

Faculté de philosophie, arts et lettres

Caryl Churchill's Aesthetic of Silence

Terror and language in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*

Auteur : Julie Trémouille
Promoteur(s) : Véronique Bragard
Lecteur(s) : Jonathan Châtel
Année académique 2018-2019
Master [120] en langues et lettres modernes, orientation générale, à finalité spécialisée en sciences et métiers du livre

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INTRODUCTION

The stage is a place of death and rebirth. Countless worlds have collapsed there and still do, in front of audiences who seek a form of preserved hope in the catastrophic visions proposed by playwrights. The famous genres which encapsulate imaginary societies that develop in parallel worlds are those of utopian and dystopian literatures, pertaining to speculative fiction. While utopias rely on an idealised vision of society wherein virtues and good values become ruling principles, dystopias reveal the risks to apply such strict rules stemming from an absolute vision, whether it is bright or bleak. Moreover, dystopias indirectly address the brutal episodes of human history and the tragic consequences of political strategies, economic greed and ecological disasters.

Female writer Caryl Churchill is certainly one of the most famous contemporary British playwrights who regularly tackle actual societal issues in imaginary worlds. This eighty-year-old woman, with a career spanning over sixty years and more than forty plays written and produced, has had a paramount influence on the evolution of British theatre. Importantly, she has been given the title of ‘Britain’s most significant living dramatist’, next to Tom Stoppard (Lawson, 2015). Her work, resolutely modern, and through which she explores topical issues, has been and still is the focus of numerous scholarly articles, essays and books. The object of this thesis is the analysis of two dystopian plays by Caryl Churchill: *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, respectively written and produced in 2000 and 2016. The purpose of these two analyses, through the identification of the key features of Churchill’s theatrical aesthetic, is to shed a new light on her dramaturgy of terror. More precisely, the main emphasis is laid on the playwright’s formal approach to language, whose innovative character has been widely acknowledged. Numerous scholars have pointed out the opaqueness of meaning in Churchill’s plays, often concluding that it reflects a crisis of language that leads to the failure of communication. The argument advanced in this thesis is that there is more to her formal work than a destruction of meaning as a response to the senselessness of terror. The hypothesis put forward here is that Michel Foucault’s concept of *heterotopia* is a relevant approach to Churchill’s texts and enables one to address the ambiguous status of words as well as the inherent aporia of the language of terror and trauma.

The first part of this research work consists of an overview of the historical and theoretical backgrounds of contemporary English drama in order to contextualise Churchill's plays and to provide the theoretical tools to discuss her dramaturgy. The first chapter outlines the main steps of the evolution of British theatre over the last decades, a period marked by substantial changes and the emergence of remarkable contemporary dramatists. A major element that is pointed out is the intertwined relationships between British theatre and society. Playwrights are keen to tackle topical issues on stage and numerous plays mirror, more or less directly, the societal evolutions that shape the context of theatrical creativity. The historical events of the twentieth century, marked by the violence of the two World Wars, the barbarity of the Holocaust and the climate of terror and perpetual threat due to the Cold War and Hiroshima, have profoundly impacted the visions of society and humanity in many fields of knowledge. The development of postmodernism after the Second World War reflected a change of views concerning the status and mission of art. It revealed a generalised loss of faith in coherent and unified narratives. The postmodern discourse was echoed in poststructuralist and postdramatic theories, respectively focusing on language and theatre. As regards the examination of the status of text and language through the evolution of British theatre, the aim is not to assess whether or not *Far Away* and *Escape Alone* belong to dramatic or postdramatic traditions, or to any new theatrical label. Instead this overview contributes to the analysis of Churchill's particular work on language in both plays that is part of a singular aesthetic of terror. In *Far Away*, Churchill plunges the reader/spectator into the all-threatening atmosphere of a world at war with itself, and whose senseless terror is conveyed in scenes portraying family members hitting strangers in their garden, macabre parades of prisoners wearing preposterous hats, and global conflicts that include, among others, animals, rivers, gravity and coffee. The collapsing world is a motif that links *Far Away* to *Escaped Alone*. The action in the latter consists of four old ladies chatting in a garden on a series of summer afternoons. In between their conversations that reveal personal distresses, one of the characters describes, in direct address to the audience, a catastrophic past composed of floods, fires, global food shortages and human mutants.

The second chapter addresses the ways in which horror and terror/-ism on stage question the limits of representation. The horror of the concentration camps, as the unprecedented epitome of barbarism, have caused a permanent disruption in the fields of human sciences and in the artistic spheres. It has forced philosophers and writers to rethink the notion of humanity along with the means of expression to convey a sense of powerlessness that arose after such atrocities. This chapter examines, in particular, the representation of violence and fear in British theatre

and their evolution from the *comedy of menace* to the *theatre of catastrophe* and the *in-her-face* trend. The rise of terrorism at the turn of the twenty-first century has given a new face to the horror. In the theoretical field, it has fostered reflections about the true nature of terror, its reification in representation and the manifestation of traumatic responses. The artistic field has grappled, and still does, with the ways to portray such events and to address their impact on society. Caryl Churchill is one of the well-known dramatists who has tackled this complex topic in plays such as *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*.

The career and the characterisation of the female British playwright are the focus of Chapter 3. The diversity of her body of works has allowed scholars to shed light on its different facets, such as Churchill's socialist and/or feminist voice. A constant in her dramaturgy is the political tone that pervades the play. Another typical trait is her formal experimentation with language. The dramatist repeatedly calls into question the notion of meaning, sentence and structure. Whereas this element reveals the influence of postmodern and poststructuralist discourses, the originality and renewal of her writing prevent theatre specialists from any fixed categorisation of her dramaturgy.

The second part of this thesis focuses on the analysis of *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*. As the former play was written in 2000 while the latter, produced in 2016, is far more recent, the theoretical background that supports these analyses is unequal. Consequently, the chapters differ in size. Their structure, however, is based on the same pattern. In both dystopias, Churchill indirectly addresses the many flaws, wrongdoings and true demonstrations of terror in the contemporary world. The main motifs of the plays such as the links between dystopias and reality, the hidden terror, the issue of agency and the specific nature of language are examined. The formal approach is the object of an in-depth study that brings a new understanding of the ambiguities and antagonisms identified in the other sections of the analyses. Besides, this study permits the probing of Churchill's dramaturgy of terror. Each chapter ends with a brief survey of the first British production of the plays, Stephen Daldry's *Far Away* and James Macdonald's *Escaped Alone*. The purpose of these additional analyses is to observe how the identified features of Churchill's theatrical aesthetic were tackled on stage and what the directors' responses were to the many challenges posed by the texts. Finally, the last chapter synthesises the particular nature of the language in both plays and the reflections fostered by the dramatist on meaning, structure and unity. Through her formal approach, Caryl Churchill distorts words to portray the silenced worlds of trauma and terror.

ABBREVIATIONS

EA *Escaped Alone*

FA *Far Away*

PART 1

CONTEMPORARY BRITISH DRAMA: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUNDS

1.1. Evolution of British theatre over the last decades

Theatre is deeply rooted in the British cultural landscape, its history going back to medieval times and the religious stories played by the Church. Its slow evolution into a profane art favoured a significant development during the Elizabethan era that witnessed the birth of one of the most – if not the most – important playwrights of all time, namely William Shakespeare. Chronicling the entire history of British theatre, albeit a very interesting though laborious task, is not the point of this chapter which outlines the main steps of its evolution over the last decades, a period corresponding to substantial changes and the emergence of great contemporary dramatists such as Caryl Churchill¹. As in any artistic field, these changes in the multiple directions taken by British theatre do not follow a clear-cut linear path. Instead, they result from a close connection with the society wherein they emerge and from influences exerted by thinkers, foreign playwrights, trends, etc.

1.1.1. British theatre and society: intertwined relationships

The tenuous link between British theatre and society is a cardinal feature highlighted by many scholars, theorists and critics. On the one hand, society, its institutions but also its crises, transformations and divisions directly impact on theatrical productions and their visibility. On the other hand, playwrights and directors find in texts and on stages a place to tackle societal and social matters of their time². In his introductory chapter about contemporary British theatre, Jean-Marc Lantéri refers to Georges Bernard Shaw as the writer who introduced 20th century United Kingdom to modernism and social criticism, thus breaking with the 19th century tradition of the *well-made play* (Lantéri, 2002, 1). According to Shaw, drama is the right genre to closely examine society and to bring into question its functioning. His discourse met with a

¹ However, the impact of some of the most dreadful events of the 20th and early 21st century on theatrical productions and the staging of horror are discussed in greater detail in the following chapter ‘Horror, terror and dystopias on stage’.

² This dialectical relationship between world and stage, theatre being the mirror of societal ideologies but also taking part in their development, is minutely examined by Nicole Boireau in her monograph *Théâtre et société en Angleterre des années 1950 à nos jours*. To it, this first section is generally indebted. She insists on the specific link between English theatre and society: ‘la présence bien identifiable du monde de référence au centre de la scène contemporaine est la quintessence d’un théâtre à nul autre pareil’ (2000, 1).

positive response in the 1950s with a new generation of playwrights determined to address British societal dysfunctions by exploring new forms and a creative use of language.

The year 1956 and the premiere of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* at the Royal Court Theatre is a common landmark to assert the beginning of 'the new English theatre', as scholar Ruby Cohn names it in her book *Retreats from realism in recent English drama* (1991, 4). She explains that, at the time, 'the drama appealed to a generation of English graduates of red-brick universities who looked in mounting anger at their heritage, their present, their prospects' (*Ibid.*, 5). A key-event of 1956 that triggered the artistic expression of this growing resentment, is the Suez Crisis³. Artists strongly criticised national prestige, colonial wars and the army in their plays; demythologising the hero was a recurrent feature in dramas (Boireau, 2000, 112; 114; 118). On the national political scene, the rise of the *New Left* played a significant role in the new direction taken by British theatre. With the emergence of this movement in the fifties came a double phenomenon that Boireau calls "dissidence" and "consensus" (2000, 35). On the one hand, playwrights of the second half of the century who, for a vast majority, came from the middle class and received a higher education, tended to move away from their milieu and get closer to lower classes who were often portrayed in their plays. On the other hand, through their status of dissidents, artists achieved a consensus about their collective opposition to an elitist theatre. They believed in the social function of theatre and rose against social determinism, mercenary and military politics, global conflicts, exclusion, etc. (*Ibid.*, 35-41). About the inherent connection between theatre and dissidence, Boireau judiciously observes: 'Une relation problématique avec l'environnement reste la substance essentielle du théâtre moderne et contemporain, fruit d'un processus de métaphorisation où espaces publics (le macrocosme) et privés (le microcosme) sont en interaction constante' (*Ibid.*, 38-39). Institutions are a recurring target of the criticisms voiced by dramatists in their plays. However, they contributed to theatrical innovations thanks to public financing, a situation that lasted till the end of the seventies⁴. Emphasis was laid on freedom of speech and a non-interventionist policy regarding creative experimentations, despite the role of patron played by the State (*Ibid.*, 15-16). This financial support and private funding also participated in the proliferation of places dedicated to British theatre. One of them is the Royal Court Theatre, founded in 1956, whose

³ 'International crisis in the Middle East, precipitated on July 26, 1956, when the Egyptian president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, nationalized the Suez Canal. The canal had been owned by the Suez Canal Company, which was controlled by French and British interests. (...) Britain and France, [after the failure of a secret 'military action to regain control of the canal'], lost most of their influence in the Middle East as a result of the episode' (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2002, 11, 353).

⁴ For further information about the funding of British theatre, see Boireau (2000, 15-22).

mission was and still is to foster new writing and whose central role in doing so has been emphasised by many theatre scholars⁵.

While English society, its economic and political ruling forces have always been at the heart of concerns from the middle of the 20th century to present times, tones and forms have varied over the decades, often coexisting and/or overlapping. Naturalism and social realism⁶ pervade British theatre, realism being a constant in the evolution of its aesthetic, although major dramatists detached themselves from this tradition, creating some of the most striking plays of the century's last decades⁷. During the sixties, these two trends represented the majority of theatrical productions. Lantéri observes that naturalism is not only a feature of traditional plays but also a subversive means to explore new territories, e.g. with the *kitchen sink drama*⁸ and a decade later, to engage in a more politically committed theatre such as Bond's, Hare's or Griffith's (2002, 2). Moreover, artists' aspirations in the 1960s fall under the influence of foreign playwrights, resulting in emulations or reactions against the latter. Scholar Élisabeth Angel-Perez points to the impact of Brecht's epic theatre and the absurd of Beckett's texts, stating that 'the theatre of the 1960s was concerned with finding (...) new experimental paths to tell the complexity of the world' (2003, 3). A couple of decades later, productions adopt a clear political tone. The background of the eighties is one of the important societal mutations. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher affirmed the primacy of the individual over a society which is, in her view, non-existent⁹. Dramatists show a violent vision of the world in plays in which the subversive character developed (Boireau, 2000, 98)¹⁰. This vein was followed in the 1990s by a radicalisation of the dramatists' aesthetical and political positions starting with the simultaneous emergence of different genres like the *New Brutalism*, the *In-Yer-Face* theatre¹¹ and the *Brilliant Comedy* (Angel-Perez & Boireau, 2007, 7). English drama from the end of the

⁵ See Lantéri (2002, 7-8), Ruset (2005b, 90-91), Sierz (2007, 5) and The Royal Court's declaration of intent on <https://royalcourttheatre.com/about/>.

⁶ Plays that depict the everyday life of lower classes, hardships they are confronted with and their degrading conditions (Boireau, 2000, 35-41).

⁷ For a detailed overview of these theatrical steps outside realism, see Cohn (1991).

⁸ '(...) étiquette de dérision apposée par les critiques pour désigner un théâtre qui porte sur l'humanité moyenne et sur ses préoccupations quotidiennes'. (Boireau, 2000, 25).

⁹ See Boireau (2000): 'Alors que les auteurs dénoncent la déshumanisation par les déterminismes sociopolitiques, le chef du gouvernement clame haut et clair la prééminence de l'individu et la non-existence de la société. À l'individualisme succède l'individualisme.' (98)

¹⁰ Ruset (2005a) however remarks that the political theatre of the 1970s in the UK was more eager to foster changes while it lost some of its hopes in the following decade with the rule of the Conservative party, the diminishing public funding in favour of a private one and the rise of commercial theatre (16).

¹¹ Questioning about the representation of horror that permeates this movement, its impact on British theatrical aesthetic of violence and the reflections it has fostered about the dialectical relationship between stage and audience are tackled in chapter 1.2.

millennium entered an era of cultural blending and formal hybridity¹². Social realism, naturalism and the genre of satire tend to give way to plays with an expressionist tone that grows stronger. Besides, the focus also shifts from specific matters drawing on social, economic and political backgrounds to a more global vision – and critique – of humanity. Urban hell and city jungles, crime, vengeance as well as an unstructured, disintegrated world and the outcasts are central themes on stage at that time. Formally speaking, playwrights work on a more abstract writing, a dramaturgy of what is left unsaid, the deconstruction of characters and the erasure of coherent temporal or spatial structures. In an increasingly multicultural society, discourses condemning colonialism and, on English stages, scenes of the ending of white supremacy, arise. Dramatists provide different focuses related to cultural mixing, from the dangers of xenophobia to the promises of a happy multiculturalism.

Today's British theatre maintains an intertwined relationship with society and seeks responses to topical issues and terrible episodes such as 9/11 and the War on Terror. However, while subversion has pervaded English drama since the 1950s through a plurality of forms and artistic propositions, as Séverine Ruset examines it in a thematic article (2005c), she wonders if this subversive tone is still characteristic of 21st century playwrights (9-10). A similar questioning runs through theatre critic Aleks Sierz's articles about national new writing (2005; 2007). He contends that, whereas societal matters are sometimes the central concern of recent plays, some important topics are ignored by the young generation of dramatists:

What new writing in British theatre needs most of all is to shake off its habitual timidity and to explore the world's more dangerous shores. Isn't it odd that there have been no British plays about global warming? Or corporate manslaughter? Or mixed-race identity? Who, apart from a couple of greyhairs¹³, ever questions the liberal consensus in the British system? (2005, 60).

Perhaps the rapid pace of the new millennium, the burning issues brought into focus by an increasing mass of media and more generally, the recent evolution of society call for a renewal of artistic and theatrical expressions. Such shift happened during the previous century after the dreadful historical episodes of the World Wars, the Holocaust and the nuclear bombing of Hiroshima. A new vision of society emerged, affecting philosophical and theoretical discourses as well as means of expression attempting to grasp a blurred sense of reality. Modernism gave way to postmodernism whose diverse expressions in human sciences fields conveyed a new

¹² The following description of the recent evolution of English drama is drawn on Boireau (2000, 199-222).

¹³ Sierz counts Caryl Churchill among the 'greyhairs' he mentions: 'The best English plays were by veterans such as Caryl Churchill or Terry Johnson or Michael Frayn. So if there was a crisis of new writing, it was a crisis of young writing' (2007, 56).

way of apprehending of the world. This influence of postmodernist discourse on theatre, notably through the theorisation of the postdramatic theatre, has been tremendous and continues to impact the playwrights' critical approaches to texts and especially to language.

1.1.2. Postmodernism, postdramatic and writing today

The evolution of theatre and more generally, of English society during the second half of the twentieth century goes hand in hand with the development of postmodernism. This broad phenomenon arising after the second World War is the expression of a loss of faith in a coherent and unified vision of society¹⁴. It found an echo in numerous theories in different fields, notably in theatre, literature and linguistics. Postdramatic theatre and theories about language that stem from postmodern discourses are the focus of this second section. Their detailed examination and the explanation of their implication on theatrical productions are highly relevant to the analysis of the dramaturgy of contemporary British female dramatist Caryl Churchill, especially because of the importance of language in the thesis argument.

