every day as a coward and that I have already lost. There it is, in my mind, ‘Loser’” (“Das ist des schreckliche an mein Leben. Dass ich jeden Tag als Feigling aufwach und schon verloren hab. Da sitzts, in mein Kopf. ‘Feigling’”; 61). A conflict exists between Manfred and himself. As a product of a capitalist and industrialized society, which splits man from the final product of his work, body from spirit, he is unable to awake and sing. While the Turkish workers in the play tell stories about their culture, family and country, Manfred confesses: “I don’t tell anything about myself. *Thinks over*. I don’t know what to say. I listen to. *Thinks it over*. Except for Sports. Because I know a lot about that” (“Ich von mir derzähl nix. *Denkt nach*. I wissad ned, was. I horch zu. *Denkt nach*. Ausser über Sport. Weil da kenn I mi aus”; 61). Yet even talking about

⁴⁹ In theatre terminology, it is a pause, an “intermezzo” between the acts of a play.

⁵⁰ Robert Musil, author of *The Man Without Qualities*, a canonical work of Austrian literature, an ironic and deep critique of the inner contradictions and the slow decline of the Austro-Hungarian empire right before the WWI.

something he understands--sports, a contemporary "opium of the people" in Marx's famous phrase--the theme of the loser returns. In this case, it is the relegated squad from Dornbach: "I used to go often to the soccer field, there in Dornbach at the Sportclub field, when it was still playing in the first division" ("I war früher oft am Fussballplatz, draussen in Dornbach aufn Sportklubplatz, wie der no in der ersten Division gspielt hat"; 61). In terms of action, and perhaps we should use the in vogue term "spectacular" action, there is a Turkish food stand that burns and a man who breaks his neck falling down his own basement stairs. Contemporary drama though is not very interested in spectacle. Most people's lives are boring and predictable, and that boredom is represented through repetitive and quotidian actions. Manfred justifies Herr Josef's statement about the increase of criminality in Austria: "Well, when I see the folks in the subway, how they go to work in a bad humor, in general, that doesn't surprise me. With nobody" ("Also, wann I mir die Leut in der U-Bahn anschau, wies in inerer schlechten Verfassung zur Arbeit fahren, allgemein gesprochen, wundert mich nix. Bei niemand"; 62). In terms of conflict, there is no place for melodramatic villains anymore. We are our own antagonists. I disagree with Stegemann who states that: "In the process of modernity it is evident that fewer humans are entering into conflict with one another. Instead they are sliding into complex battles with their own institutions" ("After Postdramatic"). Really? How can the individual be critical in these times of postmodernity and "its cultural relativism and moral conventionalism, its skepticism, pragmatism and localism, its distaste for ideas of solidarity and disciplined organization, its lack of any adequate theory of political agency?" (Eagleton, 134). Studlar presents us a man who is lost in the specific context of a miserable country that remains stuck to a long-dead past; he shows us alienated human beings, apathetic to any institution, who first have to struggle with

themselves, before turning to external enemies. Manfred wants to be left alone, and he says that. “I’d like to be left alone” (“I mecht mei Ruh haben”; 65).

The protagonist’s conflict can be designed graphically in the following actantial model:

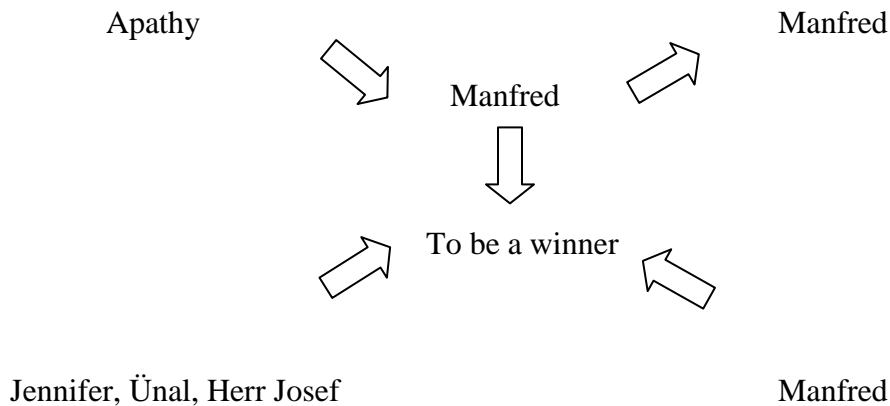


Fig. 9. Actantial Model for Manfred in *Transdanubia Dreaming*

Manfred’s occupation of three positions (the subject, the antagonist and the beneficiary) in the actantial model suggests how dependent on and entangled he is with himself, like many in postmodern times. In actantial analyses of contemporary drama, it is common to have the protagonist function as his own antagonist, due to his inability to fight for his objective. At the same time, the subject does want something for himself in accord with the individualism of our historical moment. These days we are taught to put our own needs and desires above those of others.

5.2.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

As in Walser’s play, plethora and musicalization are the only possible influences of a postdramatic theatre here, because there is no doubt that we are dealing with a dramatic text, with dialogue, a fictional world, and stage directions.

Music, as was already mentioned, is a hallmark of the Austrian folk play. Studlar does not use this legacy to transform his play into an “independent auditory semiotics” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 91) or to engender “the dissolution of dramatic coherence” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 91). The songs are related to the main theme of the play, and they all make sense.

The most bizarre element is Manfred’s dream, in the fourth scene of the second part of *Transdanubia Dreaming*, which could somehow be considered a kind of plethora or a deformation of the form. However the author himself writes in the stage direction: “The figures in the Traumspiel should all appear *slightly* deformed” (“Die Figuren des Traumspiels sollten allesamt *leicht* verzerrt wirken”; 66). His emphasis on *slightly* (“*leicht*”) indicates that he does not want anything exaggerated. This is the only possible place in the play where we could recognize a postdramatic element.

5.3. TÄGLICH BROT⁵¹ (2001)

5.3.1. AUTHOR

One of the least conventional playwrights examined in this dissertation, Gesine Danckwart transits between the controversial borders of the performing arts. Yet even when she picks alternative venues the written text has a determining role. As examples, the harbor of Mannheim for her play *Und die Welt Steht Still* (“And the World stands idle”) (2009), and her unusual shows called *Abend* (“Evening”) such as *Auto* (2009). Her texts are good examples of how the dramatic art can still survive under the dominant paradigm of postmodernity. One critic says of her writing style: “Danckwart’s text (and the Ensemble’s) is an impressionistic carpet-

⁵¹ *Daily Bread*.

text in which all possible voices are interweaved” (“Der Text Danckwarts (und des Ensembles) ist ein impressionistischer Textteppich, in dem alle möglichen Stimmen durcheinander gewebt sind”; Peter). Another critic observes: “With the playwright and director Gesine Danckwart ‘there is neither psychology nor stories, but only fragments of thought and talks about reality’” (“Es gebe bei der Autorin und Regisseurin Gesine Danckwart ‘weder Psychologie noch Geschichten, sondern nur Gedankensplitter und Gerede über Realität’”; Krug). Both comments stress the idea of voices instead of characters, and fragmented stories instead of a coherent and linear plot. Nevertheless, the non-traditional performative choices do not imply the absence of a dramatic text, and *Täglich Brot* is an example of the multiple possibilities and richness of the art called drama.

5.3.2. SYNOPSIS

Contemporary dramatists often ask for the participation of the audience in two ways. First, because they want to challenge traditional expectations about dramatic structure, they demand an active spectator who must work to piece together the story. The second task is a consequence of the first, and here resides one of the main differences between the dramatic and postdramatic texts. Whereas the drama establishes a situation that requires the audience to take up a critical position, the postdramatic text exhibits images and sounds that do not necessarily refer to a story or fictional characters. While drama demands that spectators employ their rational faculties, postdramatic theatre is more interested in a sensorial response.

Täglich Brot is a good example of a drama that could be considered a postdramatic text. There is, however, a coherent narrative beneath the turbulent surface, and that fact makes the crucial difference. Each of the characters has a story, difficult as they are to discern at first. What

makes the play unique is the fact that despite the characters' individuality, as demonstrated by their personal names, they share the same routine: getting up, making coffee, going to work, dreaming about other places, wishing for a partner, going home and spending the evening in front of the television. It takes us time to learn that we are witnessing the narratives of "an elegant career woman who tries to force her lonely existence into orderly ways; an unemployed man who doesn't bother to dress, first bewailing his fate, then stirring things, and finally promoting his fresh start; a girl student, always nice to others, who dreams away her day in search of happiness; an irritating agency man who is always nosy but at his computer despairs about protective screens; and an apathetic waitress in a KFC outfit who gets through her monotonous day by constantly complaining" ("Täglich Brot").

Gala, Sesam, Ela, Ulrich and Nelke do not follow a traditional plot. They are telling their daily activities, from the morning until the evening, with a focus on their work (or the lack of it) and their lonely lives. They never meet, with the exception of the dialogue between Ulrich and Gala. Although they have separate lives and particularities, at the end, these characters seem to share the same mediocre activities and the same hope of a better tomorrow. As the main form of speech is the narrative, the plot seems static, as if "nothing were happening". That's because the author is more interested in the character's life and work situations and not in a plot full of events that could steal the attention of the audience. Danckwart, through her five characters, tells a tale of common routines and monotonous existences, in an atmosphere full of both melancholy and hope. The Brechtian idea of a social unit being formed by at least two people is reinforced in *Täglich Brot* in a peculiar way. The author implies that people in the postmodern age are lonely, but their isolation is only apparent. They are actually surrounded by other human beings, at

work, at home (as when Gala complains about the volume of the neighbour's music) and as part of their dreams.

5.3.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – So far we have seen examples of titles that are more or less descriptive and metaphorical; here the title is only metaphorical. It does not refer to any character in the play or to any space depicted. Derived from the Christian prayer “Our Father,” “daily bread” (*Täglich Brot*) implies, on the one hand, mundane routine and, on the other, the basic support for existence: food. The characters in *Täglich Brot* share this double struggle, on a physical and a spiritual level. They need their work in order to be able to feed themselves, but it does not feed them in any spiritual sense. It is a paradox common in contemporary society, where people are rarely able to find both physical and spiritual nourishment.

b) Genre – Without any indication of genre in the stage directions, this text does not have a funny tone. Although “tragedy” may be too far-fetched, the characters' stories are at least full of sadness and frustrated dreams. Danckwart does not mix the comic and the tragic. Her world does not contain figures who can determine the future of a country, for example, but ordinary people, common workers. This is why it makes sense to categorize *Täglich Brot* as a drama, from the French *drame*. This genre originated in the eighteenth century, when playwrights like Diderot felt the need to represent other social classes on stage apart from the kings and queens of the neoclassical canon. The middle class, depicted by Diderot and others, was not as large in size as it is now, after two and a half centuries. However, the intermediate position of people in that class, their need to rise to the top and fear of declining to the bottom of the social pyramid, led to a typical angst, which is also seen in Danckwart's play. Although there is no death at the end, we

can still talk about the characters' defeat. We know that the next day everything is going to be the same, and happiness will exist only in the form of dream.

c) Structure - Apparently, *Täglich Brot* is very distant from the dramatic genre. The list of characters contains only names, no descriptions. There are no stage directions indicating place and time. Indeed, there is a complete absence of stage directions, one of the standard features of a dramatic text.

Then, when one starts reading the work, a sense of uncertainty quickly rises. It is a brilliant conjunction of structure and content when the theme appears in both, as we can see right from the beginning of the speeches:

GALA. I am afraid.

ULRICH. What of?

GALA. I don't know exactly. I simply am afraid.

(GALA. Ich habe Angst.

ULRICH. Wovor?

GALA. Ich weiss nicht genau. Ich habe einfach Angst.) (56)

This style of drama is a puzzle that asks for the patience, interest and perseverance of the audience. Important contemporary playwrights have made successful incursions into this labyrinthine form such as Bernard-Marie Koltès (*Dans la Solitude des Champs de Coton*) and Sarah Kane (*Crave*). Similarly to Koltès, Danckwart explores the reduction of human beings to commodities, to their status as mere replaceable exchange items in society.

The tension and its growth have to be found inside the one-act structure. The length of the sentences, as there are no scenes, paces the action. Here, we have an example of this

rallentando moment, defined not only by the length of the speeches, but also by the meaning of the word “Standstill” (“Stillstand”; 56):

GALA. You are not here. These fucking workers are not here. While she waits as the workers arrive, she creams her face with this cream I can afford myself. With this I can afford the cream myself, I'll soon get a relaxed face.

SESAM. A landscape. A wide landscape. Nothing else exists. Forgotten.

ULRICH. Standstill.

NELKE. To walk. Further. To run. Always further.

(GALA. Sie kommen einfach nicht. Diese Scheisshandwerker kommen einfach nicht. Während sie wartet, dass diese Handwerker kommen, cremt sie sich das Gesicht mit dieser ich gönne mir wirklich etwas Crème. Die, mit diesem das habe ich mir verdient Gefühl, ich hab gleich ein entspanntes Gesicht.

SESAM. Eine Landschaft. Eine weite Landschaft. Nichts mehr vorhanden. Vergessen.

ULRICH. Stillstand.