Postmodern discourse and postdramatic theory

Postdramatic theatre was theorised by German researcher Hans-Thies Lehmann in his seminal eponymous monograph *Postdramatisches Theatre* first published in 1999. As stressed by Jean-Louis Besson in the section of Sarrazac's glossary named 'Postdramatic' (2001, 97-98), the term is not a label referring to a specific aesthetic or genre. It groups together plays that share some features related to a new conception of theatrical creation whose main statements are the end of text's primacy over stage and the irrelevance of a coherent and well-defined dramatic fictional universe. These key-elements already reveal a strong connection to other postmodern theories, as shown by Karen Jürs-Munby, in her introduction to Lehmann's text: 'Despite the fact that Lehmann opts for the term "postdramatic" instead of "postmodern" to describe the new theatre, his theory of postdramatic theatre is of course resonating with many aspects of postmodernism and poststructuralist thinking' (Lehmann, 2006, 13). Jean-François Lyotard's

¹⁴ Abrams and Harpham, in their *Glossary* (2015), describe the climate of that period: '(...) the effects on Western morale of the First World War were greatly exacerbated by the experience of Nazi totalitarianism and mass extermination, the threat of total destruction by the atomic bomb, the progressive devastation of the natural environment, and the ominous fact of overpopulation' (227-228).

contention about the end of grand narratives is one of the influences identified by Jürs-Munby. In *La Condition Postmoderne*, the French philosopher asserts: ‘Dans la société et la culture contemporaine, société postindustrielle, culture postmoderne, la question de la légitimation du savoir se pose en d’autres termes. Le grand récit a perdu sa crédibilité, quel que soit le mode d’unification qui lui est assigné : récit spéculatif, récit de l’émancipation’ (1979, 63). This ‘loss of credibility’ concerning grand narratives is paralleled by Lehman’s loss of faith in the traditional form of drama. Lehmann’s theoretical approach to drama stems from his key-statement on the relationship between stage and reality. He argues that drama, in its classical understanding, i.e. a theatrical form whose universe is coherent and whose parts joined together create a sense of unity, is no longer a relevant means to tackle our complex reality. Speaking of dramatic theatre ‘subordinated to the primacy of the text’ (2006, 21), he refers to the Aristotelian notion of drama which supports the view of a mimetic imitation of the real¹⁵. As maintained by Lehmann:

What is necessary, however, is the principle that what we perceive in the theatre can be referred to a ‘world’, i.e. to a totality. Wholeness, illusion and world representation are inherent in the model ‘drama’; conversely, through its very form, dramatic theatre proclaims wholeness as the *model* of the real. Dramatic theatre ends when these elements are no longer the regulating principle but merely one possible variant of theatrical art. (*Ibid.*, 22, original emphasis)

He therefore concludes that ‘in present society, almost any form has come to seem more suitable to articulate reality than the action of a causal logic with its inherent attribution of events to the decisions of individuals’ (*Ibid.*, 181)¹⁶. Examining performed plays of the 20th century’s last decades, he sheds light on some stylistic traits of postdramatic theatre and its aesthetic of fragmentation which does not seek to refer to a pre-existing reel. Stage becomes the starting point of creation. Text – and therefore language – is no longer a necessary initial step towards onstage production but is approached as one of its many other components, on the same level as space, sound, light, performance, etc. Paradoxically, this proliferation of information parallels what is experienced in our contemporary postmodern world. Lehmann points it out, but only as an argument to affirm the irrelevance of grand narratives:

On the one hand, the abundance of simultaneous signs in this way presents itself like a doubling of reality: it seemingly mimics the chaos of real everyday experience. But part and parcel of this

¹⁵ The issue of *mimesis* in artistic fields was first addressed by Plato in his famous *Republic*, but he used it as an argument to condemn theatre (Sarrazac, 2001, 67). For a deep insight into the evolution of aesthetic discourses about theatre, see Naugrette’s *Esthétique théâtrale* (2010).

¹⁶ Reassessment of *mimèsis* in drama had already been carried out by major playwrights like Artaud and Brecht earlier in the 20th century. They participated in what theatre scholars call ‘la crise du drame’ ou ‘crise de la *mimèsis*’ (Sarrazac, 2001, 67-70).

quasi 'Naturalistic' stance is the thesis that an authentic manner in which theatre could testify to life *cannot* come about through imposing an artistic macrostructure that constructs coherence (as is the case in drama). (*Ibid.*, 83, original emphasis)

The dialectical relationship between theatre and society proves to be the kernel of artistic explorations as well as theoretical discourses about drama. Apprehending the networks of structures, ideologies, discourses, etc. that frame Everyman's life is a difficult task for artists. The 'demand for an open and fragmenting perception' that Lehmann finds 'enclosed within postdramatic theatre' (*Id.*) comes hand in hand with the playwrights' will to disentangle these networks in order to gain a good grasp of contemporary society. Scholar Hans-Ulrich Mohr, in his introductory essay about 'The code of contemporary drama and theatre and its functions' (2004) accurately observes that our concept of 'post-modern' reality stems from a collective construction (11). Thus, as problematic issues encountered by individuals are inherent in a societal construct, deconstruction becomes a preferred means to tackle these issues and question some consequences of common decisions. Mohr further develops: 'this [i.e. the term 'deconstruction'] signifies an activity with the aim of analyzing the given "reality" in order to avoid, or even revoke, certain of its deficits or disadvantages, including those that have come to be established under the aegis of matter-of-factness and reasonability' (*Id.*). Representing reality, even in the process of deconstructing it in order to make sense of its principles, functions, etc., is increasingly challenging due to its complexity: 'hi-story' often lacks coherence, identities are fragmented and old beliefs questioned (*Ibid.*, 12). In short, blurring cohesion in many societal aspects engenders changes in the theatrical approach to plot, characters, space, time, settings, etc. First and foremost, it impacts the main device of playwrights: language.

Text, language and contemporary drama

The study of the text status and formal experimentations in the evolution of British theatre is crucial to the analyses of Churchill's plays which are the primary focus of this thesis. Although theatrical tradition in the United Kingdom is not best known for its subversive textual innovations, dramatists of the second half of the 20th century were influenced by postmodernism and its related theories about language and literature. This influence, according to some theatre critics and theorists, comes to an end in this early twenty-first century, as language finds new purposes on stage.

In the first page of *Retreats from realism*, Cohn points out that ‘in an increasingly visual and performative culture, most English drama remains unrepentantly verbal’ (1991, 2). Though the book was published in the early 1990s, his statement holds true and English playwrights, albeit absent from the stage, still received the focus of attention and are considered the pillar of theatrical life¹⁷. Cohn goes on saying that paradoxically, for a long time in the evolution of theatre, language was a secondary concern for dramatists: ‘English stage dialogue waited for Pinter and Beckett (...) to admit hesitation, disjunction, repetition, and great gaps’ (*Ibid.*, 3). A similar observation is made by Lantéri concerning language experimentations (2002, 3-4). He notices that, contrary to continental theatre more influenced by works in the field of human sciences, the British theatre in the sixties and seventies layed the main emphasis on action rather than form. The text serves as a support for the plot. This feature changed in the next decades, especially after the break of 1979 – following the victory of the Conservative party over the Labour and Thatcher being nominated as Prime Minister – with playwrights paying more attention to the formal aspect and giving more autonomy to language (*Ibid.*, 3-4).

This change was focus is largely due to the rise of postmodern thinking and theories of language. In an issue of *Contemporary Drama in English* dedicated to ‘Drama and/after postmodernism’, Christoph Henke and Martin Middeke (2007) show how new developments in the perception of language have pervaded English drama of the last decades, notably in the work of Caryl Churchill, Martin Crimp, Mark Ravenhill or Sarah Kane¹⁸. A tremendous break with the mirror-like function of words was made by the movement of poststructuralism that paralleled postmodernism¹⁹. One of its standard-bearers is Jacques Derrida whose method of deconstruction is central to his philosophy of language and leads to the opposition to ‘systematic or intended sense, especially against a reified authorial intention’ (Henke & Middeke, 2007, 4). Derrida therefore pointed to the instability of words’ meaning (*Id.*). A second philosopher whose influence was reflected in the ‘disturbing (mental) landscapes’ of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre, as argued by Henke and Middeke, is Lyotard (*Ibid.*, 6). He asserted the ‘loss of universal values’ and ‘of unifying laws, rules, and norms for artists and scholars alike’ (*Id.*). Next, French thinker Jean Baudrillard also fostered reflections about the use of words.

¹⁷ See Ruset (2005b): ‘la dramaturgie est florissante au Royaume-Uni, pays où le texte forme la pierre angulaire du processus créatif’ (91).

¹⁸ This paragraph about several contributors to postmodern discourse about language and its influence on English drama is based on Henke & Middeke’s article ‘Introduction: Drama and/after Postmodernism’ (2007, 1-33).

¹⁹ As explained by Abrams and Harpham in their *Glossary*: ‘poststructuralists undertake to subvert the foundations of language in order to demonstrate that its seeming meaningfulness dissipates, for a rigorous inquirer, into a play of conflicting indeterminacies, or else undertake to show that all forms of cultural discourse are manifestations of the reigning ideology, or of the relations and constructions of power, in contemporary society’ (228).

In his somber vision of our Western consumerist contemporary society, he tackled the issue of meaning, arguing that new technologies such as the Internet have established, through a new virtual reality, a relationship of non-correspondence between signs and their referents, the former assuming a self-referential status (*Ibid.*, 8-9). This situation has led to a proliferation of meanings that in turn results in meaninglessness. What all these theories have in common is the emphasis on the plurality and deconstruction of significations.

Interestingly, while Henke and Middeke establish a link between postmodern discourses and the recent concerns of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre of the 1990s, Angel-Perez (2003) considers this theatrical aesthetic as a reaction to postmodernism:

The theatre of the (...) [1990s and 2000s] has been radically engaged in trying to escape the ethical and aesthetic aporia postmodernism walled itself in. Turning this ‘absence of way’ (*a-propos*) into ‘a way’ has been the federating challenge put by recent English playwrights to react – through diverse proposals – to the postmodern sceptic credo according to which art cannot change reality. (3)

Angel-Perez observes that reactions to postmodernism have taken two paths. One in the 1990s with the *In-Yer-Face* theatre wherein stage is the starting point of creation and playwrights seek to foster a physical reaction from the audience. The second path that has developed in the early 21st century is one of a theatre more focused on the role of language in ‘a revolutionary attempt to reactivate a verbal theatre (...) of the poetic sort²⁰: a theatre based on the necessity to create different, almost artaudian²¹, missions for words (chosen for their ‘vibratory’ potential), a theatre emerging from the music of the signifiers, ultimately, a theater of voices’ (*Id.*). It should be noticed that the ‘poetic language’ mentioned by Angel-Perez was already pointed out by Lehmann in his observation of postdramatic features. In a chapter dedicated to the components of what he names ‘postdramatic theatre’, he addresses the question of text and language. While he remarks on the deconstruction of meaning – a pivotal element of postmodern discourses –, he argues that, in the new theatre, a ‘specifically theatrical, “magical” transmission and

²⁰ Angel-Perez cites Caryl Churchill’s *Far Away* as an example of this verbal theatre (2003, 3). In another article (Angelaki, 2013, 79-95), she carries out a thorough analysis of language games in *Far Away*. The argument she develops in that article is discussed in chapter 2.1. dedicated to the play.

²¹ Antonin Artaud, in *Le théâtre et son double*, reassesses the role of language and emphasises its material aspect: ‘(...) que l’on revienne si peu que ce soit aux sources respiratoires, plastiques, actives du langage, que l’on rattache les mots aux mouvements physiques qui leur ont donné naissance, et que le côté logique et discursif disparaisse sous son côté physique et affectif (...), et voici que le langage de la littérature se recompose, devient vivant’ (185-186). He further specifies: ‘(...) à côté de ce sens logique, les mots seront pris dans un sens incantatoire, vraiment magique, – pour leur forme, leurs émanations sensibles, et non plus seulement pour leur sens’ (193).

connection happen' through language (2006, 145). The emphasis is laid on the organic aspect of language. Attention is drawn towards rhythm, breath, musicality of sounds, etc.:

What is emerging in the new theatre, as much as in the radical attempts of the modernist 'language poétique', can therefore be understood as attempts towards a *restitution of chora*: of a space and speech/discourse without telos, hierarchy and causality, without fixable meaning and unity. (145-146)

In summary, Lehmann and Angel-Perez both draw attention to a new autonomy of language and an increasing focus on the physical production of words, Lehmann identifying this aspect in Western plays of the 20th century's last decades and Angel-Perez in British plays of the early 21st century. However, they markedly differ in the importance they give to text.

Text, in Lehmann's report on new theatrical plays breaking the rules of traditional drama, is not brought into great focus in his book *Postdramatic theatre*. He proposes the term 'textscape' to describe the visual and sound landscape created on stage by words and their 'phonetic materiality' (*Ibid.*, 148). In these 'new variants of text' (*Id.*), the textual nature of plays is left aside and one may come to the conclusion that texts understood as collections of words forming lines may be tacitly associated to drama in Lehmann's view, i.e. an irrelevant form that 'grasps at nothing when it is meant to articulate experienced reality' (*Ibid.*, 182). In contrast, Angel-Perez's observation about the reactivation of a verbal theatre is concomitant with a potential revival of faith in language, as she and Nicole Boireau hypothesise in their article 'Le théâtre anglais 1985-2005 : un théâtre nécessaire' (2007, 7). They speculate that the early 21st century could be the era of *neomodernism*, a movement that is distinguished by the use of words as a means to address real issues, to portray society and to convey meaning (*Id.*). They state that after the crisis of representation that marked the end of the 20th century, English theatre of the new millennium sheds light on the central position of the author (*Ibid.*, 9). Boireau and Angel-Perez's assertion about British playwrights' leading role is also emphasised by Liz Tomlin in her foreword to Vicky Angelaki's theoretical book *Contemporary British Theatre: Breaking New Ground* (2013, xiii). She convincingly contends that following Lehmann's standpoint about 'the dwindling of the dramatic impulse' (Lehmann, 2006, 182) may lead to the skewed conclusion that numerous contemporary works of English playwrights 'are relics of a bygone era, with no possible relevance to the twenty-first century' (Angelaki, 2013, viii). She further puts forward this hypothesis: '(...) the historical notion of the dramatic as defined by Lehmann is no longer appropriate or relevant to the work being produced by significant numbers of dramatists at the turn of the twenty-first century' (*Id.*). In Tomlin's view, taking realism as a

factor of discrimination may lead to a deceptive duality between postdramatic works and ‘the others’, while contemporary English theatre must be approached in its plurality, its complexity and its richness:

(...) there is much to be gained by an examination of contemporary drama as a writer-driven model of contemporary theatre which is able to engage, in diverse ways, in the critique, deconstruction, revisionism or decontextualization of different aspects of a modern dramatic tradition that has (...) maintained strikingly similar questions throughout history, despite the radical evolution of its response. (xiii)

The place occupied by Caryl Churchill in this writer-driven landscape of British theatre is a first rank one. Throughout her numerous plays, she keeps questioning the status of language and reinvents forms, especially to convey visions of horror and a sense of terror that permeate words and stage.

1.2. Horror and terror/-ism on stage: the limits of representation

Bleak events of the 20th century and especially the Holocaust has violently shaken not only the everyday life of individuals, but also all the fields of knowledge. It is important to broaden the scope of the analysis of their impact by momentarily stepping away from the stage. This chapter addresses the ways in which the horror of concentration camps caused a disruption in the fields of human sciences and the arts, which forced philosophers, writers and more generally each individual to rethink their notion of humanity. Next to this notion, its representation and the tales of cruelty, horror and barbarism are profoundly questioned. Are words still efficient and relevant to convey something that stands beyond understanding or imagination? This is one of the major interrogations that was raised by survivors and artists after the camps. The second section examines several theatrical responses to the post-Auschwitz artistic aporia on British stages. Finally, the rise of terrorism at the turn of the new millennium, its hypermediatisation and the links it maintains with the codes of theatre are the subject of the third section. The difference between terror and terrorism and the way the former impacts the language and the performance are discussed. In addition, this section explores the presence of trauma that often permeates tales of terror and the specific relationship between trauma theory and literature. This theoretical overview is an important background for the analyses of Churchill's plays *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone* in which her approach to language is directly connected with the terror and traumas they portray.

1.2.1. After Auschwitz: the silence of humanity

The reference to Auschwitz in this thesis, as the epitome of the horror of concentration camps, must be understood in a larger sense, as a metaphor of barbarism and cruelty: 'Auschwitz comme métonymie de l'horreur et indépassable du XX^e siècle', as Angel Perez insightfully puts it in *Voyages au bout du possible: les théâtres du traumatisme de Samuel Beckett à Sarah Kane* (2006, 17). She further explains that Auschwitz resists the authors', historians' and theorists' attempts at defining it and contextualising it in a space-time frame: 'le chronotope Auschwitz – et c'est là la marque d'un traumatisme profond – résiste à toute tentative de limitation' (*Ibid.*, 19). Writing about the Holocaust is therefore problematic, but more generally, writing at

all. The issue of the language's efficiency and its function in conveying barbarism has been tackled by many thinkers, notably Georges Steiner, Theodor W. Adorno and Maurice Blanchot. Their specific visions and contributions to the fields of literature and philosophy stem from the same acknowledgement of a language crisis.

First, French-born American specialist of literature Georges Steiner greatly contributed to the vast field of reflections about post-Auschwitz literature. *Language and Silence* (1967) comprises his essays on the status of language, especially in literature, concerning the means to convey the barbaric events of the Holocaust, but also in relation to the broader context of societal evolutions. Steiner's purpose is to 'ask about the continued validity of language, about the authority of silence in the face of the inhuman' in order to develop a philosophy of language (xi). Strikingly, he points to the new tottering image of knowledge and arts as symbols of humanity and its elevation, a consequence of the breakdown that occurred after the horrors of Nazism:

We come after. We know now that a man can read Goethe or Rilke in the evening, that he can play Bach and Schubert, and go to his day's work at Auschwitz in the morning. To say that he has read them without understanding or that his ear is gross, is cant. In what way does this knowledge bear on literature and society, on the hope, grown almost axiomatic from the time of Plato to that of Matthew Arnold, that culture is a humanizing force, that the energies of spirit are transferable to those conduct? (ix)

On the basis of this observation, Steiner wonders if the reaction to the broken connections between culture and humanity marks the end of 'an [*sic*] historical era of verbal primacy' and the beginning of 'a phase of decayed language, of "post-linguistic" forms, and perhaps of partial silence' (*Ibid.*, vii).

Silence in the arts could first be interpreted as an echo of the survivors' difficulty to verbalise what they have experienced. French philosopher Myriam Revault D'Allones, in a collection of essays entitled *Fragile Humanité* (2002), notes that the impossibility to communicate a traumatic experience – and therefore the limits of narrations – had already been observed by Walter Benjamin in *Le Narrateur* about First World War soldiers coming back from the front, mute (183). The horror exceeds reality and hollows out language. D'Allones sheds light on the challenge faced by the persons directly impacted: 'La transformation – déclarée impossible – de l'expérience vécue en langage pose ici un problème spécifique. Car il s'agit, pour le survivant qui retourne au monde des vivants, de signifier par l'imagination ce qui outrepassa l'imagination' (2002, 182). In her view, imagination is the adequate device to speak about a

horrible reality that must be known in order to bring back a sense to the victims' lives, to humanity and also to pass this painful memory on to next generations (D'Allonnes, 2002, 183).

Second, one of the most famous statements about the post-Auschwitz crisis of language is Adorno's 'to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric'²², written in 1955 in his essay "Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft" published in *Prisms*. This sentence, the object of numerous and often mistaken comments, shows Adorno's perception of the limits reached by representation when confronted to cruel deeds that go beyond them²³. The German philosopher laid emphasis on the powerlessness of language²⁴. As Angel-Perez notices, Adorno's vision is a premise of postmodern *aporia* (Angelaki, 2013, 80). It indeed stresses a seeming deadlock for art in its attempt to portray reality.

Third, another expression of the failure of language to convey a high sense of humanity pervades Maurice Blanchot's writings. The French philosopher and literary critic rejects the linearity of narratives, advocating for an aesthetic of fragmentation. He puts it in practice in *L'Écriture du Désastre* (1980), a collection of fragments about disaster, death, writing and philosophical approaches. What Blanchot names 'the writing of disaster' is a writing that admits its own lack of power. He believes that words should be used to address the complete disarray into which human beings fall when confronted to the horror of concentration camps. He therefore argues against any possibility of action fostered by language:

Que les mots cessent d'être des armes, des moyens d'action, des possibilités de salut. S'en remettre au désarroi.
Quand écrire, ne pas écrire, c'est sans importance, alors l'écriture change – qu'elle ait lieu ou non ; c'est l'écriture du désastre. (25)

Blanchot's distrust of language results in a formal disruption of syntax and etymology. Their previous unity as segments of meaning and as part of a larger system – the sentence – is, in his writing fragmented so as to convey the problematisation of communication.