NELKE. Laufen. Weiter. Rennen. Immer weiter.) (56)

Another structural element is the variation between dialogues and monologues. There are not many dialogues in this play, but that gives them more impact than usual. The long dialogue between Ulrich and Gala is important in the structure of the play because it establishes the climax, which is the highest level of dramatic tension in the play, usually built by the final encounter between the protagonist and the antagonist. Again, Gesine Danckwart is mixing form and content: a different kind of speech allied with the only attempt made by two characters to get close to each other.

d) Fabula – This is a play about five ordinary people, tracing their actions from dawn to evening. It reveals the monotony of their “daily bread,” but this is just the first level of reading the play. Danckwart is addressing at the same time the social isolation of people from other people due to an economic system that forces them to devote time and energy to unfulfilling jobs. The characters’ negative feelings toward the socio-economic system manifest themselves in many parts of the text, and for different reasons. Right after the enigmatic beginning of the play, Gala compares her leaving home for her job to a soldier going into a battle: “Armed with an endless preparation. To grab the wallet, double check, of course to take the EC- train ticket, to place the cell phone into the purse” (“Gewappnet mit einer endlosen Vorbereitung. Nach dem Portemonnaie gegriffen, nachkontrolliert, doch noch die EC-Karte mitgenommen, das Handy einstecken”; 56). Nelke refuses the pause proposed by Ulrich when he says “Standstill” (“Stillstand”; 56), suggesting with the staccato rhythm of her sentences the unsparing rhythm of the capitalistic system: “To walk, forward. To run. Always forward. Fast. Away from here. Not to recognize anything. To go. This way to the subway. A rhythm. I go with this rhythm” (“Laufen, Weiter. Rennen. Immer weiter. Schnell. Weg hier. Nichts wiederkennen. Gehen. Dieser Weg zur U-Bahn. Ein Rhythmus. Ich gehe in diesem Rhythmus mit”; 56). People are not left with time to look back and gather a contextualized picture of their situation. That causes the erasure of the past or silly memories of it. Ela confesses: “I have a past too. I am actually one of the few who still have a past. My past is a richly traditional shampoo that my mother has already used on me” (“Oft habe ich auch eine Vergangenheit. Ich bin ja eine der wenigen, die noch eine Vergangenheit haben. Meine Vergangenheit ist ein traditionsreiches Shampoo, das schon meine Mutti an mir angewendet hat”; 57). The characters are conscious that they do not mean anything to the system: “I am a number” (“Ich bin eine Zahl”; 57). They lose track of time: “Good

morning. Hello, hello. Or is it already a good noon, a good afternoon or a good evening?” (“Guten Morgen. Hallo, Hallo. Oder ist es schon ein guter Mittag, ein guter Tag oder ein guter Abend?”; 57). In this vacuum, their only escape is to enter the competition and try to succeed. Gala recognizes the society’s pressure: “When you are thirty you must be ousting. You must have reached an important job position in order to buy somebody out. This is the only way to face competition which is cheaper to defeat when you are younger” (“Mit dreissig muss man verdrängen. Man muss eine Position erreicht haben. Damit sich dann ein Gehalt auszahlt, sonst hat man keine Chance gegen eine Konkurrenz, die es als Anfänger viel billiger macht”; 58). Sesam knows that he is still young enough to be considered a winner: “I am at the age when I see myself as a measure for quality. I still don’t have to develop any side strategy to kill my time, but I am theoretically still in the very midst of it. In life and that is now” (“Ich bin in dem Alter, in dem ich mich als Qualifizierungsmassnahme betrachten kann. Ich muss noch keine abseitigen Strategien entwickeln, um meine Zeit totzuschlagen, sondern ich bin theoretisch noch mittendrin. Im Leben. Das ist jetzt”; 57). The industrial revolution’s separation of worker and final product is registered by Ela: “Nobody here works at the field, at the mines, at the construction. This is a mere standing job” (“Keiner hier arbeitet auf dem Feld, im Bergwerk, auf dem Bau. Das hier ist nur eine Steharbeit”; 58). Sesam’s speech is emblematic, as it gives three possibilities to everyone: to join the market competition, to give up and declare defeat, or to fight against the system.

SESAM. Now you can decide on whom you’d like to place a bet. You should restore your balanced behavior in any storehouse, please, take your decision quickly. I am a possibility, but please take your decision, you should have already realized, and think about it, also to decide in an anticyclic way, full of risks and

ahead of your time, if you'd like to be with the winners, this time you shouldn't go for sympathy or pity, you could save that for yourself, if you still would like to belong to the savers, please take your decision, and too late. There is another chance lost by you, because once again you were too late, you should have been a little faster.

(SESAM. Jetzt können Sie nochmal überlegen, auf wen Sie setzen wollen. In jedem Depot sollten Sie ein ausgeglichenes Verhältnis herstellen, bitte, entscheiden Sie sich gleich. Ich bin eine Möglichkeit, aber bitte entscheiden Sie selbst, Sie sollten jetzt schon genug erfahren haben, und denken Sie daran, auch mal antizyklisch zu entscheiden, risikofreudig und Ihrer Zeit voraus, wenn Sie zu den Gewinnern zahlen wollen, dieses eine mal sollten Sie nicht nach Sympathie oder Mitleid gehen, das können Sie sich für sich selber aufsparen, wenn Sie den immer noch zu den Sparern gehören wollen, bitte entscheiden Sie jetzt, und zu spät. Hier ist mal wieder eine Chance an Ihnen vorüber, weil Sie mal wieder zu spät, ein bisschen schneller sollten Sie schon mal gewesen sein.) (57-8)

Many of these postmodern young workers, though, succumb to the system, to the mass culture that makes Nelke exclaim: "I simply don't understand this English" ("Ich verstehe dieses Englisch einfach nicht"; 58). They still keep their acute five senses: "The new Fanta with the melon flavor. Try something new. It tastes horribly" ("Die neue Fanta mit dem Melonengeschmack. Was neues ausprobieren. Schmeckt scheusslich"; 60). Yet the war is unequal. "I don't have any motivation. I know that myself, so then why should I still be stimulating other people?" ("Ich bin unmotiviert. Das weiss ich selber, nur warum soll ich hier

noch irgendetwas motiviern“?; 60). The imagined result is: “Late evening. Alone in front of the TV” (“Spätabends. Alleine vor einem Fernseher”; 60).

e) Time – It is interesting to see that time in this non-traditional dramatic text is arranged in the strictest linear chronology possible. Time becomes a structural element of a play when the narrative concentrates on characters’ daily routines. Their monologues start with references to the morning and its rituals: “To check if I left the toilet light on” (“Geschaut, ob...das Licht in der Toilette gelassen”; 56); “Swollen eyes, cold water will help only later” (“Verquollene Augen, kaltes Wasser hilft erst später”; 56). At the end of the play, the characters are all in front of the television, and the last sentence of the play refers lyrically to the end of the day: “Lights on the windows, a blue glimmering, from time to time a shadow at a curtain” (“Lichter in den Fenstern, blaues Flackern, ab und zu ein Schatten auf einem Vorhang”; 60). So, the time is chronological, despite the lack of any change or advance related to the characters’ objectives.

f) Space – There is no reference to place in the stage directions, because there are no stage directions. Only a very careful reading of the speeches let us understand where the characters are. However, the speeches are not organized in a traditional way. As the characters’ mode of delivering the speeches is mostly narrative, they could be anywhere telling their stories. There are no indications that they are actually representing the actions that they relate. There are, though, multiple references to places such as their houses, offices, shops, a café and a taxi. When it comes to the set, it is completely up to the director to stage the play the way that he thinks works best.

g) Information – Information about the characters is given very slowly, as through a medicine dropper. Danckwart requires the close participation of the reader in the construction of the context: who the characters are, where they are, and if there is any bond between them. Her

text is an intellectual game that would please both formalists and reception theory thinkers. This kind of performance demands an active and clever spectator to understand that: “Five characters live through a typical day – Ela, who is desperate to make something of herself, Nelke, wearing her youth as a badge of courage to conquer the PR world, Ulrich and Gala, who have the brass neck and ruthless instincts to make it right to the top of their professions. But can they stay there? Unemployment is the ultimate nightmare and the fifth character, Sesam, is unemployed: the bad dream on the edge of all the other dreams and ambitions” (“Play ‘Daily Bread’”, *Playservice.net.*). Yet these are fictional characters. The actors are impersonating someone other than themselves, and this is the definition of mimesis. Therefore, fictionality is definitely a part of *Täglich Brot*.

h) Dialogue - Saying that dialogue is a main feature of drama does not exclude other forms of speech. Already in Greek drama we can find epic passages, lyric sung odes and parabases addressed to the audience. Schössler, for instance, identifies some formal linguistic elements besides the dialogue:

Danckwart converts the fundamental paradox of individuation and mass existence that the bourgeois society of achievement honours in a formal way, as the five people who are present in her play are encapsulated in monological speech spaces; autistic ‘streams of consciousness,’ in which the external things, the shopping, the neighbor, his music, rise up as foreign bodies.

(Das grundlegende Paradox von Vereinzelung und Massenexistenz, das die bürgerliche Leistungsgesellschaft auszeichnet, setzt Danckwart formal dadurch um, dass die fünf Personen, die in ihrem Stück auftreten in monologischen Sprachräumen verkapselt sind; es entfalten sich ‘streams of consciousness’,

autistische Bewusstseinsströme, in die die äusseren Dinge, das Einkaufen, der Nachbar, seine Musik, wie entfernte Fremdkörper hineinragen). (304)

The fascinating thing about this text, though, is how Danckwart stresses the effect of dialogue as a form, in juxtaposing it with other less dramatic speech forms. After the very brief word exchange between Gala and Ulrich in the opening of *Täglich Brot*, we are surprised by the dialogue between Ulrich and Nelke, after the playwright has established the prevalence of monologues and narratives. It is a surprise because the audience likely thinks that dialogues will not return to the text. It is a formal effect and also a sign that human interactions are still possible in a dehumanized and technological world. Danckwart explores the power of dialogue later in the play between Ulrich and Gala, when the content is their need for sociability and affection.

Even the monologues are more narrative than lyric. They fulfill the technical function of recuperating past events, or reporting events not shown on stage. Nelke is using the narrative form when she complains: “I would really like to know which ass has drunk the last of the coffee and not made any more” (“Ich möchte wirklich wissen, welcher Arsch schon wieder den letzten Rest Kaffee genommen hat und dann keinen neuen mehr gemacht hat”; 59). Sesam dialogues with the audience: “What am I worth to you? What am I worth to me?” (“Was bin ich Ihnen wert? Was bin ich mir wert?”; 58). And at last, there are monologues which express inner states or reflect upon reality, as when Ulrich notes: “Work is fun” (“Arbeit macht Spass”; 58). It is this variety of speech possibilities that makes the language in *Täglich Brot* so interesting.

i) Character – The source of the characters’ conflicts in the play is illuminated by a passage by Marx: “Just as our opinion of an individual is not based on what he thinks of himself, so can we not judge of such a period of transformation by its own consciousness; on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained rather from the contradictions of material life, from the

existing conflict between the social productive forces and the relations of production” (41). What makes *Täglich Brot* a dramatic text is the fact that all the characters have conflicts. Their conflicts are ones shared by the common people, folks who have ordinary jobs and who struggle to pay their bills. The characters in the play are basically looking for a fulfilling life, with money, companionship and maybe some recognition for their work. Sesam, Nelke, Ela, Gala and Ulrich are a kind of collective Everyman. Despite their first names, specific genders and different professions, their daily routines are much alike. Danckwart depicts five characters because she wants to represent society, and not a personal case. She needs these singular figures in order to make a social critique and not a study of character. This is why it is difficult to apply some tools that were used to analyze the other two plays.

Take the balanced presentation of characters. One could be very detailed and try to count the number of speeches or the number of lines of each character in order to find out a numeric superiority that could lead to the definition of the protagonist. Yet this would not be relevant in a play in which it is the group effect that counts. This is why Danckwart used the one-act structure. She is not interested in privileging any character. (Which happens in a play with different scenes, and consequently, characters being more often visible on stage or having more speeches).

The same thing happens with the constellation of the characters. Is there any connection between them? The only moment in the whole play in which that happens is when Ulrich and Gala have their long dialogue. Their relation though is very ephemeral. Gala's objective is not to get Ulrich, or vice-versa. The dialogue works more as a structural feature than something crucial for the development of character.

And then we get to the actantial models. The characters' objectives are very general and almost identical. Danckwart treats her characters as social beings in a literal way. The other texts

examined in this dissertation comment on society, but the characters are individuals who work more as social metaphors. In *Täglich Brot*, the characters are literally defined by their social and economic context as indicated in this actantial model:

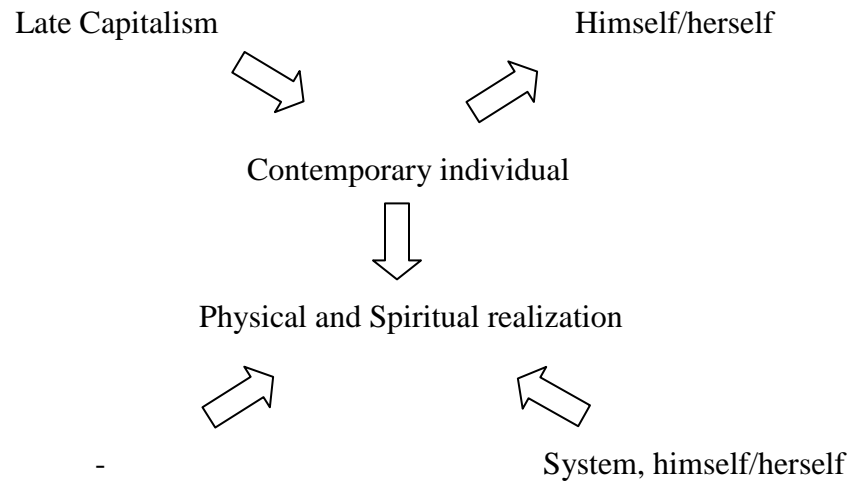


Fig. 10. General Actantial Model in *Täglich Brot*

This model is accurate for all the characters. Because of the demands of late capitalism, and the limitations it imposes on those who do not own capital, everyone (whom I called “contemporary individual” in the model) looks for physical and spiritual realization; of course, this can come in many forms such as money, prestige, children, companionship, or religion. Yet the system is powerful and becomes an obstacle for everyone who intends to break the rules. People then tend to accommodate and become victims and supporters at the same time, perpetuating the cycle of economic exploitation.

Sesam, Nelke, Ela, Gala and Ulrich are Everyman, but they are nobody at the same time. Any attempt to psychologize the characters, giving them too specific traits would not be respecting the intention of the playwright as expressed through the play’s design.

5.3.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Täglich Brot deceives the less-informed reader. The element that suggests a radical departure from the traditional drama is what Ryngært calls “information.” If one follows the precepts of Freytag, the exposition should present all the necessary information for understanding the world of the play before the plot really starts. Many playwrights, though, are not interested in revealing the motivation for the action, perhaps because they want to startle the audience or perhaps because there is no motivation or perhaps because there barely is an action. We say in this case that the information is private. This means that the spectators do not get all the necessary information about the characters’ context at one time. Danckwart uses the technique of private information in her play.

Nevertheless *Täglich Brot* is an example of drama, mainly because it creates the image of a social world peopled by characters through a highly structured, written text. This fact is diametrically opposed to Lehmann’s question about the postdramatic theatre: “Is the theatre text worthless?” (“Das Theater der Text als solcher ohne Wert sei”; *Postdramatisches* 261). He goes on to claim that: “An opening and dispersal of the logos develop in such a way that it is no longer necessarily the case that meaning is communicated from A (stage) to B (spectator) but instead a specifically theatrical, ‘magical’ transmission and connection happen by means of language”; *Postdramatic* 145). Can’t we have both? Isn’t language in *Täglich Brot* fulfilling these two functions, of enchanting through its musicality and also telling a comprehensible story? The fact that Danckwart’s plays fulfill both functions distinguishes them from postdramatic theatrical forms.

Beyond that, Lehmann’s insistence on visual aspects, spectacular elements, musicalization and simultaneity does not find any reverberation in this play. It is almost an exclusively aural text, which excludes the supremacy of the visual. The speeches are often

“musical” but not in Lehmann’s sense of the word, as sound devoid of sense. Nor is true music ever found in the play. The characters never sing, for example, unlike the other plays analyzed in this chapter. And last, the text is surprisingly linear; it follows the daily routine of these five figures, from morning until the evening, with no attempting to disrupt the strict chronology.

Once again, we witness form and content being placed side by side. Time in the straight chronology of the capitalist work journey and time as the value the characters cannot fully apprehend, the good that is always escaping from their hands. Yet Ulrich makes a promise to himself: “Next year I’ll change some things” (“Im nächsten Jahr werde ich ein paar Dinge ändern”; 58).

5.4. CONCLUSION

The social plays depicted in this chapter present some recurrent themes such as loneliness, absence of perspective in life and the difficulty of accepting the cultural “other.” Despite being called “social plays,” the characters also present some personal issues that can be translated into larger social ones. Their private lives reflect the socio-political condition of a country that has to rethink itself after the impactful changes of the beginning of the 1990s. We see age conflicts, race conflicts and work conflicts as the consequence of a social structure with fewer job places and less money. The abandonment of the welfare state by neoliberal governments revealed the crude face of an economic system that marginalizes the ones who are considered “different.” Old people in Theresia Walser’s play, foreigners in Bernhard Studlar’s play and unemployed workers in Gesine Danckwart’s compose the group of the pariahs. Through the portrayal of these realities, contemporary German language playwrights show the relevance and importance of drama as a tool for exposition of delicate social issues and critical discussion.

6. THE DOMESTIC PLAYS

Although these domestic plays do not show social issues in a direct way, as the three plays analyzed in the former chapter do, they treat them through metaphors. The environment here is the family, the microscopic social unity that mirrors the power structure of society. In *Das Kalte Kind* we see the hypocrisy of love relationships and how they deteriorate if an active decision is not made to explode an unsatisfactory status quo. In *Die Frau von Früher*, a project of revenge destroys the idyllic comfort of a bourgeois family. Finally, in *Monsun*, death is the element that rearranges the couples and reorganizes their lives. If the plays are apparently dealing with psychological issues, the metaphors are too evident to be neglected. Memory, fraternity, and guilt are important social themes in Germany, a country with a turbulent past and the need to remind the younger generations of the mistakes that should never be repeated.

6.1. DAS KALTE KIND (2002)

6.1.1. AUTHOR

The German dramatist Marius von Mayenburg became notorious with his play *Feuergesicht* (“Fireface”) (1997), considered the *Spring Awakening* of the nineties. With that play, he won the First Prize at the Heidelberger Plays’ Market and the Kleist supporting award for young dramatists. Like Bernhard Studlar, he was a student at the *Szenisches Schreiben* course at the *Universität der Künste* in Berlin, from 1994 to 1998. He was part of the artistic team of the “Deutsche Baracke,” which successfully launched the “in-yer-face” style in Germany and influenced a whole generation of playwrights. In 1999, along with the managers of the

“Baracke,” director Thomas Ostermeier and dramaturg Jens Kilian, he moved to the Schaubühne Theater am Lehninger Platz, where he has continued to develop his plays. Critics used to characterize his plays under the theme “family,” as does John von Düffel, another German playwright who comments about the dramatic production in his country: “What . . . became another big theme was the family. Strong plays were developed such as, for instance, *Fireface* by Marius von Mayenburg. In these dramas the family becomes mostly the original problem, as the cell of destruction and the essence of the social struggles on stage.” (Was... zu einem weiteren grossen Thema wurde, ist die Familie. Es entstanden starke Stücke wie beispielweise *Feuergesicht* von Marius von Mayenburg. In diesen Dramen wird die Familie meist als Urproblem, als Zelle der Zerstörung und als Kern von gesellschaftlichen Auseinandersetzungen in Szene gesetzt) (Schössler, 315).

This is true. Mayenburg sets a family at the core of his plays--as he does in *Das Kalte Kind*⁵²--but right away he explodes the idyllic bourgeois model, revealing the hypocrisy and cosmetic behavior of its members. Father and son, wife and husband, sister and brother, no relationship escapes from his acute lens. The family becomes a micro-cosmos of the society, and its failures and lies come to the surface in different forms and styles, showing the talent and lucidity of this German-speaking author.

6.1.2. SYNOPSIS

The action of the play is divided into three sections, following basically the couple Johann and Lena: their first meeting, their wedding, and their life as a married couple with child.

⁵² *The Cold Child*.

Although these are the characters that move the plot, there are other six others whose situations reinforce the conflicts experienced by Johann and Lena as a couple.

The first segment of the play takes place in the suggestively entitled Café Polygam. Lena is studying Egyptology and her parents “have come from Schönewald with my sister, they want to check out how it is, where do I usually go, in the big city, but where I usually go, there I can obviously not take them with me” (“sind reingefahren aus Schönewald mit meiner Schwester, sie wollen sehen, wie sowas ist, wo ich immer hingeh, in der grossen Stadt, aber wo ich immer hingeh, da kann ich sie natürlich nicht mitnehmen”; 52). Lena’s parents--Vati (Daddy) and Mutti (Mommy), who have already lost their personal names, apparently because there is no more individuality when you get older--seem more interested in Lena’s sexual life than anything else: “I have heard that nowadays people like anonymous sex” (“Das hab ich gehört, dass man heute anonymen Sex lieber mag”; 52). At another table at the same café, Werner and Silke, parents of Nina, are waiting for their friend Johann. He has just been rejected by Melanie, after a proposal. Werner and Silke, in their turn, are having a quarrel, which is actually the beginning of the play:

SILKE. And we were there with him.

WERNER. I was not there with him.

SILKE. Of course you were there with him.

WERNER. In my whole life I have never been to a Lady’s Room.

(SILKE. Und wir waren dabei.

WERNER. Ich war nicht dabei.

SILKE. Natürlich warst du dabei.

WERNER. Ich war im Leben noch auf keiner Damentoilette.) (52)

Werner was actually not there, but Henning was. Without any connection to the other characters in the beginning of the play, this social outsider enjoys exposing himself to women in public restrooms. This is what he does at the Café Polygam. This action is the point of attack of the play. Lena goes to the restroom after getting exhausted with her family. There she meets Henning. Johann goes to the man's restroom and listens to screams coming from the lady's restroom. He rescues Lena. The situation becomes complicated when Tina and Mutti decide to check to see why Lena is taking so long to come back to their table. In the restroom, Tina meets Henning, and the roles of hunter and game are switched. It is she who insists that he shows her his genitalia.

In the second part of the play, Johann and Lena get married. It is their wedding party. All kinds of expected conversations take place: the father tells about when he met the mother, people warn the couple not to get married either because of the fiancé or because of the frustrations of married life. The fearful thoughts of both Bride and Groom are revealed to the audience in passages as: "Because I want to marry you, you stupid disgusting woman, because I am an idiot who thought that it would work, because I forgot, that you all, all of you are disgusting women, and that you arranged to destroy me" ("Weil ich dich heiraten will, du schwachsinnige Kotzfrau, weil ich Idiot gedacht habe, dass das geht, weil ich vergessen hab, dass Ihr alle, alles Kotzfrauen seid, und dass ihr euch verabredet habt, weil ihr mich zerstören wollt"; 55). Werner's speech is categorical. He says: "The time will come when you cannot bear to see each other anymore without going into spasms . . ." ("Es werden aber Zeiten kommen, da ihr euch nicht mehr sehen könnt, ohne Krämpfe zu kriegen . . ."; 57).

In the third and last scene of the play, Lena and Johann invite their friends for a dinner party. Lena brings a whole pig to the table, an object that becomes a symbol of the rottenness and

dirtiness of the institution called marriage. However, the great revelation is the fact that Werner's and Silke's daughter Nina--about whom they have been speaking from the beginning of the play--is a metaphorical and not a real character. In fact, Nina is a doll though her parents have been pretending since the first scene that she was a normal child. Werner had already warned the audience in the beginning of the play that "Everything she says is false" ("Es ist alles falsch, was sie sagt"; 52). In this part of the play, Lena's father dies, Lena cuts off Johann's member, and Tina and Henning fall definitely in love. Mayenburg suggests that marriage, as a microcosm of society, generally fails, but there are hopeful exceptions.

6.1.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – There are three kinds of descriptive titles. First, there are titles that are homonymous with the protagonist of the play, without any suggestion of a metaphor, such as *John Gabriel Borkman*, *Tamburlaine*, and *Platonov*.⁵³ Second, there are titles that refer to a character while adding some extra information, such as *Oedipus Rex*, *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead* and *The Country Wife*. In this category, we get a hint about the character that is going to be relevant in the play such as, for instance, his function in society, or his ultimate fate and origin. Last, there are descriptive titles that refer to one character in particular, but single out a condition that could apply as well to other characters. *The Cold Child* is such a title. The title explicitly refers to Nina, Werner's and Silke's daughter, who according to Werner: "has blue lips and shakes. Our child is cold" ("hat blaue Lippen und zittert. Unser Kind friert"; 52). Nina is the thermometer of the play. She is the scapegoat who absorbs the tensions and frustrations of the other relationships. When Silke breaks the doll's legs, she is transferring to her

⁵³ Semioticians would argue that even the sole name of the character already has a meaning. Ibsen has a well-known explanation about why Hedda Gabler is not called Hedda Tesman, which is her husband's family name in the homonymous play.

child all her anger with her husband. Nina is a symbol of the anxiety of the rest of the characters, who are still children trying to understand the complicated adult's world, as in Peter Handke's lyrics for Wim Wenders's film "Wings of Desire":

When the child was a child,
 It didn't know that it was a child,
 Everything was soulful,
 And all souls were one.
 (Als das Kind Kind war,
 wußte es nicht, daß es Kind war,
 alles war ihm beseelt,
 und alle Seelen waren eins.) ("Kindsein")

The literality of the title works very well, too, as a metaphor of the coldness we find when people are stripped of their appearances. Silke exclaims: "This is definitely not a child, look at it. *She takes Nina out of the car.* This is a doll" ("Das ist ja gar kein Kind, schau dir das an. *Sie zieht Nina aus einem Bein aus dem Wagen.* Das ist eine Puppe"; 58).

b) Genre – The play has a farcical tone, but because the subject is serious, it cannot be classified as a farce. Mayenburg does not define the genre of the play either. The important thing to decide, in order to establish the genre, is related to the outcome of the plot. What happens to the characters at the end of the play? When there is a single protagonist, it is easier to come to a conclusion, but in *Das Kalte Kind*, we have eight characters on the same level of importance. If we consider Lena and Johann protagonists, and accept that she actually killed Johann when castrating him, the end is tragic. Nevertheless, the author is playing with the illusion/reality binary opposition. If that is the case, and Lena was only dreaming of having murdered her

husband, they will go on living a life of lies and frustration, the same way that the two older couples in the play do. Having said that, we have different options for the genre of the play, according to how we see the ending.

The tone of the play is funny, definitely sarcastic and grotesquely comic. The subject, though, is serious. It is not a superficial plot of mistaken identities, but a depiction of the institutions of marriage and fatherhood and an exploration of the possibility of love. These are conventional comic themes. If we see the end as something happy, a lesson being learned or the reestablishment of the balanced universe depicted in the beginning of the play, it is a comedy. If the end is melancholic or sad, the play would better be placed in the genre of dark comedy.

c) Structure - The play is divided into three segments. Mayenburg does not call them acts, but, because of the similarity to the familiar 3-act structure, I prefer to use this term.⁵⁴ The 3-act structure suggests a conventional Hegelian dialectic of thesis, followed by antithesis, leading to synthesis. However, the beginning, middle and end in *Das Kalte Kind* are not teleological *per se*. There is a cyclical movement that brings the characters back to the place where they started their actions: Lena is alone, Werner and Silke are together, Johann is at least confused and may even be dead. One can perceive a kind of Thornton Wilderesque journey through the life of man with a dead character as narrator of the plot.⁵⁵ (Even if we prefer to think that Lena only dreamed of having murdered Johann, there is still Vati's long speech after his death.) If the plot is ambiguous in terms of action and time chronology, there is no doubt about the way Mayenburg divides his characters into the stages of life. There are the young lovers, the bride and groom, the

⁵⁴ William Archer would say: "It was doubtless the necessity for marking this rhythm that Aristotle had in mind when he said that a dramatic action must have a beginning, a middle and an end. Taken in its simplicity, this principle would indicate the three-act division as the ideal scheme for a play. As a matter of fact, many of the best modern plays in all languages fall into three acts; . . . and furthermore, many old plays which are nominally in five acts really fall into a triple rhythm, and might better have been divided into three" (91).

⁵⁵ See *Our Town*, by Thornton Wilder.

couple with a young child and the old couple. Because life is not static, the pairs go from one condition to the other through the acts, and the deaths--“I die today” (“Ich sterbe heute”; 57) -- are replaced with births: “Show the child to the guests meanwhile” (“Zeig den Gästen solange das Kind”; 57). Lena and Johann fall in love in act one, get married in act two, and become the exemplary bourgeois couple, making dinner for friends with one child in the cradle. It is interesting to note that Studlar in *Transdanubia Dreaming* separates the characters according to their ages too. Yet there, the main focus is Manfred, the protagonist, who belongs to the intermediate group. There are constant references to the past and to the future of Austria, but the attention returns to Manfred. Here in *Das Kalte Kind*, there is no main character. Mayenburg is interested rather in the group and its dynamics. Yet the surface is deceiving. *Das Kalte Kind* can be read as an ironic reply to the emblematic sentence proffered by Helmut Kohl during the unification process of the two Germanies: “Now what belongs together will grow together” (“Jetzt wächst zusammen, was zusammengehört”). Families are together because of moral duties and not out of affection. Everybody is shocked when Mutti finally feels free to express her opinion about her recently deceased husband:

SILKE. I think he said it in a wonderful way.

MUTTI. He was dirt.

TINE. Mom.

MUTTI. A plague.

SILKE. You cannot speak like that.

(SILKE. Ich finde, das hat er wunderbar gesagt.

MUTTI. Ein Dreck war er.

TINE. Mutti.

MUTTI. Eine Pest.

SILKE. So könnten Sie das nicht sagen.) (58)

The game of hypocrisies never ends. While Tine and Silke play the moralist to Mutti, Tine forces Henning to show his penis, whereas Silke pours beer over her baby. The play is a perfectly built wheel, in which every character does exactly the opposite of what she/he is preaching in another scene.

d) Fabula – *Das Kalte Kind* repeats the pattern of Mayenburg's former two plays in the sense of setting the action around families. In *Feuergesicht*, there was the middle-class prototype of father-mother-son-daughter. In *Parasiten* the spectator was confronted with the story of two very different sisters. Yet in this play there is not a single family, but the interaction of three families. The growing tension in the plot appears in many different ways. One relates to the different familial constellations due to marriages, deaths, births, betrayals and love. Lena in the first act, for example, still belongs to her parent's nuclear family, as she depends on their money. In the second act, she is married to Johann, which is configured as a separate familial situation. By the end of the play, she must care for her child and perhaps her widowed mother and, depending on one's interpretation of the last line of the play, may be without Johann. Sex is the impulse that drives people together. The coldness of postmodernity makes people crave a more intimate connection. Henning compensates for his shyness exposing himself in ladies' toilets. "I show my sex with pleasure. I have just read that it is modern, but that's not why I do it. Nobody has ever shown his to me" ("Ich zeige nämlich gerne mein Geschlecht. Ich habe jetzt auch gelesen, dass das modern ist, aber deshalb mach ichs nicht. Mir hat auch noch keiner sein Geschlecht gezeigt"; 53). It is his unusual strategy of communicating. Lena and Silke cry for sex in a kind of refrain: "Can't we simply fuck?" ("Können wir nicht einfach ficken?"; 55). Johann

touches Silke's breasts in front of his wife and guests, and invites Silke to go to bed with him immediately thereafter. In these extremely individualistic times, people get physical contact only through supplications and extreme actions. The resulting emotional dissatisfaction can lead to bloody consequences. However, ironic humor is always present in *Das Kalte Kind*, even in the most gruesome passages:

WERNER. He sleeps, she lifts the blanket and detaches his sex with a single cut. . . . The detached member she lets it fall into the pool and she leaves the house through the garden door. Later the policemen get to fish it with a net from the water surface. It was swimming around. Like a drunken frog.