²² Quoted in Angelaki (2013, 80).

²³ A decade later, Adorno revised his own words in *Dialectique Négative* (1966): 'La sempiternelle souffrance a autant de droit à l'expression que le torturé celui de hurler ; c'est pourquoi il pourrait bien avoir été faux d'affirmer qu'après Auschwitz il n'est plus possible d'écrire des poèmes' (347, quoted in Angel-Perez, 2006, 21).

²⁴ See Myriam Revault d'Allonnes's comment on Adorno's contention: '(...) pour Adorno, la parole poétique ne peut que devenir muette, vouée à l'interruption, dès lors que l'on se trouve affronté à l'au-delà des frontières de l'esprit : celui de l'extrême du possible, de l'excès du mal, autrement dit de l'événement « à la limite ». La littérature est désormais impossible' (2002, 170).

The crisis of language that permeates numerous philosophical and theoretical discourses after the Second World War and the Holocaust greatly impacted the artistic sphere. However, visions of Auschwitz as the ending of History and the negation of any possibility to recount barbaric events gradually gave place to new discourses and creative attempts at addressing such tragic episodes. Revault d'Allonnes (2002) rightly corrects the assertions concerning the end of History:

La Shoah est un événement qui fait histoire, qui peut être dit *epoch-making*, marquant à la fois une irréversible rupture entre l'*avant* et l'*après* et un point de non-retour pour la conscience actuelle. En cela, elle signe la fin d'une certaine 'philosophie de l'histoire' : celle qui veut que la réconciliation finisse toujours par l'emporter sur le déchirement. (187)

In short, it is not because horrifying events force people to question elements that were hitherto taken for granted – humanity, shared values of a world community and its ability to live together – that the very existence of these elements is now annihilated. Albeit highly fragilised, a sense of humanity can rise again.

1.2.2. Horror on British stages

The 20th century was a period of considerable violence and terror. The two World Wars, the Holocaust, nuclear bombs and the Cold War are historical events that have had major impacts on intellectuals. Numerous English writers took part in peace movements. The English imaginary in particular was haunted by 'the cataclysmic obsession' (Boireau, 2000, 109). In her in-depth analysis of British theatres of trauma, Angel-Perez (2006) suggests two reasons explaining that, in her view, the theatre in the United Kingdom addressed post-Auschwitz issues and questioned the theatre's *raison d'être* more fiercely and compulsively than anywhere else in Europe: first, the influence of Irish playwright Samuel Beckett; second, the awareness of the limitations of language that came from Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy (12). Because of the impossibility to represent historical horrors in a figurative way, the stage became a space of formal innovations²⁵.

²⁵ The following examination of the evolution of British theatre from the sixties to the nineties mainly draws on Boireau (2000) and Ruset (2005a).

After the episodes of the Second World War that were traumatic for the English population, like The Blitz²⁶, and in the Cold War context, the political climate in England was one of perpetual fear. The atomic threat and the fear of annihilation was expressed in plays whose topics often dealt with nuclear power. While some playwrights followed the vein of documentary descriptions, others explored formal abstraction. The generalised menace that threatened society found an echo in the theatrical menace to the structure of plays. In these stories, madness and horror contaminate everything. The strangeness of their universe generates confusion in the audience's mind. Ambiguity often leads to the absurd. Furthermore, language is questioned and words are a new target, as stressed by Boireau (2000): 'De thématique, la menace se fait structurelle. Les éléments du réel sont pris en charge par le non-dit. L'innommable n'est pas nommé, mais restitué sous une autre forme. À la déraison du pouvoir, le théâtre répond par le pouvoir de la déraison' (125). Barren sentences are now part of a refined dramaturgy.

Laughter is one of the playwrights' devices to address the anguish of destruction. In the sixties, dramatists such as David Campton, Nigel Dennis, Harold Pinter and Norman F. Simpson explored this trend, giving birth to what the famous theatre critic, Irving Warlde names *comedies of menace* (Boireau, 2000, 125). In these plays, dramatists use derision and a playful use of language to reduce terror to a state of inoffensiveness. Although serious topics are tackled with humour, these plays are also meant to foster deeper thoughts about human nature and society. The plays portray alienated individuals struggling against a repressive system. They embody a new vision of the world which results from the division of Europe after the Second World War. This theme is particularly present in historical plays, depicting great famous characters fighting alone against an unfair system. John Osborne's *Luther*, about Martin Luther, and Robert Bolt's *A Man for All Seasons*, based on the life of Thomas More are famous examples of such plays. With the *comedy of menace*, this historical theatre was the other major vein of these decades which showed on stage the loss of certainty and the resulting fragmentation of human identity (*Ibid.*, 141).

²⁶ From the German word *blitzkrieg*, literally 'lightning war': 'military tactic calculated to create psychological shock and resultant disorganization in enemy forces through the employment of surprise, speed, and superiority in matériel or firepower' (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 2002, 2, 285). The air attacks called 'The Blitz' led by the German army to strike against the United Kingdom lasted for several months, from September 1940 till May 1941.

In the seventies, the political tone developed by dramatists opened the way to subversive formal propositions breaking with mimetic representations. One of their aims was to unsettle spectators and encourage them to look critically at world politics, a feature that was taken up by the 1990s British movement of *In-Yer-Face* theatre: ‘Prévenant tout engluement dans le pathos, la provocation incite le spectateur à reconnaître les démons extérieurs qui le menacent, et lui fait partager, non pas le sens d’une fatalité, mais la conscience de la transformabilité des choses’ (Ruset, 2005a, 14). Ruset rightly establishes a connection between the British political theatre of the 1970s and Brecht’s epic theatre. In the wake of the German playwright Bertolt Brecht, these British dramatists argued against an aesthetic based on the illusory imitation of reality. However, they differed in the treatment of the audience, Brecht advocating for calm while they looked for shock (*Id.*). Concerning genres and themes, dystopias became a favourite means to depict the bleak societal climate experienced by dramatists, transposing it into an imaginary space-time. In these parallel theatrical universes, characters completely lack freedom: ‘Privés de transcendance, emprisonnés dans les étroites limites que leur assignent leurs auteurs, asservis à de troubles pulsions, des individus, inertes ou sadiques, agissent comme des marionnettes’ (Boireau, 2000, 150-151). During this decade, numerous dramatists created dystopian space-times that were an altered, darker versions of English society wherein the social and political backgrounds of their country were indirectly mirrored. Once more, the theatre became a means of denouncing institutional failures, abuses of power and dangerous issues such as xenophobia (*Ibid.*, 151; 155).

Cruelty truly pervaded British theatre in the 1980s, notably in Howard Barker’s *theatre of catastrophe* exemplified by the play *The Possibilities*. Ruset (2005a) stresses the main traits of this aesthetic:

À l’intérieur de ce type de structure dramatique contraignante [caractérisée par un ‘effet d’accumulation catastrophique’], les personnages tentent de bâtir leur existence sur un monceau de violence agglomérée, qui les condamne à l’enlèvement. Leur humanité, soumise à l’insoutenable, se corrode. Aussi assiste-t-on dans les dramaturgies de la catastrophe à de véritables monstres de monstres. (16-17)

Breaking with the Aristotelian tradition of tragedy, dramatists exploring catastrophe do not provide any denouement, which results in the audience’s destabilization. Catastrophe, in Aristotle’s theorization of drama, is related to the play’s ending. Here, on the contrary, it often occurs at the beginning of, or even before, the action and generates a troubled atmosphere that

never leaves the stage²⁷. Through its refutation of the traditional mode of representation, the *theatre of catastrophe* truly mirrors interrogations that run through all the artistic fields, not only as regards the fragmentation of the real, but also concerning a former vision of humanity. Commenting on Aristotle's poetics, Revault D'Allonnes (2002) points out that, even though the Greek philosopher advocated for terror and pity as specific devices of tragedy, these devices must remain within the realm of human actions, excluding inhuman situations (181). As inhuman actions are now part of the everyday life, theatre must step out of the old traditional path to portray them. To do so, playwrights often work on an inadequacy between form and content (Angelaki, 2013, 80).

The staging of horror reached a climax in the 1990s with a wave that bears many labels: Sierz's *In-Yer-Face* theatre, James Christopher's *new brutalism*, Billington's *new realism* or Simko's *the tough school* and *plastic drama* (Tönnies, 2002, 57). Sarah Kane's theatre is most probably the epitome of this vein characterised by the violation of taboos regarding, among others, sex and violence. In her view, stating that a horrifying act that happened in real life is impossible to stage would amount to contesting the reality of this act: '(...) if you are saying you can't represent something, then... you are denying its existence, and that's an extraordinarily ignorant thing to do' (Sarah Kane quoted in Angel-Perez, 2006, 14). Consequently, she does not make any concessions on violent actions she imagines for the stage: rape, torture and suicide are recurring motives of her theatre. Kane's dramaturgy explores in a more radical way a theatre – and her vision of the world – beyond norms, moral and structure. Although historical and societal contexts are always the background of artists' thinking and conceptions of their theatrical aesthetic, here, Kane establishes a break with previous works. Violence, in her stories, is not the result of military operations, political decisions, or of any powerful entities. On the contrary, it stems from individual passions. Playwrights such as Ravenhill, Irvine Welsh and Jim Cartwright are usually associated with her dramaturgy²⁸. In the horrifying visions that dramatists portray, the aesthetic of space is particularly important. The stage becomes a post-human, post-apocalyptic landscape. Angel-Perez (2006) speaks of a 'monstruous space' (14) which is very often a space of action and not of verbalisation: 'Le spectateur se trouve propulsé dans un espace tortionnaire où l'on ne se paie que rarement de mots, où l'on passe à l'acte' (*Ibid.*, 15).

²⁷ For a thorough analysis of Catastrophe in theatre and the evolution of its status, see Hélène Kuntz's *La Catastrophe sur la scène modern et contemporaine* (2002).

²⁸ They indeed openly acknowledge links between their works (Tönnies, 2002, 57).

The attention directed to the audience in the *new brutalism* theatre is one of the key-features of its aesthetic. This vein aims to provoke a reaction from the spectators and abolish the vision of theatre as a passive entertaining activity. Representation does not spare the spectators: ‘Plus que jamais, le théâtre anglais procède par choc frontal et élabore une esthétique de l’abjection qui repose essentiellement sur ces « aggro effects »²⁹ et leur effet traumatique’ (*Ibid.*,14). Angel-Perez sheds light on the ethical purpose sought by playwrights: through the staging of barbarism, they aim to denounce crimes against humanity and perhaps to foster change (*Id.*). Sarah Kane clearly stated this will: ‘What I can do is put people through an intense experience. Maybe in a small way from that you can change things’³⁰. In this respect, numerous playwrights of the 1990s claim to be in direct continuity with the French dramatist Antonin Artaud’s vision of theatre. In his seminal book, *Le théâtre et son double*, he develops a philosophy of staging named ‘le Théâtre de la Cruauté’ (1964, 137-189). Artaud advocates for a theatre that, through cruelty, physically affects the audience, i.e. pushes the spectators to actively participate in the play and not merely to consider it as a distraction. In this respect, some theatrical attempts of the British *new brutalism* follow Artaud’s thinking. However, a strong difference between the vast number of these neo brutalist plays and the Artaudian vision lies in the definition of cruelty. In his view, cruelty does not necessarily imply physical violence and bloody imagery:

Le Théâtre de la Cruauté a été créé pour ramener au théâtre la notion d’une vie passionnée et convulsive ; et c’est dans ce sens de rigueur violente, de condensation extrême des éléments scéniques qu’il faut entendre la cruauté sur laquelle il veut s’appuyer. Cette cruauté, qui sera, quand il le faut, sanglante, mais qui ne le sera pas systématiquement, se confond donc avec la notion d’une sorte d’aride pureté morale qui ne craint pas de payer la vie le prix qu’il faut la payer. (189)

Merle Tönnies, in her article ‘The “Sensationalist Theatre of Cruelty” in 1990s Britain, its 1960s Forebears and the Beginning of the 21st Century’ (2002), brings new light on the identification of the theatrical movements that influenced 1990s British theatre. She posits the view that post-1990s British drama is often analysed by critics as the evolution of 1960s Artaudian *Theatre of Cruelty*. Mentioning that the latter paved the way for a virulent criticism of societal issues on stage, she however argues that the new theatrical language of the late 20th century displays different features from that of its 1960s forebears (58). For example, she notes that these plays ‘developed a standard repertoire of situations which appeal with extreme force both to sexual voyeurism and to sadistic impulses (...). The sense of limits being deliberately tested and/or

²⁹ Or ‘aggressivity effects’: a concept introduced by Edward Bond which derives from Brecht’s alienation effect (Angel-Perez, 2006, 13).

³⁰ Sarah Kane quoted in Urban (2001, 36).

exceeded (...)’ (*Id.*). In Tönnies’s views, this dramaturgy of the excesses should be understood, not only as an evolution of 1960s theatre, but also as an artistic field responding to the *fin de siècle*. She therefore compares 1990s British theatre with 1890s *sensation drama* which sought to initiate a ‘gut reaction’, to have a ‘physical impact’ on spectators that is more extreme (59-60).

The recent evolution of British theatre at the turn of the 21st century towards less violent dramaturgies – i.e. the theatrical aesthetic of plays that concerns both the texts and the representations – is pointed out by numerous scholars³¹. Intensity is lessened in the actions while language is the receptacle of cruelty (*Ibid.*, 66-67). As Vicky Angelaki observes in her essay ‘Politics for the Middle Classes: Contemporary Audiences and the Violence of Now’ (2013), 1990s theatre, nurtured by political changes and a climate of restlessness at the end of the century gives way to plays whose bare aesthetics, darkness, or awkward atmosphere and elliptical nature convey a sense of powerlessness and disappointment at unfulfilled hopes aroused by the start of a new millennium (73-75). She further reports:

There was no longer a ‘big thing’ to aspire to; no unifying narrative, or at least not an institutional one. Representation became more subdued in what it actually showed, but increasingly frightening in what it expressed in the underlying tissues of the play. A bare, almost imperceptible quality entered the stage, haunting the empty spaces of discourse and causing a genuinely threatening sensation to materialize. (73)

Language, even in its bareness, is given renewed attention by dramatists. Remarkably, the rise of terrorism and the increase in attacks in numerous countries of Western societies do not silence words as it was the case in the wake of the Holocaust³². Numerous theorists and writers who discussed the status of language in the decade following the second World War supported the view of a crisis of language. In recent theatrical approaches, however, the dramatists’ work on words reveals that language could go past the deadlock of the unspeakable trauma, as proposed by Angel-Perez (2006): ‘(...) il s’agit pour les dramaturges de trouver une langue qui soit apte à dire l’indicible, à décrire l’indescriptible’ (23).

³¹ See Tönnies (2002, 57-72) and Angelaki (2013, 57-78).

³² ‘Silence words’ should be understood as the negation of any political impact fostered by language.

1.2.3. Trauma and terror/-ism

Terrorism, especially since 9/11 and the ensuing War on Terror³³, has increasingly pervaded everyday life, becoming a recurring pattern in political discourse and in the media for the last two decades. However, terrorism was already a topical issue in the previous century. The sense of terror that has grown in Western societies till today has contaminated the theatre sphere. To the specific *modus operandi* of terrorism that sometimes borrows theatrical codes of spectacle³⁴, dramatists have responded with its many forms and devices, exploring the foggy shores of trauma between its lines.

The term ‘terrorism’ and its root ‘terror’ have been discussed many times. Anthony Kubiak, discussing the links between theatre and terrorism in the article ‘Disappearance as History: The Stages of Terror’ (1987), stresses the difference between both terms. He conceives terror as a direct and immediate experience in the real that defies enunciation and representation: ‘terror operates in this theatre of the seemingly unspeakable, and the apparently unrepresentable’ (80). A parallel can be drawn with the barbaric experience of concentration camps and the notion of inhuman that stand beyond the compass of the human mind and shake the limits of representation. While terror remains in the realm of the ‘Real’, terrorism, or Terror with a capital letter, is the inscription – Kubiak uses the term ‘reification’ – of terror in a system of representation (82). Terror occurs in a moment of disappearance, of ‘zero time and infinite duration’ that cancels History (*Id.*). Accordingly, it silences representation and language, or at least leads to a disintegration of it (*Id.*).

Before impacting words and the representation, it is the very possibility for victims to recount what they experienced that is threatened by terror. However, reactions to such events can take many shapes which are the result of trauma. Trauma studies strongly developed in the 1990s, notably with the work of Cathy Caruth. Drawing on Freud’s concept of repetition, she defines trauma as ‘an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations

³³ For an insightful examination of the topic, see Darts, Tavin, Sweeny & Derby’s article *Scopic Regime Change: The War of Terror, Visual Culture, and Art Education* (2008). As explained by the authors, ‘War on Terror’ is ‘an umbrella term used to depict the broad sweeping legal, political, and military policies promulgated by George W. Bush in response to 9/11’ (201). Furthermore, they emphasise that ‘while clearly a misguided and even dangerous rejoinder to the threat of terrorism, the overarching pretenses for the war on terror have rarely been challenged directly’ (*Id.*).

³⁴ About terrorism and spectacle, see Kubiak (1987), Hesford (2006) and Hughes (2007).

and other intrusive phenomena' (1991, 181). In Caruth's view, trauma, by its non-immediate nature, is a means to access history, since the possibility of a direct access to it and the belief in grand narratives and their referential quality have been refuted in postmodern and poststructuralist discourses (182). She rightly points out that 'for history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence' (187). In this regard, literature holds an important place in the field of trauma theory. As Geoffrey Hartman explains in his article 'Trauma within the limits of literature' (2003, 259), it is due to the inherent paradoxical nature of literature, i.e. that a text is composed by both what is said (words) and what is left unsaid (gaps). In that respect, it responds to the ambivalent status of language in its attempts to address trauma: on the one hand, words can convey a wound and be part of the healing process, on the other hand, they can reveal an 'inadequacy of what is heard or read, when the words searched for cannot address or redress other shocks' (*Id.*). He concludes: 'literature both recognizes and offsets that inadequacy' (*Id.*).

The predisposition of literature to be an adequate receptacle of tales of trauma is actually inherent to writing and therefore to plays in their textual form. However, theatrical approaches to traumatic experiences – including terrorism – are not limited to the text. The stage is also a place of speech and silence, of logorrhea and gaps. Recent British theatrical performances have responded to war and terrorism in many forms and genres such as verbatim theatre – a genre that mixes documentary sources with fictional content –, political street theatre or clownish performance (Hughes, 2007). Among contemporary British dramatists, Caryl Churchill is renowned for the political tone of some of her plays and for her formal works on language used to address societal matters, global concerns and the increasing climate of fear due to terrorism. *Far Away*, for example, which depicts a global state of war in an all-threatening atmosphere, albeit written and first staged in 2000, is considered 'one of the most theatrical and thrilling responses to 9/11' by Mark Ravenhill (Sierz, 2005, 60). Questioning horror and its representation has always been at the heart of Churchill's work. In a comment she made about Sarah Kane's *Blasted* in a letter to *The Guardian*, she wrote: 'Je comprends difficilement que les gens soient choqués, non par les choses elles-mêmes, mais par la pièce qui les donne à voir. Comment écrire sur un monde où pareilles choses ont lieu' (Benhamou et al., 2003, 55). This interrogation runs through *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, two dystopias that address violence and global catastrophes with a specific focus on the language of terror and trauma.

1.3. Caryl Churchill

Caryl Churchill's great stature in the British theatrical landscape – but also on the international scene – is unquestionable. Newspaper articles, academic essays and monographs about the dramatist confirm the special place she occupies. She has been acclaimed as 'the most profound and theatrical writer of her generation' (Cohn, 1991, 12) or as 'one of the most unapologetically unconventional playwrights of the contemporary period' (Angelaki, 2013, 5). Meaningfully, she has been given the title of 'Britain's most significant living dramatist', next to Tom Stoppard (Lawson, 2015). This public praise however, contrasts with the utmost discretion of Churchill who has always valued her anonymity in the media and given few interviews during her long career. The former head of BBC radio drama and theatre director John Tydeman said about her: 'Caryl's view was always that the plays would speak for themselves. Which, as you know, is also the attitude that she takes to interviews' (Lawson, 2012). Even though Churchill does not provide hints or clues about her work, her over sixty-year career, with almost forty plays written, has been and still is the focus of numerous scholarly works. This fact can be explained by her constant research and experimentations with form in addressing crucial topical issues.

1.3.1. Biographical overview³⁵

Caryl Churchill was born in England in 1938. The only child of a professional cartoonist, she spent the major part of her first ten years in London. Churchill has acknowledged the influence of her father's cartoons on her own work, especially the political ones about World War II, which she repeatedly saw during her childhood. From this art, she borrowed 'a world of the grotesque' (Luckhurst, 2015, 8). Her mother worked as a fashion model and actress, which was quite unusual for this epoch, with women expected to stay at home, and mostly being associated with motherhood and domestic life. Between the ages of ten and seventeen, Churchill lived in Canada with her family before coming back to England to study at Oxford University. In her monograph about the British dramatist, Mary Luckhurst (2015, 9-10) points out the influence of Marxism on Churchill's student life and then after, from the sixties to the eighties. She also

³⁵ The biographical overview is based on two main sources: Luckhurst (2015, 8-25) and Aston & Diamond (2009, 1-17).

explains that the playwright, like many other artists of her generation, reacted strongly against right-wing politics because of the rise of fascism and totalitarianism they had experienced in their youth. During her Oxford years, Churchill started to write plays that were produced by students and amateurs.

In the sixties, Churchill got married and had three children. She encountered some difficulties in being confined to doing domestic duties. Her discontent with a situation she shared with the vast majority of women and young mothers played a significant role in her growing interest in politics and feminist issues (*Ibid.*, 14-15). Notwithstanding the obstacles; she became a professional writer during this decade, and with the help of her literary agent Peggy Ramsay. The plays she wrote at that time were mainly intended for the radio. Then, the state sponsorship of the arts and the increasing interest in the developing fringe theatre contributed to the proliferation of spaces for playwrights. Churchill's plays started to be produced professionally at the Royal Court Theatre and she became the first woman writer in residence there from 1974 to 1975. The resurgence of feminism in the seventies fostered Churchill's awareness of gender inequalities, an issue she tackled many times. Besides, under the influence of such discourses, Churchill and her husband rearranged the organization of their private life in order to find a good balance between work and family for themselves. The intertwined issues of private and public spheres experienced by the dramatist became a recurring feature of her plays. In 1976, she worked on several plays with Monstrous Regiment, 'one of the UK's most influential feminist theatre groups' (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 4).

Next to feminism, Churchill's interest in socialism and societal concerns grew stronger with the leftist climate of the seventies. She attempted to associate both movements in her plays when criticising hierarchies, class- and gender-related issues from an anti-capitalist position. The British playwright also worked with another theatre company called Joint Stock, whose dramaturgical methods were based on a highly collaborative work with everybody, providing opportunities to extend experiences in the theatre, hence levelling the playing field for all the theatrical components. When the Labour party returned to power in 1997, after eighteen years of right-wing ruling in the United Kingdom, it did not coincide with a revival of socialism or feminism. As reported by Aston and Diamond, the absence of strong ideologies that could challenge established political injustices and societal problems has borne consequences on Churchill's dramaturgy in her recent plays:

Philosophical and psychological questions of selfhood are at sea, unanchored in a world that increasingly seems to offer no personal or political means of self-knowing. (...) Given the sustained erosion of a credible, counter-political strategy, Churchill has moved towards what might best be described as strategies of dis-identification with life under intensifying regimes of transnational capitalism. (*Ibid.*,6)

The political voice of Churchill through her plays, however, has remained the paradigm of her dramaturgy. It has been conveyed with more or less emphasis by her continued formal experimentations.

1.3.2. Churchill's dramaturgy

In Caryl Churchill's writing, like in every serious literary work, form and content are strongly intertwined. Discussing new political or social problems, global crisis and inner fears often asks for structural renewals. With the world's changing landscape, artists seek new paths that can convey societal disturbances. Although themes, political discourse and formal aspects of Churchill's dramaturgy are intrinsically related, these poles are examined separately – albeit links going back and forth between content and form are obviously recurrent – in the following subsections.

A political voice for topical issues

When asked in an interview if 'playwrights have an obligation to take a moral and political stance' (Betsko & Koenig, 1987, 79), Churchill gives this answer:

Whatever you do your point of view is going to show somewhere. It usually only gets noticed and called 'political' if it's against the status quo. There are times when I feel I want to deal with immediate issues and times when I don't. (...) But either way, the issues you feel strongly about are going to come through, and they're going to be a moral and political stance in some form. Sometimes more explicitly, sometimes less. (79-80)

The British dramatist has indeed often stood 'against the status quo' in her career. In the eighties, her strong political tone reflected her connexion with socialist discourses. She explored the epic vain in an attempt to denounce the market forces ruling English society, notably in a play like *Serious Money* (1987) that portrays the life of the City. Another play, *Top Girls* (1980) is also cited as belonging to 'seminal socialist writing' (Elizabeth Sakellaridou in Angelaki,

2013, 131). Often presented as a feminist play, *Top Girls* questions the representation of feminism. Churchill wrote the play after she went to the United States in 1979 and realised, when talking to women who were top executives in big companies, that they connected feminism with professional achievements, while in England it was more related to socialism (Betsko & Koenig, 77-78). In her text, Churchill called the possibility of women's emancipation into question by portraying dehumanised models of success in a fiercely competitive world. In a similar vein, she had already tackled gender issues in the play *Cloud Nine* (1979) and proposed a dramaturgy of transgression with the reversal of roles between men and women.

Churchill, from her beginnings as a professional writer until present time, has remained of paramount importance concerning her impact on the development of feminist political theatre, however, it would be reductive to examine her body of work in the sole light of feminism. The themes of her plays are numerous and diverse, even though they are always related to topical issues and preoccupations regarding future perspectives. The major part of Churchill's productions point to Churchill's interest in writing about communities and large groups of people experiencing social hardships. Good examples of this are the recent plays *Iraq.Doc* (2003) and *Seven Jewish Children* (2009) which were also the author's 'immediate responses to real events and social injustices' and focused on human rights (Marissa Fragkou and Lynette Goddard in Angelaki, 2013, 147).

Guardian theatre critic Michael Billington, in an article he wrote for the playwright's eightieth birthday in 2018, observes an evolution in her dramaturgy: 'What I see in her work is a socialist-feminist perspective that has expanded to embrace a vision of impending catastrophe'. Nightmarish atmospheres are indeed a key feature of Churchill's dramaturgy that has been stressed by many scholars. Luckhurst, for example, reports that 'Western models of the family are often represented as a microcosm of economic and political environments, which are invariably darkly catastrophic. Home is not a safe place. It is a site of gothic collapse and psychic mayhem' (2015, 5). Moreover, Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond, in their *Cambridge Companion to Caryl Churchill* (2009) highlight Churchill's exploration, over the years, of 'social worlds scarred by an inability to democratize and to revolutionize, both nationally and internationally', and conclude: 'Hence, wherever one looks the Churchillian landscape is "frightening"' (1-2). Dark atmospheres pervade the dystopian texts that have increased in number in Churchill's recent work. At the same time, Aston (2013) notices a 'political shape shifting at the turn of the millennium' – the title of her article – characterised by the diminishing

presence of her political statements in her plays and a distance Churchill has put between her and the epic vein³⁶. Similarly, specialist in women dramatists Amelia Howe Kritzer (2002, 57) remarks that at the turn of the millennium, the blurred political scene in the United Kingdom and the mediatized reports on violence, whether of terrorist, military or domestic nature, have silenced many political voices of playwrights. Churchill, though she has lessened the clear activist critique of national and international issues, has found new means of addressing topical matters. They may appear as indirect devices that do not strongly reveal the dramatist's position, but they respond to postmodern discourses of deconstructed values and fragmentating aesthetic. By reading between the lines, one can still discern, beyond catastrophic actions and fearful settings, Churchill's vision of an ideal society that would be 'decentralized, non-authoritarian, communist, non-sexist – a society in which people can be in touch with their feelings, and in control of their lives'³⁷ (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 2).

Formal experimentations

In 1960, aged only 22, the British dramatist wrote an essay for the periodical *The Twentieth Century* entitled 'Not Ordinary, Not Safe' wherein 'her dramatic radicalism, critical acuity and activist frustration are all evident' (Luckhurst, 2015, 11). In her manifesto, Churchill questioned the renewal of theatre attributed to Osborne's play *Look Back in Anger*. She wanted artists to push further their reflections on theatrical aesthetics and foster a relevant change:

At the moment everything we have is at the expense of something else: poetry without plots, songs and stylization without observation, naturalism without imagination, character without action, slice of life without form. We must find a balance that doesn't impose form and poetry unrelated to the details of life nor pile up details without finding form and poetry. Form is in itself a means of expression, and a good play is like music in the reappearance of different themes, changes of pace, conflicts and harmonies; and fuller use of form should make plays not less but more true to life. (Churchill quoted in Roberts, 2008, xxvi-xxvii).

The beginnings of her formal experimentations already appeared in Churchill's discourse about English theatre. Her continuous innovation has been acknowledged and acclaimed by scholars and critics who consider the work on textual forms as the real expression of political

³⁶ Elaine Aston (2013) argues that this distance, however, does not imply a total break from the genre. The period between *This is a Chair* written in 1997 and *Far Away* three years later is marked by 'a dissolve (...) and a renewal of the epic by means of a composition that is experiential and elliptical in design' (145).

³⁷ The original quotation comes from Judith Thurman's article in *Ms.* 'The Playwright Who Makes You Laugh about Orgasm, Racism, Class Struggle, Homophobia, Woman-Hating, the British Empire, and the Irrepressible Strangeness of the Human Heart' (1982, 54).

interrogations: 'With the renewal of form comes the renewal of the political' (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 2).

The theatrical aesthetic of the British dramatist reveals an influence of postmodern and poststructuralist discourses. In her plays, she has repeatedly called into question the concept of structure, for instance, by disintegrating the 'authorial framework' in *Blue Heart* (1997) (Liz Tomlin in Angelaki, 2013, xviii). Consequently, the text is deprived of any specific guidance or pre-existing meaning. Marked by, among others, pre-World War II surrealism, the absurd drama of Eugène Ionesco and Samuel Beckett, she has not followed the major realistic vein of British theatre (Luckhurst, 2015, 4). These influences and her formal experimentations have mostly impacted Churchill's approach to language. As indicated by Luckhurst:

While Churchill has displayed a linguistic range that includes hyper-real dialogue, voices from different historic periods, satiric verse, song lyrics, Joycean streams of consciousness and punning, as well as the evocatively poetic, she is also famously spare with her dialogue, many of her works indicating a profound fascination with the limitation of words and the eloquence of silence. (*Ibid.*, 7-8).

Through language and particular styles of speech, Churchill shapes characters who are never entirely defined and whose motives remain hidden or unclear most of the time (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 9). They wander in a temporality which is often non-linear.

The universes invented by the dramatist and her formal distortion of classic narration give birth to texts that challenge the stage. The gaps in her plays and 'fissures in the far-from-whole textual worlds' she creates participate in opening up new possibilities and new languages for theatre. In conclusion, the aesthetic of Caryl Churchill appears to answer Howard Baker's claim that 'the only things worth describing now are things that do not happen'³⁸. This remark strikingly applies to *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*.

³⁸ Barker, H. (1989, 1993). *Arguments for a Theatre*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 23. Quoted in Angel-Perez (2003, 6).

PART 2

TEXTS AND PRODUCTIONS: ANALYSES

2.1. *Far Away*

In an article, Vicky Angelaki (2017) presented *Far Away* ‘the play destined to become one of the most frequently cited dramatic texts of our time, exemplary of how new writing could do politics minus the social realism or the fixed historical attribution while remaining powerful and resonant’ (21). The play has indeed been the object of numerous scholarly analyses, most of which focused on Caryl Churchill’s political agenda, more or less concealed in her writing. The various sources tied together in this chapter, along with an in-depth examination of the play – its text and production – allow to shed a new light on Churchill’s dramaturgy. What clearly appears is a persisting ambiguity regarding the author’s statement of intent while she leads the readers/spectators in an aesthetic of pervading though hidden terror. A related issue, the possibility of agency is called into question, for both the characters and the audience. The argument put forward in this chapter is that the ambiguity of *Far Away* can be understood in the light of Churchill’s formal approach to language. To improve the examination of problematic meaning in the text, it is highly interesting to turn to the first stage production of the play by British film and theatre director Stephen Daldry.

2.1.1. Fictional dystopia or real horror

As a dystopia, the world of *Far Away* is set in an undefined spatial and temporal time. References to our real contemporary environment, however, proliferate throughout the text. Numerous scholars have suggested comparisons with topical events and concerns, while few have challenged these views by linking the play to mythical and/or mythological sources. The diversity of comments on *Far Away* is indicative of its richness.

Synopsis

Far Away was written in 2000 by Caryl Churchill. The text is divided into three acts, each one separated from the other by a time frame of several years. The play opens with a very ordinary scene: a young girl, Joan, is staying at her aunt’s house but cannot sleep. While Harper, the aunt, tells her niece to go back to bed, the child explains she heard somebody screaming and

went outside. The more the girl describes what she saw, the more Harper denies it, countering Joan's terrifying tale with reassuring assertions:

JOAN: I heard a noise.

HARPER: An owl?

JOAN: A shriek.

HARPER: An owl then. There are all sorts of birds here, you might see a golden oriole. People come here specially to watch birds and we sometimes make tea or coffee or sell bottles of water because there's no café and people don't expect that and they get thirsty. You'll see in the morning what a beautiful place it is.

JOAN: It was more like a person screaming.

HARPER: It is like a person screaming when you hear an owl. (Churchill, 2000, 12).

Joan goes on saying that she saw her uncle pushing people into the garden shed and heard other people crying inside a lorry. Harper keeps denying everything, even though she finds herself in an uneasy position:

HARPER: There might be things that are not your business when you're a visitor in someone else's house.

JOAN: Yes, I'd rather not have seen. I'm sorry.

(...)

HARPER: I think it's lucky nobody saw you.

JOAN: If it's a party, why was there so much blood?

HARPER: There isn't any blood.

JOAN: Yes. (*Ibid.*, 15)

When her niece mentions that she saw children locked up in a shed, their faces covered in blood, and witnessed her uncle hitting one of them with a metallic stick, Harper admits that what Joan saw is a secret she shares with her husband, and that Joan must never tell anyone about it. The girl thinks the threat comes from her hosts but seems convinced when Harper explains that they help people, some of whom are badly injured, to survive and that they punish traitors. Here again the reader is not provided with further details about the context. He is put in the child's position, witnessing horrors but unable to retrieve any meaning from them, being told that these people will leave the next morning 'where they're escaping to' (*Ibid.*, 20). Harper reassures Joan that they are 'on the side of the people who are putting things right' (*Id.*). The child offers to help clean up the following day.

The second act takes place some years later, in a hat makers' factory. Day after day – and scene after scene – Joan and a young man named Todd make hats intended for prisoners' executions. Hats are burned with bodies except for one, which is selected each time as the most beautiful hat and which is kept and showed in a museum. The action consists mostly of Joan and Todd

conversing about their craft while hats are getting ‘brightly decorated’ (*Ibid.*, 24), ‘very big and extravagant’ (*Ibid.*, 26), then ‘enormous and preposterous’ (*Ibid.*, 28), as indicated in the stage directions. Mass murdering is reduced to a carnivalesque dimension, emphasising the absurdity of a cruel system: ‘TODD: Did you do hat at college? / JOAN: My degree hat was a giraffe six feet tall’ (*Ibid.*, 23). Moreover, through their conversation, readers get a glimpse of events happening in this dystopian society, such as trials people can watch until the middle of the night. The fifth scene consists in a parade, only described in the stage directions: ‘Next day. A procession of ragged, beaten, chained prisoners, each wearing a hat, on their way to execution. The finished hats are even more enormous and preposterous than in the previous scene’ (*Ibid.*, 30). Regarding this action, Caryl Churchill specifies in a foreword: ‘five [persons] is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?’ (*Ibid.*, 8). Except for this scene, Joan, Harper and Todd are the only characters in the play. This latter, while making a hat with his colleague, admits he has feelings for her. He also warns Joan that the job’s management is corrupt and reveals he intends to act against it. In the final scene of the second act, Joan and Todd make new hats, the former’s hat having won the parade selection. They discuss the corrupt hat industry and how each other has changed the other one’s life, their profound tone alternating with superficial considerations:

JOAN: It seems so sad to burn them with the bodies.

TODD: No, I think that’s the joy of it. The hats are ephemeral. It’s like a metaphor for something or other.

JOAN: Well, life.

TODD: Well, life, there you are. (...) You make beauty and it disappears, I love that. (*Ibid.*, 31)

Again, several years have passed between the second and third acts. We are back in Harper’s house where she and Todd are talking about animals which are now a threat to other animals and humans as they are taking the side of populations in what appears to be a general state of war:

HARPER: The cats have come in on the side of the French.

(...)

TODD: But we’re not exactly on the other side from the French. It’s not as if they’re the Moroccans and the ants.

HARPER: It’s not as if they’re the Canadians, the Venezuelans and the mosquitoes. (*Ibid.*, 35-36)

The two characters argue about animals. Harper is testing Todd, unsure about what he thinks and whose side he is on. Todd justifies himself to Harper, listing violent acts and massacres he has perpetrated. She tells him to leave, even though he is now part of her family, being married

to her niece. Joan, who had taken time off from the war to rest at her aunt's place wakes up. Harper who fears for her safety urges her to leave too. The play ends with Joan's long monologue about the horrors she has seen on her way back to Harper's house: '(...) there were piles of bodies and if you stopped to find out there was one killed by coffee or one killed by pins, they were killed by heroin, petrol, chainsaws, hairspray, bleach, foxgloves, the smell of smoke was where we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve' (*Ibid.*, 43). Joan has committed awful acts too, killing animals and children and she does not care about suspicions regarding her day off because she will 'go on to the end after this' (*Id.*). Gravity, noise, light, darkness and silence are now lethal weapons. Nature, in all its components, is a killer too. Joan's last words are strangely enigmatic. She tells Harper and Todd about the dangers she faced when she had to cross a river:

I'd have to go straight across. But I didn't know whose side the river was on, it might help me swim or it might drown me. In the middle the current was running much faster, the water was brown, I didn't know if that meant anything. I stood on the bank a long time. But I knew it was my only way of getting here so at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case.' (*Ibid.*, 44)

Horror contrasts with the simplicity of nature.