(WERNER. Er schläft, sie hebt die Decke und trennt mit einem graden Schnitt das Geschlecht ab. . . . Das abgetrennte Glied lässt sie in den Pool fallen und verlässt das Haus durch die Gartentür. Später können es die Polizisten mit einem Netz von der Wasseroberfläche fischen. Das schwimmt da so herum. Wie ein ertrunkener Frosch.) (59)

e) Time – Marius von Mayenburg adopts a linear chronology as the apparent time structure of his play, organizing the events according to three specific moments of the lives of wives and husbands: the first meeting, the wedding, and the married life. The sense of stages in life is very clear through the journey of Johann and Lena. At the same time, the different ages of the characters, and the birth of a new character added to the death of another one in the third part of the play suggest the slow and irreversible passage of time. The audience is startled by some events in the play, mainly the revelation of Nina as a doll, and by the final sentence which raises a query about Lena's actions in the third part of the play; these surprises are enough to challenge the idea of a strictly linear time. Some might argue that everything was a huge lie told by Werner

and Silke, for instance. Or that Lena was only dreaming about the murder of her husband. The indications of uncertainty about what is exactly going on come most of the time from Nina's parents, as for example when the audience tries to understand the weather in scene one:

SILKE. It is a tepid sunny evening at the balcony, when they get to know each other.

WERNER. It looks like it's going to rain, let's sit inside.

SILKE. You haven't looked at the sky yet.

WERNER. I can smell.

(SILKE. Es ist ein lauer Abend mit Sonne auf der Terrasse, als die beiden sich kennenlernen.

WERNER. Sieht nach Regen aus, setzen wir uns rein.

SILKE. Du hast noch nicht an den Himmel geschaut.

WERNER. Das riech ich.) (52)

Although the passage of time is firmly established, the characters do narrate events that have taken place at other moments. In the first part, for example, Henning tells his story of events that happened beforehand. The same thing happens in the dinner party scene, when Vati and Mutti tell the story of their trip to Singapore. Mayenburg condenses different events in time in a single scene. It is up to the director to determine whether those events will be staged simultaneously in a single space, or in separate ones, which would reinforce the difference in time.

f) Space – The dialogue is responsible for indicating the place of action. Scene one takes place in the main room and ladies restroom of a café: “We are at the Polygam, this is one of the cafés at the Nolde Square” (“Wir sind im Polygam, das ist eins von den Cafés am Noldeplatz”;

52). In scene two, there is no indication of place at all. Johann mentions his office and Silke the park where she had sex with Johann, but these are narrated events. Vati has a speech leitmotif that suggests that those stories could take place everywhere in the world: “VATI. Kuala Lumpur, Okayama, Ulan Bator, Hyderabad, Bahrain, Damaskus, Aserbaidshan, Nowosibirsk, Zaragoza, Burkina Faso, Antananarivo, Ottawa, Alamogordo, Sacramento, Guatemala, Porto Alegre” (56).

The third scene starts with Lena’s parents at a hotel in Singapore. At the same time, the scene is taking place at Johann’s house. As Mutti arrives with Vati’s urn, the two scenes cannot take place simultaneously. Mayenburg solves the problem bringing the dead father to give a speech at his own funeral, which takes place in the middle of the dinner party. There are references to Lena’s bedroom, the living room, the dining room and the pool. The author though gives the freedom to the director to decide where the action is going to take place.

g) Information – Information is abundant in this play but, like *King Kongs Töchter* there is one revelation late in the play that changes how we understand key characters: the disclosure of the real identity of Nina. However, we know who the characters are from the beginning. There is a clear exposition in part one, and the rest of the play is a consequence of Lena’s and Johann’s meeting. The game Mayenburg is playing with the audience refers to the truth of the information. The spectator gets a lot of information, but is it possible to know if the characters are not just lying?

Echoes of the absurdist plays of the fifties populate the play, starting with its title. We don’t know what it literally refers to, until the third act. The last sentence of the play is equally ambiguous, and it establishes the audience as the main builder of the plot, as soon as it opens different possibilities. Here we have again a playwright intermingling content and form. If we are left with uncertainty regarding what really happened to Johann, Mayenburg is making a

comment on the philosophical concept of truth: “Everything she says is false” (“Es ist alles falsch, was sie sagt”; 52). It is possible that the characters are lying to each other the whole time. Our parents lie to us. Politicians lie to populations. Truth is an illusion, make of it what you will. As Mutti says about Lena’s life, “This is your own party” (“Das ist deine eigene Party”; 59). If marriage is a rotten institution, not even adultery can be taken seriously anymore, when Werner reacts ironically to the realization of his wife’s adultery: “Did I miss something, Silke?” (“Hab ich was falsch verstanden, Silke?”; 59). Children are not human beings, they are decoration or trophies to be exhibited publicly.

h) Dialogue – The play is basically structured around chunks of dialogues between the characters with some interspersed monologues. In scene one, for instance, the conversation flows from Werner and Silke’s table to Lena’s family’s table. Henning’s monologues build the transitions between the two tables. In the rest of the play, although the characters already know each other, the structure does not change.

Some events are narrated whereas others are presented as if taking place in that moment. The juxtaposition of the epic and dramatic instances work as a puzzling textual feature, that forces the audience to decide which one is true and which one is false. There is also the possibility of considering both as true and false. The important thing is that here Mayenburg applies the maxim of Brecht that, although fictional characters take one action, they could be taking a different one. Through different versions of the same story, the playwright is inviting the audience to assume a point of view about the events presented. Lena and Vati have different opinions about Detlev, whom Vati would like to see married with Lena. Lena asks her father whether Detlev “is . . . the man with the red face, on whose lap I [Lena] had to sit” (“ist . . . der Mann mit dem roten Gesicht, bei dem . . . ich auf dem Schoss sitzen musste?”; 53). Vati thinks

she is talking about a different person. For him “Detlev works at a Company which produces Hygiene articles . . . and he will make an exception for her: a job in the Managing office, calculation and accountancy” (“Detlev ist in einer Firma für Hygieneartikel . . . und er macht wegen dir eine Ausnahme: Ein Posten in der Verwaltung, Kalkulation und Abrechnung”; 53).

i) Character – If in *Täglich Brot* there were Everyman characters, here, the fictional beings belong more to the category of types. Besides the central couple, Johann and Lena, we have the stereotype of the old couple, the adult couple, and the young couple. In facing those relationships, the protagonists are able to decide if they prefer to be part of the traditional social pattern, or if they prefer to live a free life, far from the standardization of contemporary society.

The old couple, Vati and Mutti, does not affect each other anymore. They have lost their names, but they are still quite identifiable in their social roles. Actually, Mutti suggests they have always been a kind of stereotyped personalities since their first frustrating night together:

VATI. A wedding night makes everything advance. Doesn't it Johann? Don't spare her. What doesn't happen tonight is not going to happen for the rest of the marriage.

MUTTI. That's true. That's exactly what happened with us, wasn't it, daddy?

VATI. Shut up.

(VATI. Eine Hochzeitsnacht schwemmt alles fort. Nicht wahr, Johann? Schone sie nicht. Was heute Nacht nicht wird, das wird nichts für den Rest der Ehe.

MUTTI. Stimmt. Bei uns war das genauso, wars nicht so Vati?

VATI. Halt den Schnabel.) (57)

The second couple, Silke and Werner, fulfills the function of the couple married for some years with young children. They hate each other and the life of others is more interesting than

their own. The emptiness of their relationship is fulfilled with an imaginary child, that reminds us of the nonexistent son in Edward Albee's *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* They need to create something outside their private bond, in order to bear the boredom of their life together. Werner warns Lena and Johann about the kind of life they are going to face some years later: "I'm talking about the miserable times that will come, even if they seem so far. When this time comes, then you will need God, nothing else will be able to save you, you will cry for him, this will be the hour of his triumph." ("Ich spreche von der düsteren Zeit, die kommen wird, auch wenn sie jetzt so fern scheint. Wenn diese Zeit herannaht, dann werdet ihr Gott brauchen, nicht sonst kann euch dann retten, schreien werdet ihr nach ihm, dies wird die Stunde seines Triumphs"; 57).

The last couple is the young pair built by Henning and Tine. Their marginality in the plot, both in function and in theme, end up joining them in a happy ending. Their happiness, though, is a provisional one; it depends on their not looking around them to see what happens with older couples. A farcical act only confirms their feelings for each other:

Henning pours out a bottle over her.

HENNING. I'm sorry.

TINE. My dress is totally wet.

HENNING. I've already said it. I'm sorry.

TINE. You look great.

HENNING. So do you.

TINE. I love you.

HENNING. And I love you.

They kiss.

TINE. Can we get another bottle?

(Henning schüttet ihr eine Karaffe über.

HENNING. Entschuldigung.

TINE. Mein Kleid ist ganz durchnässt.

HENNING. Wie gesagt. Entschuldigung.

TINE. Du siehst hinreissend aus.

HENNING. Du auch.

TINE. Ich liebe dich.

HENNING. Und ich liebe dich.

Sie küssen sich.

TINE. Können wir noch eine Karaffe bekommen?) (59)

Among those established social types, Johann and Lena appear to be more individualized characters. Lena is being pressed by her father to date someone called Detlev and she would like to be saved. Johann has just been dismissed by Melanie and goes to the Polygam Café in order to try to forget her. Their meeting advances both objectives. If we take a look at their actantial models, it is possible to understand why Johann later on would not be able to satisfy Lena's objective in the play:

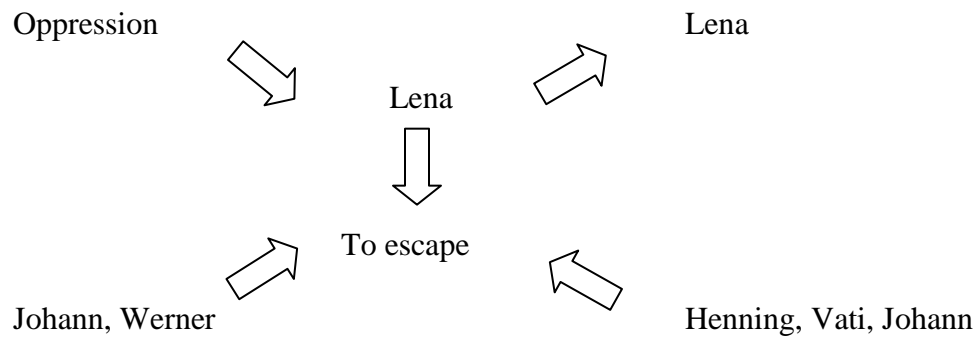


Fig. 11. Actantial Model for Lena in *Das Kalte Kind*

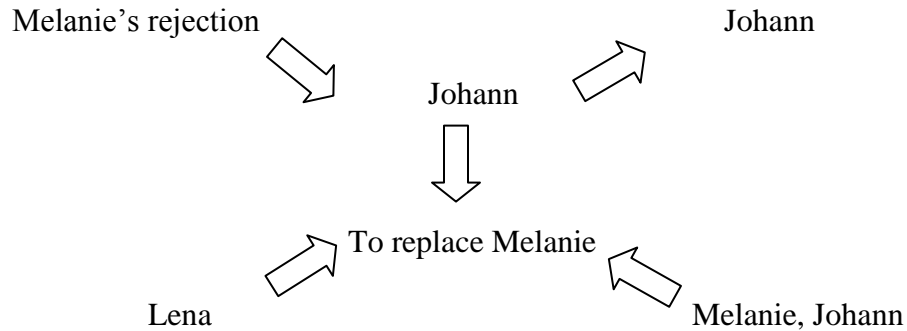


Fig. 12. Actantial Model for Johann in *Das Kalte Kind*

The disagreement between these two characters is clear in the beginning of the second part of the play through the following short exchange:

JOHANN. Melanie.

LENA. My name is Lena.

JOHANN. Exactly. I want to marry you.

LENA. Couldn't we simply fuck?

(JOHANN. Melanie.

LENA. Ich heisse Lena.

JOHANN. Genau. Ich will dich heiraten.

LENA. Können wir einfach nicht ficken?) (55)

Johann wants a substitute for Melanie, but Lena is not interested in becoming anyone's prisoner. The wedding symbolizes a kind of forced connection between them which becomes worse and worse, as they do not respect each other's individuality. The outcome of Lena and Johann's relationship is tragic, because they were not able to adapt their objectives to each other. Marius von Mayenburg is making a fierce social critique here against individuals' inability to change social stereotypes and institutions. The only characters that had a chance of escaping the world of clichés, fails.

Because the characters appear in each of the three scenes, it does not make sense to draw a configuration (or character scene chart). This constellation, however, indicates the centrality of Lena and Johann in the plot.

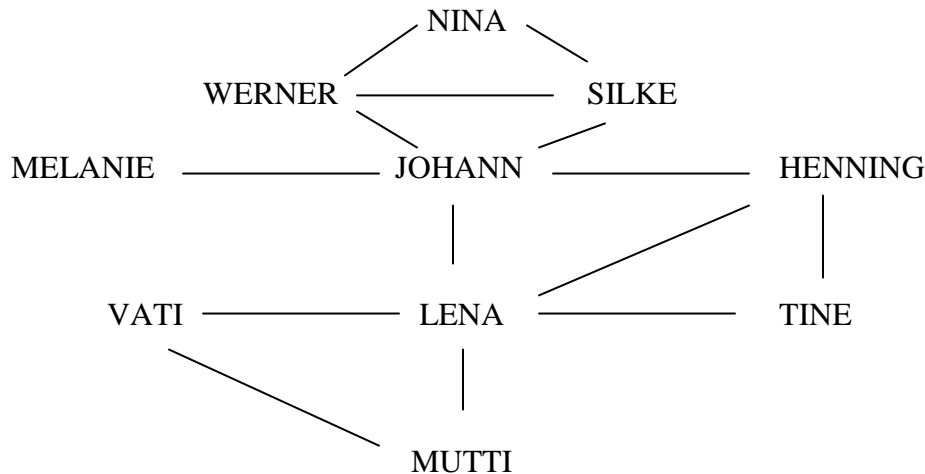


Fig. 13. Constellation in *Das Kalte Kind*

A last interesting element to consider is the importance of off-stage characters or non-conventional ones, like Nina. It is important to note that the reader is never confused about whom the characters are, and most important of all for the definition of their dramaticity, that they are fictional figures too. In *Melanie*, we have a figure reminiscent of off-stage characters who dominate the ones we can see, e.g. the Count in *Miss Julie*, and, at the same time, since we cannot be certain that she actually exists, she is something like Ionesco's bald soprano. Whether or not *Melanie* is real or a projection of other characters' imaginations, she is a rounded character, as the following description by Johann suggests.