The dystopian landscape of Far Away

It is impossible to examine the characteristics of dystopian literature without referring to the main concept it stems from: utopia. The term was coined by Thomas More in 1516. In his seminal book, *Utopia*, he described a fictional idealised society living on the island of Utopia. The term itself raised many questions because of its ambiguous etymology. As explained by Fátima Vieira in the introductory chapter of *The Cambridge Companion to Utopian Literature* (Claeys, 2010), More actually invented two terms to designate the famous place, a fact that bears great significance for the interpretations of utopian texts:

By creating two neologisms which are so close in their composition and meaning – a lexical neologism (utopia) and a derivation neologism (eutopia) – More created a tension that has persisted over time and has been the basis for the perennial duality of meaning of utopia as the place that is simultaneously a non-place (utopia) and a good place (eutopia). (5)

By contrast, the term dystopia, coined by John Stuart Mill in 1968 during a parliamentary debate, with the non-ambiguous meaning of ‘bad place’, appears as the opposite or negative side of utopias. However, both poles are intrinsically linked, as the descriptions of such societies often point to the antagonistic sides in between the lines. This connexion which is also the basis for a definition of dystopia, is highlighted in *Utopia/Dystopia: Conditions of Historical Possibility* (Gordin, Prakash & Tilley, 2010):

Despite the name, dystopia is not simply the opposite of utopia. A true opposite of utopia would be a society that is either completely unplanned or is planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful. Dystopia, typically invoked, is neither of these things; rather, it is a utopia that has gone wrong, or a utopia that functions only for a particular segment of society. (1)

The dystopian genre properly developed during the 20th century and became more prominent than its joyous sister. ‘Where did it all go wrong? When did the vision of heaven on earth become an anticipation of hell?’, Gregory Claeys asks before giving the answer: ‘Enlightenment optimism respecting the progress of reason and science was now displaced by a sense of the incapacity of humanity to restrain its newly created destructive powers’ (*Ibid.*, 107). At the dawn of the 21st century, dystopias have evolved in parallel with growing societal concerns and issues such as the globalisation, the hyper-mediatisation, greenness, terrorism and wars on terror, clandestine immigration, etc. Caryl Churchill, in *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, pushes these realities to their surreal extremes.

Plunged into the bleak landscape and increasing horror of *Far Away*, one may be tempted to reassess Gordin, Prakash & Tilley’s characterisation of dystopias. Churchill’s catastrophic world seems, to all appearances, ‘planned to be deliberately terrifying and awful’ (2010, 1). However, by looking closely at the depiction and evolution of the fictional world, it becomes clear that the planning, if there was any, first created a deceiving utopia for a certain part of the population (Acts 1 and 2) - and then completely got out of hand (Act 3).

From the very beginning, with the title of the play, an emphasis is laid on space, a central feature of utopian and dystopian literatures. ‘Far Away’ reminds the readers/spectators of another famous place in British literature, Peter Pan’s ‘Neverland’, whose nature vacillates between utopia and dystopia³⁹. The former’s location, like the latter’s, is undefined, though its existence is more firmly acknowledged than Barrie’s island. The title suggests that the action is taking

³⁹ *Peter Pan* is a story written by the Scottish writer James Matthew Barrie. It was first a theatre play, performed in 1904, before being published as a novel in 1911.

place in a remote land. The question is, remote from what, or who? The question of perception is a recurring pattern in the play. The closeness between the characters and horror, and their awareness of it, greatly varies. Space evolves together with terror from the first to the third act. The play starts at 'HARPER's house. Night' (Churchill, 2000, 9). The domestic place associated with the sleepless night of a child who describes awful visions participate in 'the dream-like quality of the whole scenario', as observed by José Ramón Pérez in his essay 'Issues of Representation and Political Discourse in Caryl Churchill's latest Work' (2002, 98). The young Joan wakes up from her childish universe to find that cruelty and violence are dangerously close to the family home. However, the bloody events come to the fore, but only indirectly, through the characters' speech. From the domestic interior, the play moves to a working area in a totalitarian system. It further opens up with the parade of prisoners and finally embraces the whole world, although once again through the characters' speech, while they are physically back in Harper's house. The dystopian space is therefore split into two: the aunt's familiar house and the unfamiliar post-apocalyptic world outside.

The audience indeed gets a glimpse of the all-pervading horror in the third act. The account of Joan's journey shapes a landscape that is close to a wasted land. All creatures, and even natural elements, are either dying or fighting for an unknown cause, if only there is one⁴⁰:

It wasn't so much the birds I was frightened of, it was the weather, the weather here's on the side of the Japanese. There were thunderstorms all through the mountains, I went through towns I hadn't been before. The rats are bleeding out of their mouths and ears, which is good, and so were the girls by the side of the road. It was tiring because everything's been recruited (...). (Churchill, 2000, 43).

On the one hand, the space of *Far Away* can be identified as a post-Auschwitz topography, haunted by the ghost of the Holocaust but also of Hiroshima, a fictional world that challenges the possibility of its representation (Angel-Perez, 2006). On the other hand, the surreal descriptions of Caryl Churchill may help bring about the triumph of horror over reality. This view is supported by several scholars who understand *Far Away* as a metaphor, a parable, 'the disturbing fable of a world at war with itself' (Ravenhill, 2008). Churchill's retreat from realism, to take up the title of Ruby Cohn's book about English drama, is a well-known factor of her dramaturgy. Janet Reinelt, in her essay 'On feminist and sexual politics' (Aston & Diamond, 2009), comments on different plays of the dramatist and suggests that her 'deliberate

⁴⁰ The reference to Hobbes concerning the state of total war in *Far Away* was pointed out by some scholars. See Angel-Perez (2006, 187) and Aston & Diamond (2009, 100; 139).

suspension of the status of the real' is a strategy by which plays such as *Far Away* 'create precisely calibrated suspended realities where temporal and spatial coordinates are impossible to secure and the action skirts the surreal' (27). In the 'suspended reality' of the play, action remains suspended too. The violence had already begun before the first act and expands beyond the temporal frame of the text. Besides, there are no clear aim, no identifiable values in the dystopian society that could justify the state of war and point to the possible closure of it. Paradoxically, the increasing horror is paired with a stagnation of terror at the maximum level of catastrophe. Nicole Vigouroux-Frey (2008) relies on a similar examination to stress the mythical temporality of *Far Away*, the one of chaos, of the Earth's ending. She thus associates Joan's last words with the myth of the immobility of Nature⁴¹. Several elements exposed here reinforce the fictional character of the dystopian world that is *Far Away*, and yet, between its lines, the text appears as a virulent criticism of, among others, environmental, political and capitalist drifts that shape the contemporary society. As observed by Angel-Perez (2006), 'Ce monde est "très loin" et pourtant, à l'image de toutes les dystopies qui fonctionnent, si proche' (184).

Not that far away... Churchill's criticism and warning

Far Away was and still is acclaimed as one of the best responses, albeit by anticipation, to the terrorist attacks of 9/11. However, one cannot dismiss the international conflicts and wars that arose in the 1990s as an irrelevant influence on Churchill's writing of the play. Mary Luckhurst, in her book dedicated to the British dramatist (2015), explains that, for the European audience of the play in 2000, the backdrop of *Far Away* was the Bosnian War⁴² (145). Furthermore, in her essay on the 'Political Returns on the Twenty-First Century Stage', Siân Adiseshiah (2012) enumerates the increasing global conflicts of the 1990s, citing 'the Sierra Leone civil war

⁴¹ Another mythical or, more accurately, mythological approach to *Far Away* and the scene of the river is the one of Siân Adiseshiah (Vieira, 2013). She draws an original parallel between Joan's account of the river crossing and the mythologic realm of the dead, Hades, with its five rivers leading to the underworld: Sorrow, lamentation, fire, forgetfulness and hate – the characteristics of the five rivers of Hades – aptly describe the setting of *Far Away*'s final act. This act is a reproduction of Hades, the underworld, a place akin to hell or at least where the dead await judgement. (...) [I]n *Far Away* human society has degenerated into a Hades-like dystopia where the dead accumulate and await judgement. (300)

⁴² Drawing on Ed Vulliamy's *Seasons in Hell: Understanding the Bosnian War* (1994, London: St Martin's Press), Luckhurst explains: 'The Bosnian War was the most deadly conflict in Europe since World War II: more than 2,100,000 were displaced by Serb and Croat forces in a bid to create ethnically homogenous territories, and more than 100,000 were killed. The inactivity of United Nation's peace-keeping officials, notoriously reduced to standing by as 8,000 Bosnians were murdered at Srebrenica, an internationally agreed "safe area", generated a lasting crisis about humanitarian aid and negotiation' (145-146).

(1990-2002) and the first Gulf War (1991), swiftly followed by the Bosnian war (1993-5), the Chechen war (1994-6) and the Kosovan intervention in 1999' (110). All these events coupled with the rise of terrorism – not only the bombings, but also state terrorism – informed Churchill's writing⁴³. In *On Churchill and Terror*, Elin Diamond (Aston & Diamond, 2009) goes back to the notion of 'war on terror' and reports the numerous questions that run through Churchill's body of work: 'Can war be waged on a system of terror *and* on the affective state of being terrified? Isn't war the cause of terror? Or is terror what feeds war? And what of terror when no war is in view?' (125, original emphasis). In *Far Away*, the reader/spectator gradually loses track of a possible ideological system underlying wars and violence to enter the blurred and fearful realm of terror. The exchanges between Harper and Joan reveal the existence of 'a big movement' whose mission is to 'make things better' by saving good people from the 'traitors' (Churchill, 2000, 20). The simplistic dichotomy of Harper's explanation, considering the fact that she is forced to admit some deeds she had denied the minute before, is probably a lie. It is nonetheless convincing enough for the young Joan who, as an adult, works in an industry that is part of a mass murder system. It is possible to liken the fictional environment of the second act to a totalitarian regime that relies on fear, competition and mediatisation to carry out executions as normal, not to say joyful, ordinary affairs. On the contrary, the global situation that is presented in the last act, several years after the morbid processions, extends beyond the compass of the human mind. It is as if Churchill had piled up the horrors of History in an accumulation of ungraspable terror.

Countering the analyses of *Far Away* that relate the play to an identifiable background, the standpoint of theatre specialist Sean Carney is insightful and provides some perspective on the play. Through his examination of *The Politics and Poetics of Contemporary English Tragedy* (2013), he criticises the analyses of Churchill's recent plays carried out through the lens of real events: 'It is ironic that at a point when her political theatre has become more abstract and philosophical in its tactics, critics should insist on reading her too literally, as creating instances of realism' (223). He illustrates his point with the examination of *Far Away* which was acclaimed as 'a prescient play' that anticipated the terrorist attacks of 9/11 (*Id.*). Carney points to the consequences of such an interpretation. It indeed led to negative critiques judging the

⁴³ As contended by English Professor Jeanne Colleran in *Images, Evidence, And Spectatorship in Caryl Churchill's Far Away* (2008): 'Despite its title, *Far Away* feels very much like the here and now of international terrorism. If there is a play that communicates the anxiety of proliferated images, piecemeal but available information, unpredictable and uncertain alliances, constant conflict that threatens to become an annihilating force, social atomization – all of the fears of the present historical moment – it is this one' (117).

play irrelevant because of the surreal grotesque third scene that moves away from a clear dystopian vision of the Western contemporary society. He further argues, quite plausibly, that the emphasis is meant to be laid on the characters' speech rather than on the possible existence of a grotesque reality described in this speech. Through her discourse in the third scene, Harper displays a 'pathological thinking' which may be the true prescient criticism of post-9/11 political strategies (225):

Her 'us vs them' thinking, is, of course, reflective of the dominant American rhetoric after September 11, 2001, and this is the play's political commentary: this form of thought – vengeful, sick, and righteous – is not a reflection of reality at all. It has lost the ability to perceive reality. (*Id.*)

In short, Carney asserts that the political tone of Churchill and her criticism of the contemporary society and its ruling force focus on the modes of thinking characteristic of Western political strategies.

Another criticism that can be stressed in the text is the one of capitalism. The position of Churchill against consumerist values already shone through in her previous work, e.g. in the play *Serious Money* (1987). The episode that encapsulates it in *Far Away* is the hat making process⁴⁴. The parallel is judiciously drawn by Aston (2013) in her article 'But Not That: Caryl Churchill's Political Shape Shifting at the Turn of the Millennium':

(...) the process figures the machine-like labour of Ford's assembly line. Yet these are highly educated workers, college graduates, 'manufacturing' their individual designs rather than the parts of mass-produced goods. In brief, Churchill makes visual reference to old-style, machine-like relations of labour to capital in order to image twentieth-century capitalism's 'designs' on objects of global consumptions. (156)

The play's temporality is adapted to the time of labour and the obligation of productivity. The second Act is divided into six scenes that correspond to different stages of the creative process, including the final result worn by prisoners and the renewal of the task, like a never-ending chain that quickens: 'TODD: We used to get two weeks before a parade and then they took it down to one and now they're talking about cutting a day' (Churchill, 2000, 23). The contrast between the attention given to the hats and the lack of consideration for prisoners embodies the

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note that, next to an analysis of the negative connotation of the hat-making scenes, Christine Dymkowski, in her article *Caryl Churchill: Far Away... but Close to Home* (2003), proposes a contrasting view. She postulates that, in a sense 'the hats function as a positive image of human creativity and endeavour in the face of mortality and transience' (61). Moreover, she points to the 'text's celebration of Joan and Todd's generosity to each other' when making the hats, notably with the sharing of the beads in the last moments of the second act (*Id.*).

superficiality of consumerist habits but also the blindness of consumers in front of the ‘collateral’ damages related to mass production, starting with the failure to respect the human rights of the workers in developing countries. In addition, the image of prisoners parading with the hats morbidly recalls the real fashion shows which certainly are the epitome of capitalist superficiality. A second comparison was made in several analyses, one that connects the parade and the ephemeral nature of the hats intended to be burnt ‘with the bodies’ (*Ibid.*, 31) with theatre itself, and its ‘oblivious pageantry and waste’ (Carney, 2013, 226)⁴⁵. More than drama, it is art that is questioned by Churchill, who responds with the absurd to the question of its meaning. It is exemplified by Todd’s description of a hat he made: ‘I did one last week that was an abstract picture of the street, blue for the buses, yellow for the flats, red for the leaves, grey for the sky. Nobody got it but I knew what it was. There’s little satisfactions to be had’ (Churchill, 2000, 22). Ironically, the characters seek meaning in these preposterous accessories but do not call into question the meaninglessness of their repressive system.

Next to political strategies and Western ideologies, ecological concerns are another element of criticism tackled by the British playwright. In *Far Away*, the portrait of fauna, flora and natural elements reinforces the surreal character of the Churchillian universe. In a similar construction to the one of space and horror, the importance of the animals gradually evolves and increases. The play begins with the familiar environment of the house with owls in the trees and a fictive dog that got run over. Several years later, animals became victims undifferentiated from human prisoners, as the fact that Joan made ‘animal hats’ shows (*Ibid.*, 26). Later in the timeline, the reader/spectator is plunged into an utterly unfamiliar world wherein animals are fighters alongside populations in international conflicts. Even butterflies represent a threat:

HARPER: I was outside yesterday on the edge of the wood when a shadow came over and it was a cloud of butterflies, and they came down just beyond me and the trees and bushes were red with them. Two of them clung to my arm, I was terrified, one of them got in my hair, I managed to squash them.

TODD: I haven’t had a problem with butterflies.

HARPER: They can cover your face. The Romans used to commit suicide with gold leaf, just flip it down their throat and it covered their windpipe, I think of that with butterflies. (*Ibid.*, 34).

Plants, natural elements but also natural phenomena such as gravity, light and darkness also play a part in the state of global war. Humans’ lack of control over their surroundings is part of a conception of the universe that is no longer anthropocentric, as rightly illustrated by Sheila

⁴⁵ For additional comparisons between the parade and theatre, see Kritzer (2002, 66) and Aston (2013, 157).

Rabillard in her chapter ‘On Caryl Churchill’s ecological drama: right to poison the wasp?’ (Aston & Diamond, 2009): ‘(...) as we smile at the story-book absurdity of crocodiles who are always in the wrong, we catch a glimpse of another way of perceiving the world – a way that does not calibrate everything by the measure of man’ (100). Considering Churchill’s previous works that already revealed her ecological concern, such as *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen* (1971) and *The Skriker* (1994), Rabillard notices an evolution in her spatial approach to the environment, from local to global issues:

(...) Churchill returns to the idea of the commons – which can be understood both as a localized place, a plot of land unenclosed and of equal access, and also a planetary concept of shared resources, where the nature of the sharing (perhaps beyond the human?) is open to philosophical inquiry. (*Ibid.*, 88)

Far Away may convey a shared fear of entering a destroyed world, or more simply the preoccupation of a grandmother – Churchill - who has to warn her grandchildren against the inherent violence that is part of the everyday life (Lyll, 2004). Additional interpretations of the possible societal criticisms addressed by Churchill in her text are numerous and diverse but the main elements have been stressed in this section that has also presented the critical frame of *Far Away*⁴⁶. Like numerous artists, Churchill is reluctant to impose any fixed meaning on her work and let the audience finds its way in her dystopian landscapes.

2.1.2. Hidden terror

A striking feature of *Far Away* is the status of terror. A close examination reveals that the violence of Churchill’s dystopian play is mainly conveyed indirectly. Rather than cruel actions, it is the account of horrifying deeds that is presented to the reader/spectator. The only, but extremely important, exception to this pattern is the scene of the morbid procession of prisoners. Using the logic of spectacle for the parade, Caryl Churchill fosters a reflection on theatricality and its devices. Moreover, she puts the audience in the position of the voyeur and thereby challenges its critical thinking and potential agency.

⁴⁶ For further analyses of *Far Away* in relation to socialist and feminist issues, see for instance Janelle Reinelt’s *On feminist and sexual politics* (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 18-35), Kritzer (2002, 65), Elaine Aston’s *Feminist views on the English stage: women playwrights, 1990-2000* (2003, Cambridge University Press) and Pola Sotomayor-Botham’s *Lejos: La distopía socialista-feminista de Caryl Churchill* (2013, *Revista Chilena de Literatura*, 83, 161-175).

The tale of terror

The awareness of the brutal world of *FA* is raised by a child, a young Joan, who found herself in the uncomfortable position of the witness. The account of what she saw is cleverly disclosed little by little in her discussion with her aunt. The first thing the reader/spectator learns is that the girl ‘went out’. Churchill, from the beginning, establishes a contrast between the safe house and the dangerous space outside. This pattern is a recurring element of her dramaturgy, as observed by Elaine Aston and Elin Diamond (2009): ‘weaving its way through most if not all of her plays, is the affective gap between violence and harm “out there” versus a protected, if anxious, “here” (6-7). From the moment Joan begins to explain what she heard and saw, her credibility is undermined by Harper, who uses her status of adulthood to gain ascendancy over the child, and over the truth:

HARPER: Poor girl, what a fright you must have had imagining you heard somebody screaming.

You should have come straight down here to me.

JOAN: I wanted to see.

HARPER: It was dark.

JOAN: Yes but I did see.

HARPER: Now what did you imagine you saw in the dark? (Churchill, 2000, 13).

At this point, the tale of Joan could still be the fruit of her imagination, or even a nightmare she had and mistook for the reality. Her answer, however, produces a shift in the discussion. The child saw her uncle, a fact that seems believable and harmless but soon grows frightening as the reader/spectator learns that ‘he was pushing someone. He was bundling someone into a shed’ (*Ibid.*, 14). Joan goes on: ‘There was a light on. That’s how I could see the blood inside the shed. I could see the faces and which ones had blood on’ (*Ibid.*, 17). Harper, who, until then, had to convince her niece that all she saw was a friendly party and the marks of an unfortunate dog that accidentally got run over, has to acknowledge some truth in Joan’s version. She uses the power of secrecy and threat to silence the girl. Horror, however, has been allowed in and the former safety of the household is now disturbed. Joan and the audience are confused and find it difficult to distinguish between veracity and lies, between good and evil:

HARPER: You’ve found out something secret. You know that don’t you?

(...)

HARPER: Something you must never talk about. Because if you do you could put people’s lives in danger.

JOAN: Why, who from? From my uncle?

HARPER: Of course not from your uncle.

JOAN: From you? (*Ibid.*, 17)

In the ensuing discussion, Harper convinces her niece that she and her husband are good people saving other persons by ‘helping them escape’ and ‘giving them shelter’ (*Ibid.*, 18). Another terrifying reality therefore appears in her explanations, one from which people, sometimes wounded, escape. The uncle is once again mentioned and his cruelty emphasised by Joan’s report on his bloody actions: she saw him hitting a child with a metallic stick. In a nutshell, horror permeates the play from the very beginning, but only indirectly. The familiar environment is quickly disturbed by the voice of a character. Élisabeth Angel-Perez, in the chapter ‘Caryl Churchill : dystopies et jeux de langage’ (2006), confirms: ‘(...) Churchill figure la menace en décontextualisant l’horreur : c’est à travers les mots de l’enfant insomniaque que se découvrent les agissements de l’oncle tortionnaire (...). Les mots, enfantins, ont pour mission de vocaliser l’horreur’ (185). Words are the receptacle of terror. One element, however, opens a breach for the horror to leave the speech and become apparent: blood. At some point, Joan says that she slipped on some blood, a fact that could be the irrefutable proof that she had been telling the truth from the beginning, except that Churchill expectedly plays with uncertainty. About the girl’s foot, she writes in a stage direction that ‘she holds up her bare foot’ before saying ‘I mostly wiped it off’ (Churchill, 2000, 16). There is no indication that the substance is visible. The dramatist indeed leaves directors with the choice to make horror visible or not⁴⁷. Although the atmosphere is one of strangeness, the events witnessed by Joan, next to the additional explanations of her aunt, create powerful images that find an echo in the reality of the reader/spectator. The situation of people beaten up and hidden in sheds and lorries that will lead them to an unknown location alludes to human trafficking. It may also refer to deportations towards concentration camps or expulsions of immigrants.

Decontextualisation is enhanced in the hat-making scenes. Before the fifth scene, which is the episode of the procession, it is impossible to associate Todd and Joan’s work with a macabre killing system. One learns that there are animal hats, that some are worn by boys and that the all hat-making process may only be destined to parades. Televised trials are mentioned too, but their meaning remains opaque. The deceiving innocence of their work brutally collapses with the vision of chained prisoners, a point that is further discussed in the next subsection. It is in the last scene of the second act that the atrocity is revealed. The bodies, treated like simple pedestals for the hats, are burned. Mary Luckhurst (2015) uses Diamond’s concept of ‘permissible visibility’ to brilliantly shed some light on the hidden horror of *Far Away*.

⁴⁷ The fact that Harper does not retort with a counterargument may support the view that there is actual blood on Joan’s foot.

Diamond, in her book *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theatre* (1997, Routledge) asserts that ‘specifically, the mystification of the body in representation has come to serve as a metaphor for the concealment of human, and especially female, experience under patriarchy and capitalism’ (85, quoted in Luckhurst, 2015, 22). Luckhurst draws on Diamond’s statement to stress the absence of visual horror in *Far Away*. Examining the parade scene, she insightfully concludes:

This is the only time we see the dark world of the condemned (who are both male and female) and we never hear their stories but we ‘know’ their fate without having to see it. Churchill’s ‘permissible visibility’ reflects the enforced silence and invisibility of the victims of torture, dictatorship and genocide which crowd our newspapers and screens and yet remain marginal. (*Ibid.*, 22-23)

The invisibility of the victims, and of the horror, is stronger in the last act. It goes hand in hand with a lack of individualisation. While the trials of the past years may have implied some kind of legal system, the world of *FA* has become a surreal binary order where everyone and everything is either an ally or an enemy. One moves rapidly from one category to the other. Besides, groups of people are discriminated from one another according to ridiculous criteria: distinct groups are formed by ‘the engineers, the chefs, the children under five, the musicians’, ‘Portuguese car salesmen’, ‘Russian swimmers’, ‘Thai butchers’ and ‘Latvian dentists’ (Churchill, 2000, 36-37). With such enumerations, Churchill perhaps lays stress on the anonymity of victims in war conflicts and the over-simplification of human topographies by the media. Brutality is made visible in Todd and Joan’s speech. Ambiguously, it is both concrete and surreal. The following excerpts illustrate the point:

TODD: I’ve shot cattle and children in Ethiopia. I’ve gassed mixed troops of Spanish, computer programmers and dogs. I’ve torn starlings apart with my bare hands. And I liked doing it with my bare hands. [...] And I know it’s not all about excitement. I’ve done boring jobs. I’ve worked in abattoirs stunning pigs and musicians and by the end of the day your back aches and all you can see when you shut your eyes is people hanging upside down by their feet’ (*Ibid.*, 40-41).

While dystopic elements are accumulating, they remain a description blankly stated by the characters. Terror, albeit phantasmagorical, is normalised and threat is everywhere. Home, if it was once a safe place, is not anymore because Harper has doubts about Todd’s loyalty and does not want to have problems because of Joan’s staying with her. The dialectical gap between a safe ‘here’ and a dangerous ‘out there’ identified by Aston and Diamond (2009, 7) no longer exists. Horror, though concealed in the characters’ lines and the audience’s imagination, is right here.

Showing terror: the horror show

While Churchill hid terror in words, she made a significant exception with the scene of the parade. The stage direction of the dramatist – the only direction written in the foreword – concerns the number of prisoners on stage: ‘five is too few and twenty better than ten. A hundred?’ (Churchill, 2000, 8). A couple of scholars consider it a telling example of Churchill’s dramaturgy. First, Vicky Angelaki, in a chapter of her book *Staging Crisis* (2017) entitled ‘Too Much Information: Caryl Churchill and Millennial Angst’, points to the formal bareness of the dramatist:

This playfully defiant note was groundbreaking for new writing and politics. It follows that in Churchill’s work as in that of other playwrights resistant to prescribing the visual world of their plays, (...) stage directions became sharp and minimal, sometimes preposterous and always weary of realism. (21)

Second, Una Chaudhuri (2015), in *Anthropo-Scenes: Theatre and Climate Change*, asserts that a parade of a hundred persons, as suggested by Churchill, is a mark of the influence of epic theatre in the play, recalling ‘the large choral dramas of ancient Greece, the teeming pageants of the medieval cycles, or even the crowded modernist stages of Reinhardt, Piscator, and Brecht’ (2). She also notes that the wide range of people on stage, from five to a hundred, leaves the director free to decide ‘*the scale* of the horror at the heart of the play’ (*Id.*, original emphasis). While Churchill leaves room for the imagination, the brief description of the parade generates some strong images. ‘Chained prisoners (...) on their way to execution’ undeniably remind the reader/spectator of the lines of victims of the Holocaust in concentration camps (Churchill, 2000, 30). Similarly, the prisoners of this dystopian reality are deprived of identity. As Aston (2013) puts it, ‘the dispossessed in *Far Away* appear as a condemned and silenced body’ (157). In addition, there is an easy comparison to make between the figures, walking in silence while wearing ‘enormous and preposterous’ hats, and fashion shows. Both of them draw attention to the accessories. These are meant to be emphasised at the expense of the people wearing them, who are used as human display units. Alongside the showing of hats, Churchill points to the waste of a consumerist system. In Sean Carney’s view, theatre, in some way also participates in these ephemeral chains of production and destruction (2013). He contends that the parade scene is a direct criticism of ‘theatre’s oblivious pageantry and waste’ (226). The parade scene indeed echoes the functioning of theatre: some people are put on public view as part of a show. Churchill relies here on the logic of spectacle (the procession) in a spectacle (the production of *FA*). The concept that is illustrated in this scene is one of meta-theatricality

by which the theatre brings its devices and mechanisms out in the open and counteracts the mimetic illusion of the representation. The result of such a process in this crucial episode of *Far Away* is the superposition of the fictional dramatic moment with another demonstration that takes place beyond the universe of the play, inside the theatre room. The fifth scene of the second act 'is not just a dramatization of a moment of morbid pageantry, it *is* a moment of morbid pageantry' (*Id.*, original emphasis). The British dramatist thus steps aside from the hidden terror with the macabre procession and changes the threat into action. In doing so, she refutes the claim of the post-Auschwitz crisis of representation. However, she conforms to the postmodern break from illusory realist aesthetic by emphasising the theatrical character of the episode.

Position of the audience: terror and voyeurism

The representation of terror leads to another related issue: the position of characters and spectators who acquire the status of voyeurs. Before addressing the following subsection, it is important to specify the notion used when referring to voyeurism. In an article discussing this question – and the related issue of pornography – in relation with the famous Spanish novel *La Regenta*, Charnon-Deutsch (1989) explains: 'In a broad sense, voyeur means a prying observer who seeks the sordid or the scandalous. (...) In a narrower sense, the voyeur is someone who obtains sexual stimulation or gratification by visual means, and a pornographer, one who transmits the sexual experiences of women to others' (94). The term 'voyeurism', in the framework of the analyses of Churchill's plays, is to be understood in the broad sense. The Macmillan dictionary adds some nuances – taken into account – in the definition of the voyeur as 'someone who enjoys learning about the private details of other people's lives, especially unpleasant or shocking details'⁴⁸.

The mediatisation of terror, notably through the coverage of attacks, bombings and reprisals plays a major role in the perception of terrorism. It drastically increased after 9/11, although violent images of conflicts had already haunted the screens before. This mediatisation serves different purposes and is very often biased by powerful states' perspectives and political aims regarding the vision they want to convey. Churchill's plays, although it precedes these events, allude to such a strategy to which the media have recourse in times of war, one that was

⁴⁸ <http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/voyeur>

especially used after 9/11: the establishment of a binary opposition between ‘us’ as victims and ‘them’ as the foreign brutal perpetrators.

In *Far Away*, two different facts are related to the question of the visibility of terror. Firstly, there are trials that are supposedly broadcast all night long. Churchill does not give any information about the object of trials. One may hypothesise that the accused are prisoners, some of whom end up being executed after the processions. Secondly, the parades themselves imply that a crowd, or at least a jury for the hat contests, are watching. The interrogation that results from these observations is ‘Who are the voyeurs?’. In the first case, the characters are the only possible target. Todd, for example, enjoys the screening of the trials: ‘I stay up till four every morning watching the trials’; ‘I watch them at night after I come back’ (Churchill, 2000, 24; 26). Joan, by contrast, clearly states that ‘[she does not] like staying in in the evenings and watching trials’ (*Ibid.*, 26). Voyeurism appears to be a contrasting feature for the couple. Concerning Joan, her reluctance to see is already emphasised in the first act. Though she was curious about the noises she heard, she quickly regretted her position of witness. ‘I’d rather not have seen’, she tells her aunt in their exchange (*Ibid.*, 15). In the second case, next to the aforementioned potential crowd, it is the audience that is placed in the voyeur’s position. This situation is discerningly examined by Jeanne Colleran in *Images, Evidence, And Spectatorship in Caryl Churchill’s Far Away* (2008). Colleran’s basis for her argumentation is the audience’s position in front of the parade in the second scene:

(...) it is impossible for an audience member to look with anything but helpless fascination at a display of economic and social disjuncture that is most disturbing precisely because the amazing hats are so diverting and the prisoners so ordinary. In part, we’ve never seen anything like it; in part, we’ve seen it all before. (105)

In her view, this experience of spectatorship is comparable with that of the Everyman in the postmodern mediatised society where every event is replayed on screens, podcast on the radio, shared on social media, etc. (*Ibid.*, 105-106). Paradoxically, ‘the nature of this mediatized information – its instantaneity, volume, and reach – generates an image pile-up that seems to produce inversely-proportioned knowledge and insight’ (*Ibid.*, 106). This phenomenon causes the audience to feel powerless and incapable to act or even observe the events properly. The accumulation of images indeed impacts on the understanding of the event and sometimes replaces the real experience of it. This argument is developed by Jean Baudrillard in his essay ‘The Spirit of Terrorism’ (2012): ‘in all these vicissitudes, what stays with us, above all else, is the sight of the images. This impact of the images, and their fascination, are necessarily what

we retain, since images are, whether we like it or not, our primal scene' (20). For the audience, the perception of the event is direct, i.e. not mediated by any screen, but it generates an abundance of images portraying a reality that remains, in most cases out of reach: pictures of naked bodies piled-up in pits, of scrawny men in striped pyjamas, and most recently, of Abu Ghraib tortured prisoners in the context of the War on Terror⁴⁹. What stands behind the reactivation of shocking images is trauma. Colleran (2008) remarks:

Like the falling trade towers, this kind of image is not replicated only in the retina or preserved only in the memory but is dispersed into blood, lies behind pupils and mixes with adrenaline. The image has settled itself as a state of perpetual woundedness, and wherever it is seen, it activates a response. (108)

Although trauma appears between the lines of *Far Away*, the activation of a traumatic response from the audience is certainly the purpose of such plays that tackle serious and often brutal realities. On the contrary, theatre relies on its own devices to allow the audience to step back and make sense of the action on stage and also the real events it alludes to. Yet the increasing amount of violence in plays could create a pattern spectators get used to. Séverine Ruset, in *La mise à l'épreuve du spectateur dans les dramaturgies contemporaines* (2005a), warns against such a possibility:

La mise en scène d'un monde pétrifié par la violence, quand elle ne repose pas sur une structure déstabilisante, risque de pétrifier aussi le spectateur. (...) Il est par conséquent essentiel qu'il soumette la réalité objective à une déformation – la représentation de l'ignoble doit véritablement corroder la structure de la pièce – qui lui permette de l'examiner sous un angle nouveau et d'en sonder les profondeurs. (22)

Churchill's dramaturgy, as it has been stressed in the analysis of dystopic elements of *FA*, precisely seeks to prevent the audience's paralysis by creating an unfamiliar world and playing with the formal aspect. It is interesting to mention another characteristic of the parade scene that generates confusion and which is the carnivalesque nature of the parade. Mikhail Bakhtin, famous Russian literary theorist, was the first to highlight the reversal of hierarchy, of established order and official values as characteristic of the carnival⁵⁰. Hughes, in his article about the relationship between spectacle, theatre and terror (2007), presents some artistic attempts at tackling terrorism which draw on the carnivalesque to point to the senselessness of

⁴⁹ For a detailed analysis of the relationship between spectacle and terrorism in which the meaning and impact of these pictures are discussed, see Hesford (2006).

⁵⁰ As indicated by Abrams and Harpham in their *Glossary* (2015): 'In *Rabelais and His World* (trans. 1984), Bakhtin proposed his widely cited concept of the carnivalesque in certain works of literature. This literary mode parallels the flouting of authority and temporary inversion of social hierarchies that, in many cultures, are permitted during a season of carnival' (88).

the reality that is mimicked (155). She explains that ‘the inversion of the real’ occurs ‘via use of humour and mimicry’ (*Id.*). In *FA*, however, there is no use of humour and the mimicry is only a possibility that remains in the hands of stage directors. Despite this remark, the dramatist powerfully conveys a sense of grotesque that plays a role in the reception of the scene by the audience. This grotesque tone appears in the many oppositions and absurd contradictions set up by Churchill. For instance, the prisoners’ rags contrast with the gigantic and colourful hats. Furthermore, the characters insist on the ephemeral nature of the hats as a metaphor for life while the ephemeral nature of life is directly presented in front of their eyes by the executions of prisoners.

Importantly, while the use of the grotesque and the carnivalesque indirectly points to moral values and refers to a world order in which good and evil are – more or less – separated identified entities, Churchill’s dramaturgy of terror in the play proves to be more complex. Thereby, it directly mirrors the societal issues related to conflicts, terrorism and the use of violence that are never dichotomous. This view is supported by Carney (2013) who contends that terror in *FA*, because it is mainly hidden, prevents spectators from adopting strong critical standpoints:

(...) the typical response will be to assume that these fascistic and violent actions are morally questionable. (...) The audience will naturally assume that Joan, her aunt Harper, and Todd are morally wrong to approve these events, and that the audience is in a morally superior position to judge them for it. But positions of moral superiority are just what the play is out to expose and question, and it is all too easy for the audience to take just that superior position. (226)

To come full circle, this situation is comparable to the confrontation of individuals with the hypermediatisation of events such as the War on Terror. Colleran (2008) suggests that Churchill via the strategical use of defamiliarisation – ‘by a combination of faux realism, spectacle, and enigma’ – addresses the peculiarity of this type of mediatisation:

These stratagems are not employed to augment a distorted record but rather to understand the seeming, possibly absolute, elusiveness of such an account – an elusiveness that in the first act of the play serves the interests of power, and in the final act nearly disables the possibility of resistance. (107-108)

In her statement, Colleran pinpoints another related question that arises from Churchill’s text: the possibility of agency.

2.1.3. Agency

Dystopian societies in literature are, in most cases, based on a repressive system that instils fear to abort any attempt of rebellion. Some characters – especially the ‘hero’ – call into question their daily routines and the values they must agree with. The possibility to refuse to obey blindly, to take back the control of their lives and to pursue their own goals is called agency. The room for agency in dystopian stories, however, greatly varies. In Churchill’s confusing universe, the standpoints of her characters are not easy to grasp: seemingly trapped or taking part in the system, discussing some elements but also stepping aside. Their status in the world of *Far Away* is instable. Moreover, it is directly related to the possible agency of other components such as animals and nature. A close examination of what remains of freedom for all of them allows to shed light on the author’s intention and vision.

Loss of agency: the grey zone

From the very beginning of the play, the power relation is unbalanced. A child, young Joan comes up against the authority of an adult, her aunt Harper. The former seeks the truth, quite obstinately. At some point, her questions resemble an interrogation:

HARPER: That’s where the dog got run over this afternoon.
JOAN: Wouldn’t it have dried up?
HARPER: Not if the ground was muddy.
JOAN: What sort of dog?
HARPER: A big dog, a big mongrel.
(...)
JOAN: What was his name?
HARPER: Flash.
JOAN: What colour was he?
HARPER: Black with a bit of white.
JOAN: Why were the children in the shed? (Churchill, 2000, 16)

Harper, however, has all the answers and, when she finds herself in an uneasy position because Joan has witnessed violent deeds, she manipulates her niece. Not only does she convince the child that the violence committed by the uncle against other children is necessary and just, but she also enrolls Joan in covering up the horror:

HARPER: (...) You’re part of a big movement now to make things better. You can be proud of that. You can look at the stars and think here we are in our little bit of space, and I’m

on the side of the people who are putting things right, and your soul will expand right into the sky.