JOHANN. First, she is not marrying me. Second, she was never able to forget Christian. Third, I have only reminded her of him. Fourth, the similarity is not big enough, this is why, fifth, she took the opportunity to break with me, because sixth the ring hasn't pleased her.

(JOHANN. Erstens, sie heiratet mich nicht. Zweitens, sie hat Christian nie vergessen können. Drittens, ich habe sie nur an ihn erinnert. Viertens, die Ähnlichkeit ist aber nicht gross genug, weshalb sie fünftens bei der Gelegenheit die ganze Sache mit mir beendet, weil ihr sechstens auch mein Ring überhaupt nicht gefällt.) (54)

Marius von Mayenburg explores many possibilities concerning the dramatic element of character. This makes sense since his play explores the capacity of people to break out of the social frames, stereotypes, and institutions that define and limit them.

6.1.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Coldness, plethora and simultaneity are the postdramatic elements that one can see in *Das Kalte Kind*.

Coldness and plethora are only related to Nina, the character to which the title refers. This Chekhovian seagull, dead before any possible birth, is not a person but a doll, suggesting an absence of warmth like that Lehmann sees in a good deal of postdramatic theatre. In keeping with that, Nina is a deformed being and plethora suggests some deviation from the norm. This is made clear by the way Silke treats the object, actions that are explicitly visible according to the stage directions: “*Silke pours Werner’s beer into the stroller*” (“*Silke schüttet Werners Bierglas in den Kinderwagen*”; 52) and “*She breaks the doll’s head off*” (“*Sie reisst der Puppe den Kopf ab*”; 58). This is grotesquerie, the process of deforming the already bizarre doll.

Regarding simultaneity, many actions happen at the same time. For example, in the first segment, Lena’s family is at one table and Nina’s parents at another, while Henning is waiting for his victim in the Lady’s toilet. In the third act, we can establish three different chronological

segments, which might be considered real action or narrations that occur during the dinner party at Lena's and Johann's house, e.g. Mutti and Vati's trip to Singapore. At the end of the play, Werner and Silke narrate Lena's revenge over Johann. Again, Werner and Silke could be witnessing the scene or simply narrating it to the audience after it has happened. The main difference from postdramatic simultaneity lies in the sequential presentation of these bits. Mayenbourg is not asking for the scenes to be staged at the same time but one after another (though, again, he offers flexibility as to how these events are staged). Making this choice, the author is declaring his intention that audiences understand the sequence of events in the world of the play. He is not using simultaneity to undercut comprehensibility, as in postdramatic theatre.

Less explosive than his impactful *Feuergesicht*, *Das Kalte Kind* still shows Mayenbourg's "interest in the family and its dysfunctional relationships" (Barnett, 326). He is very attached to the dramatic form and the few postdramatic elements are tangential. Indeed, as Barnett observes, "other playwrights have sought a more formally experimental relationship with contemporary reality" (327).

6.2. DIE FRAU VON FRÜHER (2004)

6.2.1. AUTHOR

Roland Schimmelpfennig's achievements as a playwright are immense, as indicated by the fact that he is currently the most staged contemporary German language playwright. He worked as a journalist in Turkey, before starting his studies in theater directing at the Otto-Falkenberg School in Munich in 1990. His first play dates from 1996 and, since then, he has

been awarded the Nestroy Prize, the Else Laske-Schüler Preis and he has received eight nominations for the Mülheimer Theater Award, having finally won the grand prize in 2010. He does not like to talk about his plays. As he says:

The theater speaks for itself. Nobody would get the idea to do justice to a painting or to a sculpture by means of language, or a musical composition. A work of art informs about itself, it communicates--ideally. Playful, frivolous, neglectful, funny, or very meticulous, completely humorless, documentary, psychological or puzzling, hardly accessible, awkward, obscure or whatever: plays grasp their audiences.

(Das Theater spricht für sich selbst. Niemand würde auf die Idee kommen, mit den Mitteln der Sprache einem Bild oder einer Skulptur gerecht werden zu wollen, oder einer musikalischen Komposition. Ein Kunstwerk erteilt Auskunft über sich selbst, es teilt sich mit – im Idealfall. Verspielt, leichtsinnig, fahrlässig, komisch oder akribisch genau, völlig humorlos, dokumentarisch, psychologisch oder rätselhaft, schwer zugänglich, sperrig, düster oder wie auch immer: Stücke nehmen ihre Zuschauer mit.) (“Wie man”)

6.2.2. SYNOPSIS

Frank and Claudia are married to each other. The day they are finishing to pack their suitcases to move to another city, the doorbell rings. It is Romy Vogtländer who arrives to ask for payment of a debt incurred twenty-four years before.

ROMY V. We were a pair for a whole summer-

FRANK. Romy Vogtländer...

ROMY V. 24 years ago.

FRANK. Romy . . . that time. *Short Pause*. Then we were seventeen.

ROMY V. Seventeen, that's right. I was seventeen, you were twenty, and then you swore to me that you would love me forever.

(ROMY V. Wir waren einen Sommer lang ein Paar-

FRANK. Romy Vogtländer...

ROMY V. Vor 24 Jahren.

FRANK. Romy . . . damals. *Kurze Pause*. Da waren wir siebzehn.

ROMY V. Siebzehn, ja genau. Ich war siebzehn, du warst zwanzig, und damals hast du mir geschworen dass du mich immer lieben wirst.) (48)

Schimmelpfennig tells a contemporary version of the myth of Medea, with the same tragic outcome. Romy is brought into the house after Frank's son throws a stone onto her head and she faints. She was rejected by Frank, but his son's error gives her the chance to fulfill her plans. First, she kills Frank's son, and then she gets rid of Frank's wife, in a horrific scene at the end of the play.

The plot is not original and is quite simple. Rather, the author is interested in mingling form and content, offering different perspectives on the same phenomenon. Claudia's death, for instance, is told in three different versions. Each character filters the facts in order to build his/her own reality. In a play that is apparently dealing solely with personal issues, Schimmelpfennig is questioning the idea of truth, which is an important social and political concept. Coming from the past, Romy symbolizes the memories that people try to erase, but find constantly knocking on the door. Although the play does not make any direct reference to an

historical social or political event, the plot allows for a variety of interpretations, all relating to the weight of the past being carried in the present.

6.2.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – The title of this play belongs to the category of descriptive titles with extra information. It is not simply Romy Vogtländer, but *The Woman from Before*.⁵⁶ The first part of the title suggests Frank's oblivion. Romy is just a "woman" for Frank, a teenage lover he has long ago forgotten. The second part of the title refers to Romy's place in Frank's past but the vagueness of "before" also implies his loss of memory and the consequences of not learning from our past actions. The title does not imply directly a connection with any historical event, but it is very suggestive. Whereas Claudia wants to erase the past, Andi, who belongs to a younger generation, prefers to examine it.

CLAUDIA. Why didn't you leave her lying there?

ANDI. Leave her lying there? The dead woman?

CLAUDIA. Yes-

ANDI. I couldn't do that-

(CLAUDIA. Warum hast du sie nicht da liegenlassen?)

ANDI. Sie liegenlassen? Die tote Frau?

CLAUDIA. Ja-

ANDI. Das konnte ich nicht-) (51)

Andi is going to be sacrificed as a kind of scapegoat but his death can also be seen as something larger in a social context. Different from the generations who became adults during the eighties and nineties, a period when German politicians were espousing an ideology of

⁵⁶ *The woman from before.*

economic euphoria allied with a lack of interest in the past, Andi belongs to a younger generation that wants to examine the past and its consequences. This includes not only the guilt related to atrocities committed by the Nazi regime, but also to the economic recession caused by the neoliberal economy at the end of the twentieth century that adversely affected the welfare state.

b) Genre – If we agree that both tragedy and drama address serious issues in a heavy tone, and that the main difference between is the social class depicted, then we can say that *Die Frau von Früher* is a drama. If we want to consider only the triad of atmosphere + subject + ending, then there would be no difference between tragedy and drama. Since the play is a contemporary version of the myth of Medea, it would seem to be a tragedy. On the other hand, if we follow George Steiner, a U.S. scholar, who “In *The Death of Tragedy* . . . argues that the triumph of rationalism and a secular worldview has removed the metaphysical grounds for tragedy in the modern world” (Brown), then the only left possibility in terms of genre is drama.⁵⁷

c) Structure - Schimmelpfennig reveals content through form “with his non-chronological play structure” (“mit seiner nicht chronologischen Stückstruktur”; Werndl). The drama’s forward and backward movement through time enacts the author’s premise about the relativity of truth and the impactful presence of the past. Presenting many versions of the same fact, Schimmelpfennig invites the audience to choose between them, in this way taking a critical approach to the story. “That which seems true and certain does not have to be true; certainty can from one moment to the other become uncertainty--even after twenty years of a marriage” (“Das, was wahr und gewiss scheint, muss nicht wahr sein; Sicherheit kann von einem Moment auf den anderen in Unsicherheit umschlagen--auch nach zwanzig Jahren Ehe”; Werndl). Although the play does not explicitly address broader social spheres, the instability of truth in

⁵⁷ See Steiner, George. *The Death of Tragedy*. 1961. New York: Oxford UP, 1980.

Schimmelpfennig's domestic situation mirrors the false information we receive from the media and politicians.

The following table of the structure of *Die Frau von Früher* helps us to understand these theoretical ideas in a visual way:

Table 5

Scenes Chronology in *Die Frau von Früher*

Scene	Time stage direction	Chronological position ⁵⁸
1	-	D + E
2	Ten minutes earlier	C + D + E
3	A little later	B
4	Some minutes earlier	E + F
5	A little later	G + H + I
6	Meanwhile	G + H + I
7	-	J
8	-	K
9	Later at night, around 3:30 a.m.	M
10	-	L
11	Two days earlier	A
12.1	Two days later, at night, shortly after 3:30 a.m.	N + O
12.2	Later in the same night	P
12.3	A little earlier in the same night	O + P + Q + R
12.4	Shortly before	M
12.5	A little later	S
12.6	Around ten minutes earlier	H
12.7	Around ten minutes later	T
13	Next morning	V
14	Some minutes earlier in the same morning	U + V + W
15.1	Around twenty-five minutes later	δ
15.2	Around twenty-five minutes earlier	X + Y
15.3	Some minutes later	α
15.4	Some minutes earlier	Y + Z + α + β
16	-	γ
17	-	δ + ϵ
18	-	ϵ + ζ + η
19	A moment earlier	ϵ + ζ + η

⁵⁸ The Greek letters by the end of the table were needed because there were more events in the play than the number of letters in the alphabet.

The distinction between plot and story is essential here. “Story” refers to the sequence of events as they must have occurred, in a chronological cause-to-effect sequence. “Plot” refers to the sequence of events as they are presented by the playwright, in the course of the drama’s unfolding. The first event of the play in terms of the story happens in scene 11. The first event in terms of the plot is not the first one in terms of the story, but the fourth and the fifth, represented by the fourth and fifth letters of the alphabet in the chart above. Schimmelfennig is not only jumping backwards and forwards in time, but the events are sometimes repeated, with small additions or deletions, suggesting that truth is relative through the structure of the play.

In a very open structural form, the playwright does not follow any traditional pattern of number of acts. The scenes are not even named as “part,” “episode” or “scene”. They have only numbers. One can see here the influence of movies in the narrative. The scenes are short and the flashbacks constitute a basic feature of the play, reminding us of the importance of the past.

d) Fabula – The important dramatic element to be mentioned concerning the fable of *Die Frau von Früher* is the exposition. The exposition does not depart from what is expected of a dramatic plot, but it is very similar to it, creating therefore a contrast with the unusual time structure of the play. This contrast shows how closed and open elements can coexist in contemporary drama in the same play: the exposition in the very tradition of the closed form, and time as a feature that would be categorized as belonging to an open form.

Szondi starts his *Theory of Modern Drama* by explaining how the most outstanding modern playwrights were adapting drama to modern perceptions of reality. He concludes that the epic theatre was the ultimate form, “a kind of universal key” (*Postdramatic* 29), if the dramatist intended to establish effective communication with his audience. Nevertheless, many other

attempts were being made by outstanding dramatic authors, who sought to avoid the artificiality of drama. The first playwright commented on by Szondi is Ibsen:

The most characteristic feature of Ibsen's technique of exposition is, however, his use of what may be called the retrospective method, a technique employed by Sophocles, by Racine and to a certain extent by Hebbel. That is to say, he prefers to begin his tragedy just before the catastrophe and to make the dialogue unravel the preceding events in retrospect, instead of presenting the actual events in succession on the stage. This type of exposition concentrates the action into a very small space of time, in conformity with the realistic desire to observe the unities. It is also, as it happens, a type of exposition favoured by the traditional fate-tragedy, the dramatic conflict in all cases being between past and present, the sins of the past contrasting violently with the calm atmosphere of the present and swiftly destroying the idyll as retribution approaches. The dramatic contrast between the beginnings and endings of Ibsen's plays is dependent for its effect on this type of exposition. (Tennant, 91)

Tennant offers a classic exposition of the "late point of attack." Many of the dramatic elements he mentions are present in Schimmelpfennig's play: the compressed unity of time, the plot limited to the moment right before the catastrophe, and the past intruding into the present with a destructive force. The actions in the play contribute decisively to the idea of fate, and the inescapable question of the "what if"? Romy gets into the house again, *because* Andy threw a stone onto her head. She says: "You brought me here . . . not your father" ("Du hast mich hergebracht...nicht dein Vater; 53). The metaphysical dimension of the fable gives a certain tragic dimension to the characters. They are not just psychologically whole humans, they are also

almost mythical figures, e.g. Romy coming from nowhere, to claim a debt from the past. If we want to bring Schimmelpfennig even closer to Ibsen, in order to show how much *The Woman from Before* is indebted to the tradition of plays with a “late point of attack,” consider the remarkable similarity between the title of *The Lady from the Sea* and *Die Frau von Früher*. Although in the Norwegian’s play, the protagonist is not the character who comes from the past, in both plays we have a couple being threatened by the sudden arrival of someone from a long time ago. There is no death at the end of *Lady From the Sea*, but this is not characteristic of his late work where we see a lot of what Tennant classifies as “responsible deaths” (116). By this, he means that the deaths do not happen by chance; they are a present consequence of past acts committed by one of the characters. It is surprising to discover that Schimmelpfennig’s play has so much in common with the ancient Greek idea of destiny and Ibsen; the cinematic short scenes and the narrative passages of the Epic Theatre would lead us to speculate a different heritage.