JOAN: Can' I help?

HARPER: You can help me clean up in the morning. Will you do that?

JOAN: Yes. (*Ibid.*, 20-21).

According to Aston (2010b), Young Joan's loss of agency is coupled with a loss of feminism. In her article 'Feeling the Loss of Feminism: Sarah Kane's *Blasted* and an Experiential Genealogy of Contemporary Women's Playwriting', she examines recent plays of female dramatists that point to an experienced feeling of a loss of feminism. She comments on dystopias: 'The loss of or crisis in feminism is also cast in the shadow of a world increasingly scarred by regimes of terror and acts of terrorism' (587). An example of it is *Far Away*, 'which position[s] a girl child (...) as caught up in and damaged by a dehumanizing fabric of violence and terror' (*Id.*).

Several years later, the now grown up woman actively participates in a mass-murdering system by working as a hat-maker with Todd. The blindness is ironically emphasised by their focus on the corrupt working environment. Todd warns Joan about it and the woman galvanises him into taking action against the management. In doing so, both characters may seem to gain agency but it is only deceiving a impression. Able to examine their close reality, they unquestioningly rely on the righteousness of the parades. Aston (2013), about their inability to care for the prisoners, remarks that 'this serves as a chilling reflection on a deep-rooted sense of social alienation and an acute inability to care for others' (157). Paradoxically, they show a growing sympathy – which turns into love – for each other. They are supportive of each other's work despite the official competition and they share a reciprocal admiration. Joan says to Todd: 'You make me think in different ways'; he answers back: 'You've changed my life, you know that?' (Churchill, 2000, 32; 33). Besides, in her own and sole comment on the play, Churchill points to 'the characters' desire to be on the side of what's right' (Churchill, 2008, viii). Their ambivalence makes it difficult for the reader/spectator to get a fixed opinion on them. The author does not provide a full portrait and thereby leaves some space for doubts. This is a trait characteristic of her dramaturgy that was identified by several scholars. Kritzer (2002), for example, observes that in Churchill's plays, 'individuals are never fully revealed or defined' (58). Tönnies (2017) supports her view, and taking into consideration the audience's empathy, points out that 'emotional involvement also becomes much more oblique and less focused compared to traditional drama (...), as the figures on stage are too reduced and enigmatic (...) to "move" audiences directly and with specific aim' (159). In this regard, and considering their

scary and constraining reality at the end of the play, Todd and Joan, prove to be both bullies and victims of the dystopian system. Their uncertain status becomes clearer in the light of Primo Levi's concept of 'grey zone'. In a chapter of *Les naufragés et les rescapés. Quarante ans après Auschwitz* (1989), the Jewish Italian writer, drawing on his traumatic experience as a prisoner in the Auschwitz concentration camp, affirms:

Il apparaît à des signes nombreux qu'est venu le temps d'explorer l'espace qui sépare (...) les victimes des persécuteurs (...). Seule une rhétorique schématique peut soutenir que cet espace est vide : il ne l'est jamais, il est constellé de figures abjectes ou pathétiques (...) qu'il est indispensable de connaître si nous voulons connaître l'espèce humaine (...) (40)

The dichotomy between good and evil is indeed blurred in *Far Away*. From where the audience stands, it is evident that, to take up Todd's words, 'there's a lot wrong with this place' (Churchill, 2000, 23). The horror, however, is hidden during all the play except for one grotesque scene. The spectators are therefore mainly faced with seemingly ordinary people evolving in closed familiar and relatively 'safe' places such as a house and a workshop. In addition, these people are capable of feeling love, which is unsettling. Precisely, this depiction of Joan and Todd as ordinary members of the society opens the way for another parallel with the Holocaust via Hannah Arendt's expression of the 'banality of evil'⁵¹. At the time, her choice of words, which is purposefully powerful, gave rise to misinterpretation. The famous journalist and political scientist commented on it: 'Rien n'est plus éloigné de mon propos que de minimiser le plus grand malheur du siècle. Ce qui est banal n'est par conséquent ni une bagatelle, ni quelque chose qui se produit fréquemment' (Arendt quoted in Revault D'Allonnes (2002, 91)). Arendt referred to the absence of guilt of the perpetrators while designing and implementing the project of systematic murdering (*Ibid.*, 90). The concept that arose in the context of Adolf Eichmann's trial⁵², especially points to the shocking fact that evil was found in persons who embodied the common man. In Arendt's view, it is because of this ordinary status that such a mechanical act of barbarity is made possible: 'Monsieur-tout-le-monde, qui n'est pas méchant ni motivé, et qui, pour cette raison, est capable de mal infini – lui qui, contrairement au méchant, n'est jamais confronté au sinistre nocturne' (*Ibid.*, 101). This

⁵¹ Although this link is directly and solely based on a personal analysis of the play in the context of this thesis, this parallel, as it was discovered afterwards, has already been drawn by Mary Luckhurst (2015) in her monograph about Churchill. She however refers to Arendt's concept from a different angle since she comments on Daldry's production of *Far Away* in New York. About it, she writes: 'Bearing out Hannah Arendt's and Daniel Goldhagen's theories of National Socialists' obsession with obedience, the actors performed Todd and Joan as classic examples of the banality of evil: as two workers just doing their jobs – which happen to involve the annihilation of other human beings' (150).

⁵² Adolf Eichmann was a Nazi officer who played a major role in conceiving the system of mass deportation during World War II.

observation holds true for Joan and Todd in the second act of *FA*. They can be compared to Nazi officers who do not call into question the system they are involved in and fail to see the bigger picture. It is strikingly conveyed by Todd's attitude who is convinced he is in the right, 'speaking from the high moral ground' and being 'the only person in this place who's got any principles' (Churchill, 2000, 32; 27). As proposed by Diamond (Aston & Diamond, 2009), both of them are simply 'labouring to beautify a brutality that no longer shocks them' (140). All in all, the defamiliarising world and words of Caryl Churchill plunge the audience into a fictional system of normalised terror.

Crossing the river: a step towards change?

While the totalitarian system of the second act created a sense of powerlessness and delusion, the chaos of the collapsing world in the last act forces a redefinition of agency. The characters' state evolves from blindness to confusion. A solid ground to distinguish friend from foe no longer exists. Everything is a potential weapon and everyone either kills or is killed. The loss of agency in this new reality is stressed by Cordula Quint in her article 'Terror of the Contemporary Sublime: Regional Responses to the Challenges of Internationalism and Globalization in the Drama of Caryl Churchill and David Edgar' (2003). She perspicaciously quotes the following excerpt: '(...) everyone saw me walking along but nobody knew why, I could have been on a mission, everyone's moving about and no one knows why (...) ' (Churchill, 2000, 43. Quoted in Quint, 2003, 181). Contrary to humans, nature and animals regain their influence in the course of events. The fauna, from seemingly normal animals in the first act to the status of executed victims in the second, becomes an active participant in the total war. As noticed by Adiseshiah (2012), their agency exceeds what would be considered as a 'normal' range of actions in view of their nature: '(...) the extra-textual material world in *Far Away*, although it has no dialogue, has a concrete independence of its own. Not only does it display its agency through active participation in war but it is also given an autonomous, albeit amorphous, sense of presence' (288). This virtually reversal of order may be interpreted as a warning from Churchill against the consequences of the damages caused by humans to their natural environment.

Concerning the question of agency and the possibility to change a mapped out apocalyptic future, the play's ending is disturbing and opaque. It has been given markedly different

interpretations by scholars⁵³. While a vast number of them only focus on the bleak dystopian aspect of the play, making comparisons with the Holocaust, terrorism and global conflicts, other literary and theatre specialists notice a utopian impulse that hides in Churchill's text. This is exemplified by Adiseshiah's following assertion in her essay 'The Dramatisation of Futureless Worlds: Caryl Churchill's Ecological Dystopias': 'The play's vision is utterly insufferable and as such implicates the necessity of social reconnection, a reconnection that can defend against the political amnesia so central to the world of *Far Away*' (Vieira, 2013, 303-304). Social reconnection is indeed present, in a sense, at the end of the play. Joan has chosen to leave her position – which remains unknown – in the war to 'have one day' with Todd (Churchill, 2000, 43). In doing so, she has taken a great risk and could be punished by an unnamed authority:

HARPER: You can't stay here, they'll be after you. What are you going to say when you go back, you ran off to spend a day with your husband? (...) Did anyone see you leave? Which way did you come? Were you followed? There are ospreys here who will have seen you arrive. And you're risking your life for you don't know what (...). (*Ibid.*, 42).

Her act is interpreted by Kritzer (2002) as one of heroism, a 'glimmer of a Brechtian "way out" of the dystopia of a world disintegrating in chaotic conflict' (66).

The balance of agency in the relationship between humans and nature is possibly found at the very end of *Far Away*, in Joan's tale of her hesitation in front of the river. Diamond (Aston & Diamond, 2009) astutely suggests that '(...) perhaps Churchill is offering something simpler and more elemental: Joan's capacity to still feel the water subverts her own numb acceptance of terror's ubiquity. This small moment of sentient resistance must also be counted in Caryl Churchill's dramaturgy of terror' (141). The sense of Joan's actions remains as opaque as the intention of the playwright. Although she refuses to impose a fixed meaning on her work, her principal tool, which is her formal approach of language, holds some of the keys to her dramaturgy.

⁵³ An original, albeit arguable, interpretation is the one of Nicole Vigouroux-Frey (2008) who relates the scene of the river to the myth of a possible reconstruction of humankind. It is not discussed in this subsection because it is not as relevant as other interpretations regarding the issue of agency.

2.1.4. Formal approach: the double-edged language

Of all the ambiguities present in Caryl Churchill's dramaturgy, the most significant one concerns language. The dramatist's unceasing formal innovations in her substantial body of work have been repeatedly stressed and commented on by scholars and critics. The inherent duality of language in *Far Away* is the place other ambiguities stem from: the hidden horror, the issue of agency, the author's intention. The main observation regarding the status of language in the play is that Churchill responds to the difficulty to retrieve sense from the brutal realities of genocides, from the atrocities of wars, conflicts, terrorism and environmental neglect with a formal problematic meaning. Deducing that there is a total absence of sense that parallels the senseless postmodern world, however, would be a too simplistic interpretation. The argument developed in this section is that the double-edged nature of Churchill's language can be grasped in the light of Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*.

Response to the postmodern failure of language

The formal approach of Churchill has been related to the postmodern premise of the crisis of language in numerous analyses of her plays. Major ungraspable and terrific episodes of History such as the Holocaust, the Cold War, Hiroshima, etc. compelled the artists, philosophers and writers to call into question the power and relevance of their means of expression. The opacity of the horror impacted the main device of humans to communicate their incredulity: words. What emerged from poststructuralist theories that informed the postmodern assumption of the end of grand narratives is an emphasis on the plurality of meaning, on doubts regarding the sense of words and, consequently, the deconstruction of any fixed meaning. The distance from the realistic tradition in British theatre that Churchill has taken from early stages in her dramaturgy reflects an influence of such theoretical discourses. Drawing on Stephen Lacey's observations of realism in British theatre, Liz Tomlin (Angelaki, 2013) hypothesises that *Far Away* may be in line with Harold Pinter's early work regarding the 'self-reflexive deconstructions of realism' (xix):

In Pinter's early work (...) absence of any guide to meaning was accompanied by the dislocation of seemingly recognizable realistic settings. Here (...) the otherwise familiar dramatic cosmos of the domestic rather becomes "the sites of terror and fear, often when familiar, comfortable

routines are wrenched from their associations and invested with newer, darker possibilities”⁵⁴. Yet these possibilities are never conclusively realized, and the language that sketches them out explains nothing (...). Once ideas remain suspended from representation in language, “the chain of cause-and-effect that holds the realist narrative together is severed, and when these connections are broken, the “reality” that they construct loses its definition”⁵⁵. (*Id.*)

In *Far Away*, Churchill indeed plays with the deceiving realistic settings, the domestic space whose unfamiliarity increases through the acts. The seemingly reassuring house of Harper is doubted by its inhabitant herself, who asks Todd: ‘Is this a place of safety?’ (Churchill, 2000, 35). Besides, as suggested by Tomlin, the bleak possibilities of Churchill’s dystopian universe remain, except for the parade, in the realm of language. The surreal collapsing world of the play is only described by the characters through their verbal exchanges. The latter simultaneously convey a normalised state of terror and the difficulty for the characters to make sense of that new configuration. As described by Quint (2003), ‘opacity reigns as innumerable groups form and reform in the characters’ imagination, and paranoia and isolation define their attempt to chart the dangers which surround them. Churchill’s deliberate obfuscation calls up an overwhelming sense of dread and paralysis’ (179). The characters’ loss of bearings is experienced by the audience who struggles to enter a reality wherein animals are rapists, and coffee, pins and hairspray are deadly weapons.

The influence of the absurd clearly shows in the play. The images created by an imaginative language add grotesque nuances to the dystopian landscape. Preposterous hats on ragged prisoners, people afraid of butterflies and cows, the international dentistry as a plotting enemy count among the phantasmagorical traits of this multifaceted play. Next to images, the discussions strongly bear a Beckettian character, although by comparison with Beckett, there is a progression in Churchill’s play⁵⁶. Such an influence is pointed out by Quint (2003): ‘(...) in dialogue passages reminiscent of Beckett and Ionesco, Churchill renders her characters’

⁵⁴ Lacey, S. (1995). *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*. London & New York: Routledge, 144. Quoted in Angelaki (2013, xix).

⁵⁵ Lacey, S. (1995). *British Realist Theatre: The New Wave in its Context 1956-1965*. London & New York: Routledge, 145. Quoted in Angelaki (2013, xix).

⁵⁶ *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (2012) provides a useful summary of the hallmarks of Samuel Beckett’s dramaturgy, which is helpful for a better understanding and identification of Beckettian traits in Churchill’s work: ‘Not much happens in a Beckett play; there is little characterization, little plot, and little incident. Characters engage in dialogue or dialectical monologues that go nowhere. There is no progression, no development, no resolution. Rambling exchanges and repetitive actions enact the lack of a fixed center, of meaning, of purpose, in the lives depicted. Yet the characters persist in their habitual, almost ritualistic, activities; they go on talking, even if only to themselves. In spite of the reiterated theme of nonexistence, the characters go on existing – if minimally: a stream of discourse, of thought and will, a consciousness questioning its own meaning and purpose’ (Ramazani & Stallworthy, 2620).

efforts to position themselves absurd and meaningless. She poignantly captures the peculiarity of contemporary paranoia' (178). The following excerpt illustrates Quint's statement:

TODD: I never liked cats, they smell, they scratch, they only like you because you feed them, they bite, I used to have a cat that would suddenly just take some bit of you in his mouth.

HARPER: Did you know they've been killing babies?

TODD: Where's that?

HARPER: In China. They jump in the cots when nobody's looking.

TODD: But some cats are still ok.

HARPER: I don't think so.

TODD: I know a cat up the road.

HARPER: No, you must be careful of that. (Churchill, 2000, 35-36)

One could almost laugh at the conversation, if it was not for the unsettling seriousness of the tone. Churchill's sentences are, for the vast majority, devoid of markers of expressiveness. There is not a single exclamation point or suspension points in the whole text. Philip Roberts (2008) comments on Joan's last speech: 'The horrors she encounters are spoken matter of factly. That is the tragedy. (...) A different normality has been established, one accepted by those involved. It is absurd and terrifying at the same time' (149).

The ambiguity created by Churchill that is emphasised by Roberts can be explained by the duality of Churchill's language. Regarding this feature, the article of Elisabeth Angel-Perez 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp' (in Angelaki, 2013) is of paramount importance. An in-depth examination of Angel-Perez's argument is therefore necessary for the analysis of Churchill's approach to language in this subsection. Drawing on Wittgenstein's concept of language games, 'a symbolic linguistic system artificially fabricated yet envisaged as a mode of communication complete in itself'⁵⁷, Angel-Perez examines how Churchill makes use of constrained writing to express the failure of language in a chaotic postmodern world, proposing 'a kind of theatre playfully able to reveal the inhumanity of humanity and the linguistic and ethical disaster of modernity' (81). She argues that constrained writing is a highly relevant form to shed light on the obsolescence of previous uses of language in tragedy because it displaces meaning outside the text. This particular writing indeed results from a rule, a mechanism that the playwright imposes on himself/herself. She further contends that the playfulness that lies in this literary form appears to be the 'very locus of tragedy' (*Id.*). Establishing a direct relationship between Churchill's writing and post-Auschwitz approaches to language such as Adorno's and

⁵⁷ Wittgenstein, L. (1953). *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell, 220. Quoted in Angelaki, V. (2013, 88).

Blanchot, Angel-Perez interprets this playfulness as the only possible means to address barbarity (*Ibid.*, 87). Meaning is the kernel of her examination. She questions Churchill's use of language in *Far Away*, wondering if her words still belong to the English linguistic system, keeping their original sense, or if their meaning may have been switched, the text therefore requiring to be deciphered. As Churchill does not provide an analytical grid for the understanding of her plays, both hypotheses remain plausible. In her analysis, Angel-Perez details the two paths opened by the British dramatist. The one of a literal meaning 'invites the reader-spectator to imagine a grotesque world, whose deformity finds a physical manifestation in the presence of unhierarchically threatening mutants in the all-engulfing system considered' (*Id.*). The second hypothesis, the one of a hidden or altered meaning which draws on constrained writing and Jean Tardieu's language game model of *Un mot pour un autre*, confronts the audience with an unfamiliar world whose menacing atmosphere is still very palpable (*Ibid.*, 87-88). Following the latter path, Angel-Perez reaches this conclusion:

Verbalized in a language bereft of its referent, the threat remains unrepresented; it obliterates any hermeneutical or imaginary attempts and leaves the spectator in a state of maximal anguish because of indeterminacy. For the spectator [*sic*], language is no longer an instrument that helps them map the word and therefore control it, if to symbolize the world is to dominate it: it retaliates and confronts them with their own powerlessness' (*Ibid.*, 88).

Her perspective relying on linguistic theory leads to an observation previously made in this analysis: language is the true realm of terror.

Contrary to Angel-Perez who focuses on the blurred meaning of words and concludes with the failure of language, Christine Dymkowski (2003) draws a clear parallel between the seaming surreal reasoning of the characters in *Far Away* and actual societal discourses. For instance, she identifies references to the feeling of being threatened by communities, to changing attitudes of powerful nations regarding far away conflicts and alliances, and to ecological concerns that can lead to paranoia about health issues (62-64). Importantly, Dymkowski compares Churchill's work on language in the play with her other recent texts such as *The Skriker* and *Blue Kettel*, wherein the words' meanings are distorted. She notes that 'Churchill's tactic, theatrically entertaining, functions to make us ask how important words are and what kind of understanding is desirable and/or necessary' (*Ibid.*, 67). Drawing on Deborah Cameron's approach to feminism and linguistics, Dymkowski supports the view that Churchill, by playing with meaning, creates a sort of 'feminist linguistic and political practice', fostering a reflection about

‘the political nature of meaning itself’⁵⁸ (*Ibid.*, 67-68). She concludes that ‘in playing with language and making us create and face new meanings, Churchill continues to make theatre that entertains, challenges, and subverts – a theatre that is vital in every sense of the word’ (*Ibid.*, 68).