If Schimmelpfennig is still using the expositional methods of Ibsen, it is because those methods are effective for his aesthetics and ideology. Ibsen is used as a comparison in this section in order to show that contemporary drama is not only influenced by current artistic trends, but it is also very grounded on traditional formal principles.

e) Time – The time structure in *Die Frau von Früher* is not a traditional one based on linear chronology but, at the same time, it is not the “eternal present” of the postdramatic paradigm. If “the *prolongation of time* . . . a continuous present . . . and an *aesthetic of repetition*” (*Postdramatic* 161) are trade marks of the postdramatic theatre, then the many changes of time that continue to underwrite a coherent fictional reality, the continuous exchange between past, present and future that yet create an intelligible character history, set this play into a different aesthetic category. Thus we are left with the idea of time in the epic theatre, which is

characterized by “leaps in time that point to human reality and behaviour as discontinuous” (*Postdramatic* 161). Not only is this discontinuity built into the structure of the play, it is also confirmed by the first stage direction: “The indications of the time leaps in the beginning of the scenes have to be made clear through writings, announcement or other means” (“Die Angaben der Zeitsprünge zu Szenenbeginn müssen durch Schrift, Ansage oder andere Mittel deutlich gemacht werden”; 48). Basically, the action takes place in a night and the following morning. There is only one scene--namely, the eleventh--that takes place two days earlier. Scene thirteen establishes a break in the action starting a kind of “second act”. (I use the quotation marks because the author does not frame his play according to this conventional skeleton, which is obvious by the epic structure of the plot through its division into scenes). Time in the play is intricately arranged, due to its advances, flashbacks and simultaneities. The play starts *in media res*, and three scenes offer us dialogues that took place before the time of this scene. This game of advancing and returning goes on. Schimmelpfennig demands a very attentive and intellectually curious spectator. He uses this method to stress some short passages that will be repeated in the middle of later scenes, such as:

Later in the same night.

ANDI. It was a stone.

ROMY V. What kind of stone . . .

ANDY. It was a stone that hit you.

ROMY V. No . . .

ANDY. Right . . . it was a stone . . . this big . . . it hit you on the head.

ROMY V. How do you know that?

(Später in derselben Nacht.

AND. Es war ein Stein.

ROMY V. Was für ein Stein . . .

ANDI. Es war ein Stein, der Sie getroffen hat.

ROMY V. Nein . . .

ANDI. Doch . . . es war ein Stein . . . etwa so gross . . . er traf Sie hier am Kopf.

ROMY V. Woher weisst du das?) (53)

Simultaneity occurs not on stage, as the scenes are written in a sequence, but through different narrations of the same moment. This happens mainly with Tina, who is a kind of outside character and takes part in only one dialogue; she makes her other interventions in a narrative form.

f) Space – Schimmelpfennig is very strict about the place of the action. There is a long description of the room in which most of the action takes place: the large hall of Frank's house. All of the scenes take place there with the exception of the narratives by Tina, which occur outside the house. The author is again dealing with the theme of truth and its different versions. While we have an action happening inside the house, Tina is the voice from outside. Her perspective is always partial, and that suggests metaphorically the amount of information that ordinary people get.

TINA. She still stands at the door, indecisive, doubtful, then first she goes inside the bedroom, holds the bag, there's something she does not grasp, I can see that.

(TINA. Noch steht sie in der Tür, unschlüssig, zweifelnd, dann erst geht sie ins Zimmer, halt die Tüte, sie versteht etwas nicht, das kann ich sehen.) (56)

g) Information – Depending on the kind of audience, the expectation in relation to the play differs. For the ones who are acquainted with the Medea myth, it is not the outcome of the

story but how the story is going to be told that matters. In this case, information is not that important, because the denouement is already known.

If the spectator does not know the myth, however, it is necessary to acquire information in order to understand the plot. Here, Schimmelpfennig aligns himself with some of the other playwrights analyzed in this dissertation. First, he challenges the audience to build a logical narrative. Only then will the audience be ready to establish where the truth might be. The author goes further, because his plot offers different perspectives on the story's events. There are at least two standpoints for each event, which complicates the audience's task of positioning itself.

h) Dialogue – There are three different kinds of speeches in the play. Once again, the author is using different formal possibilities to stress his premise about the relativity of truth.

There are dialogues such as:

CLAUDIA. Who are you talking to?

FRANK. Me?

CLAUDIA. Yes, who are you talking to?

FRANK. With-with nobody. Who should I be talking to-

(CLAUDIA. Mit wem sprichst du?

FRANK. Ich?

CLAUDIA. Ja, mit wem sprichst Du?

FRANK. Mit-mit niemanden. Mit wem soll ich denn sprechen-) (48)

There are monologues:

CLAUDIA. Was it Tina, who just left the house? I thought I saw someone. (*She finds the present. Talks towards the Bathroom.*) What's that? Is it from Tina?

How nice of her. This is really nice of her--how surprising. Do you know what's in there?

(CLAUDIA. War das Tina, die gerade aus dem Haus gekommen ist? Ich dachte, ich hätte jemanden gesehen. *(Sie findet das Geschenk. Spricht Richtung Bad.)* Was ist das? Ist das von Tina? Wie nett von ihr. Das ist doch wirklich nett von ihr-- wie entzückend. Weisst du, was drin ist?) (56)

There are also narrations, usually delivered by Tina, who besides establishing different perspectives on the main events, tells the same story of abandonment that makes Romy return from the past:

TINA. I wait for five minutes, ten, but he doesn't come. I stand alone in the darkness at the foot of the bushes, right off the lights of the lamps. Everything sleeps. No cars. No voices. Above me very high in the air an airplane. How is it there, now, inside the airplane?

(TINA. Ich warte fünf Minuten, zehn, aber er kommt nicht. Ich stehe allein in der Dunkelheit am Fusse der Böschung, gerade ausserhalb des Lichtscheins der Laternen. Alles schläft. Kein Auto. Keine Stimmen. Über mir hoch oben in der Luft ein Flugzeug. Wie ist es da, jetzt, in dem Flugzeug?) (53)

Last, stage directions add the perspective of the playwright to the perspectives of the characters, as manifested through their speeches:

In the next entrance he tries to free himself, but he does not succeed, she has put the bag around his head. He punches in the emptiness. No air comes. He fights, blind and suffocating, back to the hall, she takes him back to his room.

(Beim nächsten Auftritt versucht er sich zu befreien, aber es gelingt ihm nicht, sie hat die Tüte über seinen Kopf gezogen. Er greift ins Leere. Er bekommt keine Luft. Er kämpft sich, blind und erstickend, zurück in die Flur, sie zieht ihn zurück in sein Zimmer.) (53)

i) Character – The protagonist of the play is Frank. Although the title of the play is referring to another character, the title itself underlines Romy's importance to Frank and not herself as a character per se. It is the same as *Uncle Vanya* by Anton Chekhov. The title suggests that Vanya is someone's uncle and, therefore, that we should be aware of his niece, Sonja. In essence, the title puts Sonja at the center of the play, though it refers to another character. So too here. *The Woman from Before* is the woman from Frank's past.

Having said that, we can build the configuration of the play.

Table 6

Configuration in *Die Frau von Früher*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12.1	12.2	12.3	12.4	12.5
FRANK	X	X		X		X	X	X			X					
CLAUDIA	X	X		X		X	X	X								
ROMY V.	X	X		X			(X)	X	X			X	X	X		X
ANDI							X		X		X	X	X	X		X
TINA			X		X					X					X	

	12.6	12.7	13	14	15.1	15.2	15.3	15.4	16	17	18	19	# of scenes
FRANK	X		X	X		X	X	X	X			X	15
CLAUDIA	X	X	X	X	X					X			12
ROMY V.		(X)		X		X	X	X					15
ANDI		(X)											8
TINA									X		X		6

The equal number of scenes in which Frank and Romy appear suggests that the play is about their relationship.

The constellation in a play that is so economical with respect to the number of characters shows the centrality of Frank in the plot.

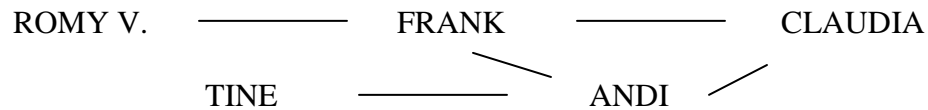


Fig. 14. Constellation in *Die Frau von Früher*

Frank is the link between Romy and his family. Romy kills both Claudia and Andi because of Frank and their interrupted relationship in the past.

Another important consideration when looking for the main character of the play is to identify with whom the play opens and closes. The last image is the one kept by the audience's eyes. It is no accident that Frank is the only character seen in the last scene of the play.

For these reasons, I give priority to Frank's actantial model.

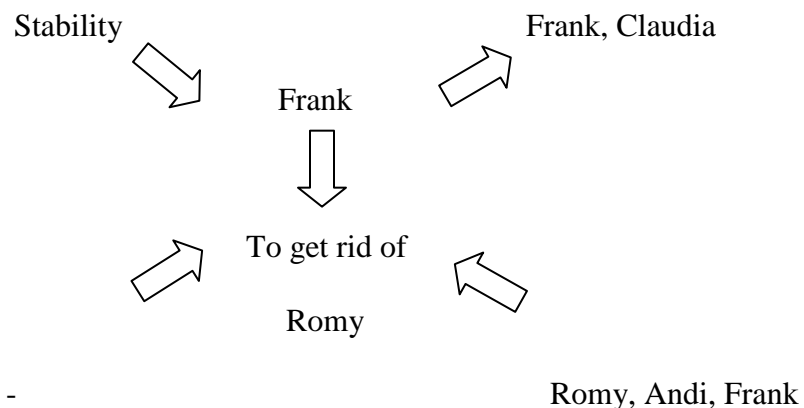


Fig. 15. Actantial Model for Frank in *Die Frau von Früher*

Frank does not want to renounce his marriage of nineteen years and the secure economic condition that he has achieved. He wonders if it is not worth it to return to his romantic and irresponsible youth when Romy presses him about the life he now has but he realizes that he would lose too much. This character is the prototype of the individual who did something

condemnable in the past and is trying to repress this memory. *Die Frau von Früher* is a powerful examination of the return of the repressed as seen through the very personal journey of an ordinary man.

6.2.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Simultaneity is what comes to mind when looking for postdramatic influences in *Die Frau von Früher*. Nevertheless, the text does not ask for the scenes to be played at the same time. There is a deliberately constructed sequence. Scenes five and six, for instance, happen at the same time but the reason for this conjunction lies in the increased expectation it creates as we think that the stone has probably hit Romy's head; we then have the first scene between Claudia and Frank after the intrusion and the revelation of the woman from before. The dialogue that the audience expects between these two characters is positioned as the second in the sequence of these two scenes; furthermore, scene five foreshadows the motif of violence and physical harm that we will see played out in hideous fashion later in the play.

The three last scenes in the play, each relating the same event, build to a masterful climax, one of the characteristic moments in a dramatic play. The horrible incident of Claudia's burning--a direct reference to Medea punishing Jason with the gifts that her children brought to his wife--is unveiled from three different perspectives, each exploring a different speech form: monologue, narration, and action without words. Yet these three perspectives are not simultaneous. It is the sequencing of the contrasting views à la Eisenstein and not the juxtaposition that creates the tension and allows the audience both to understand the narrative and take a position for or against it.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Russian film director who introduced the concept of "montage" which is the creation of an idea through the editing of two apparently disconnected pictures.

6.3. MONSUN (2005)

6.3.1. AUTHOR

Although Anja Hilling is the most youthful member of the post-1989 generation of German-language playwrights, her path to success looks like much like the others portrayed in this dissertation. She earned a degree in Theatre Studies and German Literature, then studied at the well-reputed *Szenisches Schreiben* course at the Universität der Künste in Berlin from 2002 to 2006. Her plays have already been nominated for the Mülheimer Theater Prize; they have been read at the Plays' Market at the Berliner Theatertreffen; and she was chosen the “best young playwright of the year” by the highly respected magazine *Theater Heute* in 2005. Her plays are staged by important theatres in Germany and her productivity is amazing: ten plays in seven years.

6.3.2. SYNOPSIS

Bruno is married to Paula, but he has an affair with Sybille. He writes the script of a soap opera called “House of Tears” (Tränenheim). After a disastrous interview he is fired, and the producers consider making Sybille his substitute. Coco and Melanie are a lesbian couple planning to have a baby. When Melanie gives up the idea of fostering a child with Coco, she decides to leave.

Zippo is Bruno and Paula's child. He serves as the point of connection between the characters.

When Melanie is preparing her farewell words for Coco, she runs over Zippo who dies. Both couples separate. Bruno goes to Sybille. Melanie goes to Vietnam. Coco and Paula meet at a beach house and spend some days together.

*Monsun*⁶⁰ is a story about real people. The death of Zippo shakes the life conceptions of the characters, making them realize what really matters in life. It is possible to see through Hilling's play the historical transition of drama from an artificial representation of reality, like one of the soap operas written by Bruno, to the more naturalistic real life drama of today.

6.3.3. PLAY ANALYSIS

a) Title – *Monsun*, or Monsoon in English, according to the Oxford English Dictionary is “a seasonal prevailing wind in the region of South and Southeast Asia, blowing from the Southwest between May and September and bringing rain” (OED “Monsoon”). The title is descriptive in that it refers to the rain that falls in Vietnam during Melanie's stay in that country: “It rains. The sound of the rain has changed. It is soft. It does not drop anymore.” (“Es regnet. Der Klang des Regens hat sich verändert. Er ist weich. Er tropft nicht mehr”; 55). At the same time “monsoon” is a metaphorical reference to the tears dropped by all the characters, as they experience their losses. Everyone loses someone dear to them. Just as water spreads, so too the monsoon of sorrow spreads over multiple spaces in the plot: a house at the sea, a lake in Brandenburg and the hut in Vietnam under the pitiless monsoon rainfall.

b) Genre – The characters depicted are ordinary middle class people, the tone of the play is serious, and the subject is serious too. Therefore, the remaining element to be discussed is the play's ending. The pairs have rearranged themselves and, despite the loss of their children, they are willing to start a new life again. Death followed by a non-tragic ending is typical of

⁶⁰ *Monsoon*.

tragicomedy. In *Monsoon*, after the sad events of the beginning and middle of the play, we face the characters experiencing a kind of “resurrection.” (Not by chance, Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, one of his tragicomedies--or romances--has a character that metaphorically resurrects at the end of the play.)⁶¹

c) Structure – The structure draws from varied sources. First, *Monsoon* follows the traditional division of a drama into five acts. However, each act has a title, which returns us to one of the alienation effects of the epic theatre. Another direct influence is from the movies; the play’s very short scenes, jumping from one place of action to another, are reminiscent of a cinematic narrative technique. The table below encapsulates these elements:

Table 7

Speech Forms in *Monsoon*

	Speech form	Length in minutes	Characters	Place
INTRO	Voices in off	1	Bruno (B)	Darkness
I.1	Stage direction + Monologue	¼	Paula (P)	Kitchen
I.2	Stage direction + Monologue	¼	Coco (C)	Bakery
I.3	Stage direction + Voice in off + Monologue	¼	P	Kitchen
I.4	Stage direction + Monologue	1	Melanie (M)	Car
I.5	Stage direction + Monologue	¼	P	Kitchen
I.6	Dialogue	½	B + Sybille (S)	Fair
I.7	Monologue	1	C + (M)	Hospital
I.8	Dialogue	2	P + B	Kitchen
II.1	Dialogue	½	B + S	Bed
II.2	Stage direction + Monologue	¼	C	Room
II.3	Dialogue	1	P + B	Kitchen
II.4	Dialogue	1	B + S	Café
II.5	Dialogue	1	P + B	Corridor
II.6	Dialogue	1	S + B + M	Café
II.7	Dialogue	1	C + M	Bakery
II.8	Stage direction + Voice in off +	½	P	Anywhere

⁶¹ See Foster, Verna. *The Name and Nature of Tragicomedy*.

	Monologue			
III.1	Dialogue	½	P + C	Beach house
III.2	Stage direction + Monologue	¼	M	Hut in Vietnam
III.3	Dialogue	¼	P + C	Beach
III.4	Dialogue	2	B + S	Zippo's room
III.5	Monologue	1	M	Hut in Vietnam
III.6	Dialogue	¼	P + C	Beach
III.7	Stage direction	¼	B	At a desk
III.8	Voice in off	¼	S	Sybille's house
III.9	Dialogue	1 ½	P + C	Beach house
IV.1	Monologue	1	M	Hut in Vietnam
IV.2	Dialogue	1	P + C	Beach
IV.3	Dialogue	1	B + S	Car
IV.4	Stage direction	¼	M	Hut in Vietnam
IV.5	Dialogue	½	S + B	Kayak
IV.6	Dialogue	¼	C + P	Beach
IV.7	Dialogue	½	S + B	Lake shore
IV.8	Dialogue	½	P + C	Beach house
IV.9	Dialogue	½	B + S	Car
IV.10	Monologue	½	M	Hut in Vietnam
IV.11	Dialogue	½	P + C	Beach house
V.1	Dialogue	1	P + B	Zippo's room
V.2	Stage direction	¼	P	Kitchen
V.3	Stage direction	¼	B	Zippo's room
V.4	Voice in off	½	C	Bakery
V.5	Stage direction	¼	M	Hut in Vietnam
V.6	Dialogue	½	P + B	At the table
V.7	Monologue	¼	B	Kitchen
V.8	Dialogue	1	B + S	Café
V.9	Stage direction + Voice in off + Monologue	½	P	Kitchen
V.10	Voice in off + dialogue	¼	C + B + S	At the door
V.11	Stage direction + Voice in off + Monologue	¼	C	Coco's house
V.12	Stage direction	¼	M	Hut in Vietnam

Given this structure alone, it is impossible to identify a protagonist in *Monsun* (though I will do so in the section titled “character” below). All five characters are important for the game of switching partners. The odd number of characters means that there is always someone alone, creating the sense that the other couples are not very stable. This sense of instability comes to

fruition as the plot unfolds. In the beginning there are Paula and Bruno, and Melanie and Coco; the pairs are then disarranged and new combinations are formed.

Another characteristically contemporary element implied by the play's structure is the speed of the action. Not only are the scenes short, but the place of the action changes drastically. It is possible to see here influences of the fragmented artistic forms of the postmodernist paradigm.

d) Fabula – The story itself is reminiscent of the accelerated times of today. The rapid pace with which the characters change partners and locations makes them recognizable figures. Hilling, though, is not merely reflecting the way things are in the postmodern world; she is also making a social critique of the ephemeral relationships that arise under these conditions. Two main elements that are related to the society as a whole are examined through the fabula: the erasure of the traumatic past and the difficulty in building a future.

The traumatic past is represented by the death of Zippo, the attempts to inseminate Coco, and Bruno's disastrous interview. All of these events in the fabula make the characters flee from each other. Paula and Coco go to the beach house at the East Sea. Bruno and Sybille go to a lake outside Berlin. Melanie takes the most radical decision: she flies to Vietnam and stays there in a hut for the remainder of the play, trying to learn native behavior and to forget her past.

If the past is something to be forgotten, the future is hard to build upon. Every relationship needs attention. The play suggests that human beings are more and more individualistic and are not willing to make the concessions necessary to remain in relationship. However, a family, a marriage, or a love affair depends on concessions. The inability of the characters in the play to make lasting commitments to one another reflects contemporary society, where people are constantly frustrated by interpersonal difficulties especially as contrasted with

the fairy tale characters of TV soap operas. Hilling uses the image of a soap opera to stress the artificiality of mainstream drama compared to real life. Bruno is the scriptwriter of “The House of Tears” and is well aware of the bad quality of his writing. *Monsoon* shows us that actuality is neither so tragic nor so happy as it is shown in television. Bruno asks the interviewer: “So you don’t need to tell me what kind of shit I’m doing there” (“Also Sie müssen mir nicht erzählen was für einen Scheiss ich da mache”; 47)

In a larger frame, Hilling is talking about contemporary society and, more specifically, Germany. The characters do not want to face the traumatic events of the past and, at the same time, they cannot organize their lives toward a successful future.

e) Time – The text is chronologically linear. Hilling does not reverse time’s arrow in order to tell her story. Despite the importance of the past, her intention is to create the expectation of how the characters will live in the present and future. Different from *Die Frau von Früher*, where time variance suggested the relativity of truth, the veracity of the characters is not in question in *Monsoon* so much as their capacity to establish relationships. The text is less a meta-commentary about itself as a work of art than it is the story of a journey of five characters who try to survive in a threatening individualistic world.

Weather is a fundamental element in the play. The rain is a symbol of the sadness and the tears dropped by the characters. Yet it is a symbol of regeneration too. It falls everywhere, both in Vietnam and in Germany. This natural element is made lyrical by the radio newscaster:

VOICE OF THE RADIO NEWSCASTER. What a rain. In Berlin and in Brandenburg. Munich Hamburg, the whole of Germany is under rain. Also Vienna reports showers. Rain rain rain. I want to go barefoot on the street. Right now. Rain in Prague. Thunderstorm in Moscow. Drops form on the eyelashes.

Floodwaves put Scotland under water. In Vietnam many people have lost their homes. What a rain. I feel myself as a wild poppy that tears open its red mouth in the middle of the field. This is how I feel: born again.

(STIMME DER RADIOSPRECHERIN. So ein Regen. In Berlin und Brandenburg. München Hamburg ganz Deutschland im Regen. Auch Wien meldet Schauer. Regen Regen Regen. Ich will mit nackten Füßen auf die Strasse. Jetzt gleich. Dauerniesel in Prag. In Moskau Gewitter mit Sturmböen. Von dem Wimpern tropfen. Flutwellen setzen Schottland unter Wasser. In Vietnam verloren zahlreiche Menschen ihr Dach überm Kopf. So ein Regen. Da fühl ich mich wie milder Mohn. Der sein knallrotes Maul aufreißt mitten auf der Wiese. So fühl ich mich. Wie neugeboren.) (56)

f) Space – Varying radically from one scene to the other, the places of action establish the pace of the text and at the same time they make a comment about the characters.

Paula transits between the kitchen and the beach house. She is a domestic character who is most interested in having deep relationships. The kitchen symbolizes her nurturing aspect and the desire of replacing Zippo through Coco's child.

Coco's journey is very similar to Paula's. She goes from the bakery to the beach house and back. She wants to have a child too. The bakery, like the kitchen, connotes of the idea of feeding.

Melanie's relationship with space is unique. In the beginning of the play, she is seen in many different places: car, hospital, bakery and café. She does not have a place that she can call her own. This discomfort revealed through space is mirrored in her disapproval of having a child

with Coco. Then, in the second half of the play, she is seen inside a hut in Vietnam. Her loneliness is important as it makes her realize that human beings need connections.

Bruno transits with Sybille between public spaces such as the lake and the café and he moves with Paula between private places like the kitchen and Zippo's room.

Sybille spends most of her time with Bruno and shares with him the same public spaces.

g) Information – Information in *Monsoon* is abundant, direct and concentrated. The audience becomes acquainted with the characters and the story from the very beginning. There is only one informational element that is going to be revealed later: that the death of Zippo was not because of the pretzel. At that moment of the play, because the audience and Bruno already know the truth, it is a private information only for Paula, who has been feeling guilty since her son's death. An information that will expiate everybody's guilt about the death of the child.

BRUNO. Zippo.

PAULA. Do you still remember the nurse.

BRUNO. The accident.

PAULA. Stop.

BRUNO. He had bought a Pretzel. That happened before the accident. He had a bite of the pretzel.

Pause.

PAULA. Swear.

BRUNO. Indian oath.

They reach their hands over the pieces of fish.

(BRUNO. Zippo.

PAULA. Weisst du noch die Krankenschwester.

BRUNO. Der Unfall.

PAULA. Hör auf.

BRUNO. Er hat sich Brezeln gekauft. Bevor das passiert ist der Knall. Hat er mitten in eine Brezel gebissen.

Pause.

PAULA. Schwöre.

BRUNO. Indianerschwur.

Sie geben sich die Hand über den Fischfetzen.) (56)

h) Dialogue – There is a variation of speech forms that helps to build the frantic pace of the plot. Let us examine them one by one.

Voice in from offstage. This happens in the introduction, through Bruno's interview, and when the characters leave messages in the answer machines.

Stage directions and monologue. These scenes are exclusive to Coco, Melanie and Paula. They show the characters performing an action and are concluded with a single sentence.

Stage direction, monologue and voice in off. This speech form is used almost exclusively in Paula's scenes, when she is in her kitchen, alone, listening to the radio.

Monologue. Most of the time these are delivered by Melanie in the hut in Vietnam.

Dialogues. This is the most frequently used form of speech. It advances the plot and all the characters engage in it.

This diversity of speech forms has the ironic effect of emphasizing the characters' similarities: they are each looking for love, understanding and companionship, albeit using different voices. Each character has a different way of articulating the same core needs.

At the same time, the diversity of speech forms creates a great sense of variety. The juxtapositions of these different forms hold the attention of audience members who are constantly being startled by a different character configuration and different kinds of speech.

i) Character – If we check the number of scenes in which each character appears, we realize that the same situation encountered in *Die Frau von Früher* is repeated here. It is basically the story of a couple:

Table 8

Number of Scenes by Characters in *Monsun*

PAULA	19
BRUNO	20
SYBILLE	12
COCO	15
MELANIE	11

The constellation is another formal feature that allows us to see visually how central the characters of Paula and Bruno are:

MELANIE ——— COCO ——— PAULA ——— BRUNO ——— SYBILLE

Fig. 16. Constellation in *Monsun*

The plot follows a couple in a relationship supported by falsehoods, who lose their son in a car accident. Both try to reorganize their lives when separated from the other, which brings into the plot the three other characters: Bruno's lover Sybille, Paula's new girlfriend, Coco, and Coco's former partner, Melanie. Paula and Coco share a very similar experience of tragic motherhood and abandonment by a partner.

If we examine the characters' actantial models, we can see that they show interesting similarities despite the strong individuality of each character. Hilling creates five people who

seek the same things, but with clearly different objectives. As the protagonists of the play seem to be Bruno and Paula, their models will be the ones that I examine:

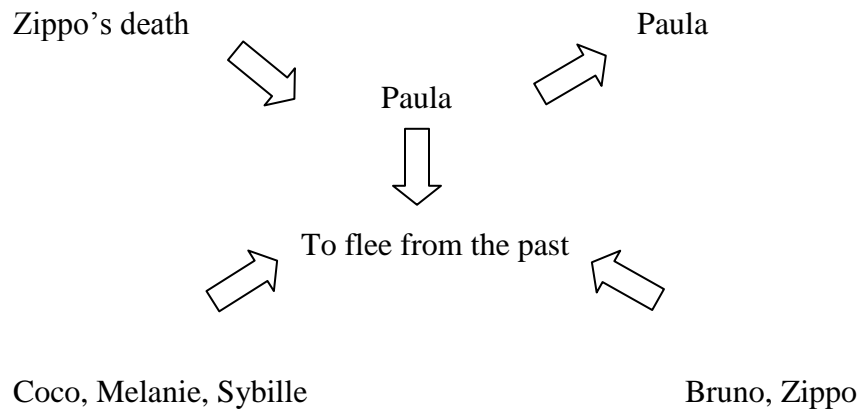


Fig. 17. Actantial Model for Paula in *Monsun*

Paula needs to leave the house that reminds her of her son. Bruno was not there when she needed him the most, and she says to him: “I don’t want to see you for some time” (“ich will dich für eine Weile nicht sehen”; 50). Many characters are helping her for different reasons: Melanie, because she borrowed her house at the beach, where Paula will meet Coco; Sybille, because she is keeping Bruno close to her and far from Paula; and, finally, Coco who will make Paula fall in love with her and, therefore, help her to forget Bruno.

Paula accuses Bruno of being responsible for Zippo’s death. Bruno’s actantial model is motivated by this feeling of guilt:

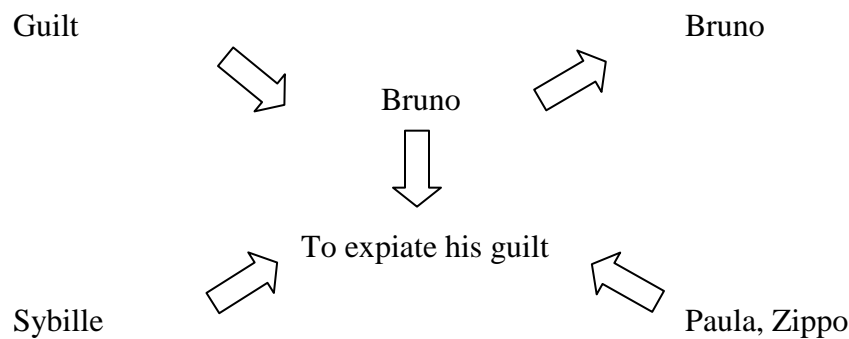


Fig. 18. Actantial Model for Bruno in *Monsun*

Each of the protagonists has an actantial model that is activated by the death of their child. They are antagonists to each other; that is why they will find the solution of their problems, or better, they will be able to reach their objectives, through other characters in the plot. Paula's and Bruno's last scene together in the play is very symbolic. The recurrent motif of the water comes back: "*In the middle of the dish there's a fish swimming in butter*" ("*In der Mitte des Tisches schwimmt ein Fisch in Butter*"; 56). Paula states metaphorically that their affection is gone: "It is cold the stupid fish" ("*Er ist kalt der blöde Fisch*"; 56). The absence of affection is made definite through the stage direction: "*They stare at each other. No fight in the look, no sex in sight.*" ("*Sie sehen sich an. Kein Streit im Blick, kein Sex in Sicht*"; 56)

6.3.4. POSTDRAMATIC ELEMENTS

Music is a very strong element in Hilling's play. She lists the songs that come up throughout the story in the stage directions. Not only music but other aural elements, too, establish the importance of sound in *Monsoon*. The introduction, for instance, is built through the voices of Bruno and the radio interviewer. In the beginning of the fourth act, we have the following stage direction: "It is raining. The sound of the rain has changed. It is not dropping, it is rattling on the bamboos" ("*Es regnet. Der Klang des Regens hat sich verändert. Es tropft nicht, es prasselt auf den Bambus*"; 53). However, these effects work with the play, they cannot be seen as a "no longer dramatic language of theatre" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 93) or as contributing to "the dissolution of the dramatic coherence" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 91). The autonomy of sound in the postdramatic theatre does not resonate in Hilling's play. Sound, here, on the contrary, collaborates to build tension and meaning.

Another aspect that could be considered an influence of the postdramatic is the extreme scenic imagery of *Monsun*. Hilling enumerates the places of action after the list of characters, and one could think that this scenic richness relates to Lehmann's category of visual dramaturgy. "The rooms of apartments in Berlin, an Audi, a bakery, a fair" ("Die Zimmer von Wohnungen in Berlin, ein Audi, eine Backstube, ein Volksfest"; 47). However, here again we do not see a postdramatic element. The scenic variety helps to tell a wide-ranging story; it is not, as in the postdramatic theatre, an independent visual element that "is not subordinated to the text and can therefore freely develop its own logic" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 93).

Like the other five post-1989 German language plays analyzed in this dissertation, *Monsun* is a drama, a formally complex drama to be sure, but not an example of postdramatic theatre. Anja Hilling, like many of her colleagues, still believes in the power and critical reach of drama. These playwrights would not fall under the acid condemnation of Shaw who complained almost exactly a century ago about "a drama in which there was nothing but action: no talk, no discussion, nothing to tax the brain, and very nearly nothing to pay" (247)

6.4. CONCLUSION

The "domestic plays" share with the "social plays" a commitment to the discussion of important social issues through drama. Although the plots are apparently dealing with family issues, they can be read as comments on larger political questions. *Monsun* suggests that death is a devastating event, but at the same time it can cause the enlightenment of those who are still alive. If considered here broadly, the play is talking about war and the importance of understanding those events in order to avoid its repetition in the future. It is warning us to take our lives seriously before it's too late, i.e., engage, wake from stupor. *Das Kalte Kind* presents

different couples who have in common a blind following of established societal patterns. They perform their roles as puppets, and Nina works as a perfect metaphor of their robotic behavior. Lena is the character that has the chance to change and break with the sameness and mediocrity. *Die Frau von Früher*, in its turn, shows the power of the unsolved past through the figure of a mysterious woman who returns to collect a debt. In the plot, it is a debt of love. However, the past is a serious theme for a country like Germany and neglecting it can bring terrible consequences, as Schimmelpfennig's play attests.

7. CONCLUSION

What is more, if drama died easy, it would already be dead. The art has a powerful hold on quite a number of people, among whom I count myself. And if now I seem to be working up an optimistic peroration, I would ask: what can I think? If you were a pterodactyl of the decadence, no one could expect you to talk in the tone of retrospective biology. Your business would be to die; and you can die with all the more dignity if you think you're not going to die at all.

(The Life of Drama, Eric Bentley)

After the analysis of six plays written by contemporary German language dramatists, what conclusions can we draw? One conclusion is that postdramatic elements do not play a large role as an aesthetic influence on these dramas, different from its influence on other performing arts. It would be a paradox if this were not the case since the postdramatic paradigm suggests the eradication of features essential to drama, namely, the representation of a fictional world.

This conclusion does not demean the theatrical current that prioritizes the *hic et nunc*, the spectacular, and the autonomy of the body. The coexistence of opposing ideas is not only a recurrent historical pattern, but also a healthy mutual reinforcement of principles and beliefs.

Williams and Hamburger put it very clearly:

The current divide in German-speaking theatre between proponents of a “dramatic” theatre, in which the prime purpose of theatre is the production and performance of scripted plays in a representational manner, and practitioners of a “post-dramatic” theatre, in which the text of the play is neither sacrosanct nor necessarily central to the performance, is the most pressing artistic issue of the time. Advocates for a “dramatic” theatre accuse those whose work is primarily “post-dramatic” of self-indulgence and foresee incipient chaos when the

underpinnings of a dramatic repertoire have been removed. Furthermore, given the intense suspicion among "post-dramatic" directors of the rhetorical nature of theatrical representation and their frequent avoidance of even a trace of illusion on stage, it is difficult to imagine that theater even has a future if the "post-dramatic" were to become the sole mode of theatre in Germany. But as in any mature theatre culture, various genres of theatre are constantly laying claim to precedence, and the vitality of the culture depends primarily on competition between modes rather than the prevalence of one over all others. (394)

Nevertheless, in order to establish this competition of modes, it is crucial to understand how apples differ from oranges. I conducted just such an exercise in differentiation in Chapter Three when I used Ryngaert's framework and Ubersfeld's actantial model coupled with Lehmann's account of postdramatic theatre to examine Heiner Müller's *Despoiled Shore Medeamaterial Landscape with Argonauts*. In the end, I concluded that Müller's play is a text for the postdramatic theatre, though it does contain some traditional dramatic elements.

The defense of dramatic theatre in this dissertation is a contribution to the ongoing story of a theatrical form over 2500 years old that continues to surprise and unfold. Upon reading the premature notice of his own demise, Mark Twain remarked, "The reports of my death are greatly exaggerated." So, too, as I hope to have shown, the reports of the demise (decline, dwindling) of drama are greatly exaggerated. These plays by significant contemporary dramatists in the German language are clear demonstrations of the continuity, even the thriving, of this form in one of the most contentious theatrical landscapes of the present day.

The growing trend in theatre analysis is to focus attention on performance. This is completely understandable when theatre is confounded with drama. This practice reached an

extreme point where some thought it impossible to analyze the dramatic text independent of its staging. Text and performance are two different things, however, and are often misunderstood. That drama is literary fiction written to be spoken by actors and completed in an acting space is a widely shared idea nowadays. Nevertheless, to say that drama cannot be studied independently from the performance is the same thing as to say that the heart cannot be studied in medicine separately as an organ of the human body.

Styan summarizes the feud between these two radical positions:

Bickering between rival ideas of what is theatre and what is literature perplexes our understanding of drama. For an author to say he will write for the theatre is to imply that he will have to learn to play to the gallery: 'If the audience gets its strip tease it will swallow the poetry', writes Mr. Eliot. How often do we hear a remark like, 'That was put in for the groundlings' upon a theatrical effect in Shakespeare? For a student to say he is going to study drama seriously is still likely to suggest that he is going to ignore the physical considerations of actor, stage and playhouse. At one extreme we hear Granville-Barker telling us that the art of the theatre is the art of acting, first, last and all the time. At the other we read William Archer advising the playwright not to think of the actor's performance of his play as indispensable, but only as an added illumination. (*Elements 2*)

Those excesses contributed to the demonization of drama mainly in the scholarly field. Drama *is* literature and *is* theatre. Its hybrid nature allows it to traffic between those two modes of artistic expression.

Pavis recognizes that focusing on drama is one possible way to analyze a performance:

Dramatic Structures and dramaturgy analyze the text of the *mise-en-scène* according to the treatment of time and space, the configuration of characters in the dramatic universe, the sequential organization of the episodes of the Story. As soon as the critic takes on the task of supplying information on the Story and the dramatic universe of the play, he deals with dramaturgical questions. (*Languages* 98)

Given that drama can be studied separately from theatre, it may endure in the study even after it has lost its place on the stage. However, as suggested by the numerous awards and productions received by the plays analyzed in this dissertation, drama is still very much alive on the German-language stage. So what enables drama to resist the dominant paradigm of postmodernity in the theatre?

Art, and in our case, here, drama, depends on an audience. The form is a device developed throughout history with the aim of captivating the interest of this audience. Each dramatic form and each artistic form, and this is why we try to differ drama from other artistic manifestations, has a clear ideology behind it. According to Raymond Williams: “It is a central proposition of Marxism, whether expressed in the formula of base and superstructure or in the alternative idea of a socially constituted consciousness, that writing, like other practices, is in an important sense always aligned: that is to say, that it variously expresses, explicitly or implicitly, specifically selected experience from a specific point of view” (199).

Many authors identify the 1980s--when performance and postdramatic theatre arose, according to Lehmann’s historical division--with the hegemony of right-wing governments. Three leading western countries elected conservative presidents, who opened their economies (and forced other ones to open theirs) to foreign capital and dismantled secular social support

networks associated with the labor classes. Margaret Thatcher in the United Kingdom and Helmut Kohl in Germany brought to their countries a form of “wild” U.S. capitalism that, on the one hand, made the U.K. and Germany military satellites of a greater world power without any choice of non-alignment and, on the other, formed a political platform that promised quick chances of social ascension and enrichment for their native populations. Playwrights that objected to this political scenario were not heard; people in these countries could not see what was going on as they were being manipulated by an increasingly sophisticated media and were being alienated by a multiplicity of commodity choices, varying in kind, form and price. Playwrights and drama were thus subtly cornered by conservative governments in the 1980s, and consequently were neglected by an audience unable to grasp their own victimization. The 1990s, different from the former decade whose idols--Michael Jackson and Madonna--epitomized a futile and ephemeral society, saw the emergence of other political forces. Playwrights found much to write about: a capitalist and wealthy Russia, devastated eastern European countries now abandoned by their former economic supporter, the entrance of China as a major player in the planetary economy, a massacre in the former Yugoslavia, the U.S. as apparently the winner of the cold war and a powerful and unified Germany replacing Berlin as the center of Europe. I do not mean to say that the fall of the Berlin wall brought about an immediate change in people’s critical awareness, but it did generate incomprehension and uncertainty, and this is what prompted work by a new generation of dramatic authors. Apparently exhausted--or as Dea Loher frankly admits, sickened--by the self-centered focus on performance as a genre, these writers sought to express a broad social anguish and their opinions about it. They needed words to express their meanings. Spectacle alone, even the spectacle of a body in anguish, could not express the depth of their feelings and breadth of their concerns. As they saw it (again, one is

reminded of Dea Loher), the postdramatic theatre's ambiguity and refusal to value language are signs of its lack of political engagement. Lehmann himself realizes that when he talks about the "difficulty of developing adequate forms of a political theatre" (*Postdramatic* 177) within the postdramatic paradigm.

I maintain, and my analyses confirm, that as long as there are socially/politically engaged theatre artists, the dramatic form will not disappear. Once again, it is important to stress that this dissertation is not proclaiming that drama has a monopoly on political art in the theatre, there is place for all different forms. As I have argued, a theater in which "the phenomenon has priority over the narrative, the effect of the image precedence over the individual actor, and contemplation over interpretation" (*Postdramatic* 80) does not ask for a critical reaction from the audience. To reference Brecht, this kind of theatre does not alienate events on the stage so that spectators may better grasp their economic roots and alternatives but, rather, entangles audience members in them. Drama feeds political understanding as Brecht explains in his *Short Organum for Theatre*:

So let us invite all the sister arts of the drama, not in order to create an 'integrated work of art' in which they all offer themselves up and are lost, but so that together with the drama they may further the common task in their different ways; and their relations with one another consist in this: that they lead to mutual alienation.
(204)

This dissertation has laid out fundamental characteristics of both drama and postdramatic theatre. Many key-words appeared throughout this study such as meaning, presence, language, parataxis, criticism and spectacle. In this conclusion, it is not my intention to summarize again the disjunctions between those two forms of theatrical art, but to reiterate that the critique made

against the postdramatic theory is not based on its aesthetic choices per se but to its depoliticization of theatre. Pavis says that:

According to Habermas . . . postmodernism can be linked to a tangible reaction in the seventies and eighties, to a movement of ideological retreat and depoliticization. . . . One cannot deny the existence of this political retreat, in contrast to the fifties and sixties, this refusal to pose questions in terms of social contradiction; nor the difficulty that Marxist philosophy, hitherto dominant among the intelligentsia, has had in regenerating itself . . . and the loss of faith among the intellectuals, treated for too long as negligible and untrustworthy by both right and left. As a result, a “new philosophy” has arisen, much more cynical and disenchanted, an expert (a bit like postmodern discourse) in the analysis of the cold mechanisms of power and social functioning – whence the extreme distrust in the face of all inheritances, especially that of Marxism, and the fascination with textual manipulation and the deconstruction of every work, classical or modern. (*Crossroads* 64)

This depoliticization came along with a denial of meaning. This postmodernist ideological position, evidenced by the condemnation and distrust of rational thought, hindered the democratic discussion of ideas. In theatre, the forecast death of drama was a strategic coup that eliminated any possibility of discussion. There was no longer a debate about what drama is, because drama no longer had a place in postdramatic theatre.

However, the period of postdramatic theatre’s dominance may already be closing. Many important critics have realized that a style that assumes the autonomy of art, its abstraction and its independence from reality, would have trouble in finding and keeping an audience. In a 2006

essay, the German theatre critic Franz Wille recognized that there is “a new trend in contemporary German playwriting which moves beyond postmodern performance and aims for a mimetic representation of reality” (Haas, *Dramatic Drama* 81). Haas agrees with Wille and she entitles “this new phase in German playwriting ‘dramatic drama’”⁶² (*Dramatic Drama* 84). According to Haas: “Dramatic drama in Germany has moved on towards an aesthetic that is based on text, character and linearity” (*Dramatic Drama* 84). Surprisingly, even Lehmann sees the evaporation of the postdramatic theatre:

Perhaps in the end postdramatic theatre will only have been a moment in which the exploration of a “beyond representation” could take place on all levels. Perhaps postdramatic theatre is going to open out onto a new theatre in which dramatic figurations will come together again, after drama and theater have drifted apart so far. (*Postdramatic* 144)

Lehmann’s confession is symptomatic. However, I would like to close this work with a quotation that is in tune with the main ideas developed in this dissertation: the re-emergence of drama and the importance of drama as a committed art. This quotation ends with a question mark, because nobody owns the truth, and the constant examination of our certainties only helps to move our field of study forward.

What constitutes an engaged and political drama today? Despite the broad spectrum . . . two features stand out, namely, the construction of the text and the empowering of the audience. The dramatic drama takes issue with the representation of reality, by which I mean, the concrete non-virtual environment as experienced in a framework of time and space. It does not duplicate the

⁶² Haas does not mean here “a bourgeois, a melodramatic or a pseudo-psychological theatre” (*Dramatic Drama* 91) that where the terms both Brecht and Sartre used to characterize the drama in the XX century. Dramatic here is an opposition to Postdramatic.

allegedly unstructured works of the real world but creates an aesthetic commentary on how the narrative is developed. In doing so, the dramatic takes a modernist stance, it tries to establish a relationship with the past and a critical narrative of the present. Instead of placing the emphasis on the present, as does the postmodern, the modernist stance harks back to Brecht's historicisation, of enriching the narrative of the present by means of a historical perspective. In doing so, these dramatists follow the idea of unity, i.e. the juxtaposition does not result in a radical breaking up of the textual and/or performative surface. Whilst the postdramatic makes any rational approach to reality seem futile, the dramatic drama takes a step back from the deconstructed textual surface. So what is the dramatic? (Haas, *Dramatic Drama* 90)

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