In summary, Angel-Perez’s and Dymkowski’s reasonings differ on the identification of a world of reference, the former arguing that the absurd and playful character of Churchill’s formal approach conveys a sense of impossible reconciliation between horror and its representation, the latter pointing to comparisons between the characters’ speeches and current political discourses and way of thinking. Both analyses, however, share a similar focus on the issue of meaning and, combined together, lay stress on the double-edged nature of the meaning of words in *Far Away* – one side sticking to the original sense of words, the other highlighting a different sense, more difficult to grasp – that induces a reflection about meaning itself, its political nature, its functions, its importance.

The heterotopia of language

Regardless of meaning, the very materiality, the form of words and style of the sentences put together are subject to diverse observations. Several scholars contend that Churchill’s work on form reveals a filiation to modernism. Tönnies (2002) judiciously remarks that, in the playwright’s recent work, the intensity is lessened in the actions while language is the receptacle of cruelty (66-67). She notes that “Such a more restrained dramatic style is now gaining ground. (...) Caryl Churchill’s (...) *Far Away* work[s] through enigmatic austerity, repetition and musical patterning’ (*Ibid.*, 68). Moreover, Roberts (2008) compares *Far Away* with another of Churchill’s ecological plays, *Not Not Not Not Not Enough Oxygen*, and remarks that, in both texts, ‘the dislocation linguistically mirrors a drastically dysfunctional world, from which there is little escape’ (29). This formal work is more obvious in *Not...Enough Oxygen*, wherein one of the main characters stutters repeatedly. In *Far Away*, repetitions of similar verbal constructions create, on various occasions, the musical patterning Tönnies is referring to. The following excerpt, which is part of Todd and Joan’s exchanges in the second act, provides a good illustration of such a pattern:

⁵⁸ Cameron, D. (1992). *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. Houndmills: Macmillan, 227. Quoted in Dymkowski (2003, 67-68).

JOAN: Your turn.
 TODD: I go for a swim in the river before work.
 JOAN: Isn't it dangerous?
 TODD: Your turn.
 JOAN: I've got a pilot's licence.
 TODD: I stay up till four every morning watching the trials.
 JOAN: I'm getting a room in a subway.
 TODD: I've got my own place. (Churchill, 2000, 24-25).

Despite the location of this linguistic motif in several scenes, the main part of Churchill's text proves to be rather 'normal' in its formal presentation. Sharing some traits with Hans-Thies Lehmann's theory of the postdramatic theatre, e.g. the absence of fixable meaning, the text of *Far Away* does not present itself as the support of a "magical" transmission and connection', as a 'textscape' that bears and fosters 'the phonetic materiality, the temporal course, the dispersion in space, the loss of teleology and self-identity' (2006, 145; 148). Nevertheless, the emphasis of space that lies in Lehmann's term of 'textscape' is highly relevant, though approached from a different angle, to discuss the ambivalence of the words' status in *Far Away*. The philosophical notion that allows to shed a new light on Churchill's text is Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*.

Heterotopia is a term coined by the famous French philosopher Michel Foucault, whose work left its mark on the twentieth century. He first introduced the notion in 1967, during a conference at the Cercle d'études architecturales in Paris, but only granted permission to publish his text, entitled *Des espaces autres*, in 1984. In his text, Foucault starts from a reflection about the society in his days, considering it to be more preoccupied with the question of space than the one of time. Synthetically relating a history of spatial conception, the philosopher notes the evolution from a medieval space of localisation marked by a hierarchical logic to a space that is infinitely open, expanding, and whose advent was fostered by the work of Galilei. He further defines the contemporary space as based on neighbourhood relations between points or elements (1994, 753). He draws on previous theories that led to a conception of inner, personal space – i.e. of humans – as a non-empty heterogeneous one and contends that the outside space – which attracted his main interest – was equally heterogeneous. He states that: 'nous vivons à l'intérieur d'un ensemble de relations qui définissent des emplacements irréductibles les uns aux autres et absolument non superposables' (*Ibid.*, 755). Foucault then focuses on particular spaces characterised by the fact that they are in connexion with other spaces, a connexion that can be based on inversion, contradiction or suspension and that foster a reflection about these other spaces. The philosopher identifies two types of spaces that have this property. The first

one is the utopias which are imaginary spaces that present an idealised or reversed image of contemporary societies. The second type is the heterotopias, defined by Foucault as:

(...) des lieux réels, des lieux effectifs, des lieux qui sont dessinés dans l'institution même de la société, et qui sont des sortes de contre-emplacements, sortes d'utopies effectivement réalisées dans lesquelles les emplacements réels, tous les autres emplacements réels que l'on peut trouver à l'intérieur de la culture sont à la fois représentés, contestés et inversés, des sortes de lieux qui sont hors de tous les lieux, bien que pourtant ils soient effectivement localisables. (*Ibid.*, 755-756)

In the rest of his text, Foucault details a series of principles common to these spaces and illustrates them by giving examples of heterotopias such as the cemetery, the garden, the prison or the ship. The third principle is that a heterotopia is 'capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, quoted in Tompkins, 2014, 4). Significantly, Foucault cites theatre as a heterotopia that exemplifies this principle: 'thus it is that the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a whole series of places that are foreign to one another' (*Id.*).

The argument proposed here is the understanding of Churchill's language in *Far Away* as a heterotopia. The heterotopic nature of language was pointed out by the French linguist Jean-Claude Milner in his book *L'Amour de la langue* (2009), in which he supports the view of the inherent dichotomous character of language. Milner distinguishes between 'la langue', which is the focus of linguists and grammarians, a system allowing to differentiate it from the other languages, and 'lalangue', which exists outside 'la langue' and reflects the unconscious and the desires of the person who talks (64-77). Importantly, Milner concludes:

Un mode singulier de faire équivoque, voilà donc ce qu'est une langue entre autres. Par là, elle devient collection de lieux, tous singuliers et tous hétérogènes : de quelque côté qu'on la considère, elle est autre à elle-même, incessamment hétérotopique. Par là, elle se fait tout aussi bien substance, matière possible pour les fantasmes, ensemble inconsistant de lieux pour le désir : la langue est alors ce qu'en pratique l'inconscient, se prêtant à tous les jeux imaginables pour que la vérité, dans la mouvance du mot, parle. (*Ibid.*, 20-21)

There is therefore an ungraspable real that exists in the language. It is this observation made by Milner that is the most useful to the analysis of *Far Away*.

First, the hypothesis of a linguistic heterotopia in Churchill's play enriches the understanding of her dramaturgy of terror. As it has been stated before, horror, in the dystopia, is mainly hidden, deceptively 'far away'. Its true location is the language itself, rather than the actions.

The most shocking and unsettling events of the bleak Churchillian world are not enacted in front of the audience, but only shine through the characters' speeches. This feature reflects the dramatist's wish not to impose a definite meaning, not to impose a vision that would prevent the audience from questioning both the process and the content. Not only is the surreal character of the fictional world very defamiliarising, but the fact of being almost entirely conveyed through exchanges that occur in relatively 'safe' settings increases the difficulty to retrieve sense from it. Thereby, the dramaturgy of Churchill fosters a reflection about meaning itself, and also about the reversed mirror of *Far Away* which is our contemporary society with all its issues and conflicts. In addition – a slightly contrasting point that further emphasises the unstable and complex nature of words in the British play –, although terror is indirectly tackled, which creates a distance between the audience and the collapsing violent world, some scholars suggest that words are performative and thus actively bring the horror on stage. Such a point is made by Elin Diamond (Aston & Diamond, 2009) who argues that: 'Like a true performative, and in affectless tones, the language in Scene 3 does what it says: it brings into being a world of perpetual war in which terrorist acts are indistinguishable from the actions of a young woman journeying to see her husband (...)' (140). Language, as Milner argues, encapsulates an ungraspable real and, in Churchill's text, brings the confusion right in front of the spectators. Diamond also stresses the significance of the stylistic aspect of *Far Away*:

It is easy to be shocked by the sight of the manacled prisoners herded off to death – surely *that* is terrorism. It is far harder to write terror's language, to invite audiences to feel something like 'the knobbly foreign construction just under the English skin' – in this case, the shards of broken bodies and a destroyed nature poking through the skin of a well-formed English sentence. (*Id.*, original emphasis)

Her observation recalls Kubiak's assertion that terrorism is the reification of terror via the representation, while terror in itself silences the performance (1987). In *Far Away*, terrorism pervades the stage in the scene of the parade while the language, in between the lines of its 'well-formed English sentence[s]', through a certain bareness, keeps terror intact (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 140).

Second, the stylistic quality of *Far Away* proves to be even richer in the play's ending, whose opacity is perhaps the best embodiment of the heterotopic nature of Churchill's language. Joan's last words indeed convey a poetic tone that was not apparent before in the text⁵⁹. In order to

⁵⁹ This trait is notably observed by Vicky Angelaky (2017): 'The verbal matter deployed by characters is potent, bursting with images and signification and ranging from the paradoxical to the lyrical, as the three protagonists discuss the war raging outside' (22).

support this argument and have a better grasp of Churchill's approach to language, the article of Antonis Balasopoulos (in Vieira, 2013), analysing another ending of a dystopia in 'On Desertification and the redemptive Powers of Language: Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*', is highly relevant. The observations of Balasopoulos about the dual nature of McCarthy's use of language, especially visible in the contrasting last paragraph of *The Road*, share some uncanny similarities with Churchill's writing and the last sentences of *Far Away*. The latter text ends with Joan's words: '(...) at last I put one foot in the river. It was very cold but so far that was all. When you've just stepped in you can't tell what's going to happen. The water laps round your ankles in any case' (Churchill, 2000, 44). The former dystopia concludes with a strange echo:

Once there were brook trout in the streams in the mountains. You could see them standing in the amber current where the white edges of their fins wimpled softly in the flow. They smelled of moss in your hand. (...) In the deep glens where they lived all things were older than man and they hummed of mystery.⁶⁰

Balasopoulos comments on the 'fertile ambiguity' of McCarthy's style. On the one hand, he points to a filiation with Jacques Derrida's 'desertification of language', Jameson's 'world reduction' or Barthes's 'zero degree of writing': 'a mirroring of the devastated state of the natural world by a language that is relentlessly minimal, short of both expressive and formal decorations' (61). Then, he states that 'on the other hand, it is *in such* language (...) that something like the pure, distilled form of hope is preserved' (*Id.*, original emphasis).

The view of a utopian impulse or the sign of resistance that several scholars identified in the ending of *Far Away* might be understood in the light of such linguistic theories. What is highlighted by the theoretical cross-checking of Balasopoulos is this:

(...) in this ascetic denuding of the visible signs of the phenomenal world there lie the lineaments of hope in something to come, a faith which is, as it were, without faith, without theological founding in any doctrine and for that very reason without any 'pragmatic grounding' in calculation: the pure kernel of a desire that refuses to give way, to surrender or to capitulate to silence. (*Id.*)

Like the ending of McCarthy's *The Road*, Churchill's text juxtaposes 'in a real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, quoted in Tomkins, 2014, 4). It is the heterotopic multiple layers of meaning present in *Far Away* that is the kernel of Churchill's dramaturgy of terror.

⁶⁰ McCarthy, C. (2010). *The Road*. Basingstoke & Oxford: Picador, 306-307. Quoted in Vieira (2013, 62).

2.1.5. From the page to the stage: Stephen Daldry's production

The analysis of Churchill's text has given rise to the identification of several significant patterns related to dystopian issues: the distance between the fictional dystopia and the contemporary society, the representation of terror, the possibility of agency and the status of language. The emphasis has been laid on a feature of paramount importance in Churchill's dramaturgy: the question of meaning and its multiple layers. As stated by Annette Pankratz in her article 'Signifying Nothing and Everything: The Extension of the Code and Hyperreal Simulations' (2004), the staging of a text develops its own dramaturgy and, in doing so, sheds light on different facets of the play and provides an additional layer of interpretation. In other words, 'theatre produces a flood of divergent signs and a host of meanings. Sounds, sights and smells, moving bodies, immobile objects and immaterial words form the basis of the theatrical code (...)' (Pankratz, 2004, 63). The purpose of the analysis of Daldry's production in this section is to examine how the identified features of Churchill's dramaturgy were tackled on stage. *Far Away* was performed for the first time in 2000 at the Royal Court Theatre in London in a production directed by Stephen Daldry, an English theatre and film director well-known for movies such as *Billy Elliot*, *The Hours* or *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. It is important to note that it is Churchill who chose Daldry to produce her play, perhaps because of his 'open, speculative and playful ways into text', as suggested by Aston (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 157).

On stage, the dystopian world of *Far Away* took all the appearances of a fable cautiously hiding its pervading terror. The play opened with the audience facing a painted front cloth created by the set designer Ian McNeil. The painting represented a rural landscape with a little farmhouse surrounded by a lake, green meadows and a mountain in the background. In addition, there were noises of birds and a humming of a song. Dymkowski (2003), commenting on the set design of the first act observes that the whole scene 'create[d] a sense of fable, even though the ensuing opening scene was played naturalistically' (56). The combination of these elements deceptively alluded to a utopian vision whose contrast with the rest of the play has been stressed by several scholars. Aston (2013), for instance, states that:

The opening of *Far Away* was designed to make strange our inability to see the world as it really is, "things" as they really are. (...) Taken away, it revealed the dark, domestic interior of Harper's house. The contrast of the two, as I recollect, was stark and disorienting. Fairy tale on the outside and nightmare on the inside (...). (159-160)

Reviewing the production, Una Chaudhuri (2003) also focuses on the distance created by the front cloth:

We were both far away and nearby, a long way from our modern city lives, yet close to the cozy fantasy lands of our childhood. The contrast between this image and the grim world of the play was more than merely ironic; it was an encapsulation of the distance between the world we treasure and the horror we have made of it. (134)

Chaudhuri rightly points to a constitutive feature of Churchill's text that was brilliantly illustrated by this setting: gaps. She contends that 'in *Far Away*, the gaps are not between acts or between worlds but *within* them, and to watch the play is to be forced to confront its constitutive distance' (134). The painted images then disappeared to reveal the character of Harper, humming the carefully chosen hymn of Andrew Young: *There Is a Happy Land* whose first lyrics are 'there is a happy land, far, far away'. The dreamlike character of the opening was purposefully maintained throughout the play thanks to the light and space designs. The stage was plunged into darkness except for one or two main elements: an armchair, some chairs, a table with a small lamp in the first and third acts; working tables in the second act. The characters' clothes and the furniture were very simple with a 'timeless' character (Roberts, 2008, 258). Moreover, the smooth transitions between the different scenes and acts further participated in the surreal frame of the play. In contrast, the actions and speeches of the actors were played in a naturalistic way. These elements put together reflect the many ambiguities of Churchill's text and its dialectics between familiar and unfamiliar components.

The hidden terror found its way to shine on stage in the parade scene. Daldry's conception of the prisoners' procession highlighted its textual carnivalesque nature. The scene opened with a row of prisoners standing behind a large black veil that reflected their long shadows, deformed by the gigantic hats. The image was both threatening and grotesque. The parade began with a music that recalled a fanfare played by a brass band or a military parade with the sound of trumpets for official announcements. Noises of a crowd were added to the soundtrack. The prisoners, wearing plain beige outfits with a number on their chest and the competing hats started to parade in rows of four to six persons, with a total of twenty-four figures on stage. Their movements were made difficult by the fact that they were chained together by their feet. Different influences have been pointed out by critics and scholars regarding Daldry's staging. Theatre critic Michael Billington, in a review of the play (2000), noticed the epic effects produced by the disproportion between the show and the size of the stage. Another comparison is made by Libby Worth in *On Text and Dance: New Questions and New Forms* (in Aston &

Diamond, 2009), who draws a parallel with the aesthetics of Pina Bausch: 'In *Far Away* (2000) the repetition of the hat-making scenes and the parade of hat-wearing prisoners gesture towards Bauschian imagery of dislocation and alienated actions rooted in movement rather than text (72)'⁶¹. All these elements reveal the use of a strategy already identified in Churchill's text: the logic of spectacle in the spectacle. Flashes of camera, red and yellow lights and smoke on stage reinforced this trait. The attention of the audience, who, at that stage, did not know about the macabre ending of the competition, was therefore drawn towards the artificiality of the scene and the traumatic images it recalled. The impact of the scene and the reaction it may have triggered differed from the staging of the hat-making process wherein the preposterous hats were the object of laughter from the spectators. On the prisoners' head, their absurd appearance changed into a morbid accessory. Chaudhuri (2003) goes further and asserts that 'Churchill's hats are (...) autonomously evil, as if with a deathliness of their own. They seem to be man-made versions of the killing things that the final act speaks of (...) ' (134).

The observation of an independent and killing status of the hats is an interesting and significant contribution to the issue of agency. Other objects in the staging of *Far Away* may be interpreted as symbols related to that issue. The lion-shaped cuddly toy of young Joan in the first act is a good example of it. The actress was carrying it in her arms when she entered the stage, which could have led the audience to believe that what she claimed to have witnessed was actually a nightmare, as cuddly toys are strongly related to bedtime. The lion seemed to be invested with a protective force, like many childish possessions. Meaningfully, the girl put it down during the following discussion, when Harper partly admitted the truth and her niece offered her help:

HARPER: No, I'm trusting you with the truth now. You must never talk about it or you'll put your uncle's life in danger and mine and even your own. You won't even say anything to your parents.

JOAN: Why did you have me to stay if you've got this secret going on?

HARPER: The lorry should have gone yesterday. It won't happen again while you're here.

JOAN: It can now because I know. You don't have to stop for me. I could help uncle in the shed and look after them. (Churchill, 2000, 18-19).

The symbol of innocence was thus left aside when Joan verbalised her will to participate in the violent deeds, although she thought she could serve a good cause. Later, when her aunt told her how children of traitors were beaten, the young actress took back the stuffed lion and went to

⁶¹ In a footnote, Worth explains: 'In her Tanztheatre pieces, Pina Bausch often includes parades of dancers who weave across both stage and auditorium whilst meticulously repeating the same gestural step sequences. Such iteration of action, divorced from obvious function or narrative, paradoxically highlights each dancer's individuality and human commonality.' (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 85)

sit further away from Harper. The moves and positions of the actors indeed played an important role in the illustration of the power struggles and of the all-threatening atmosphere. For example, when Joan woke up at Harper's house in the third act, she was wearing a sleeping outfit that made her look vulnerable. Then, Todd dressed her while Harper was warning her about her dangerous behaviour. The woman, whose fate had been discussed by her aunt and husband, was shown as being deprived of autonomy. Next to the lion, another element which does not appear in Churchill's text was the glass of water Todd gave Joan at the end of the play. The man was squatting down next to Joan and both Harper and he were waiting for her to drink it. Joan paused before taking the glass. When she finished her monologue about the river, she sniffed the glass and drank it in one go. Once again, the pervading fear and suspicions were clearly staged. Daldry also stressed the nature's recovery of agency by materialising Joan's fear of water.

Regarding the language on stage, Stephen Daldry's directing method of actors was a relevant response to Churchill's dramaturgy. When directing actors, Daldry employs a technique described as 'physical actioning': 'rather than work on lines in terms of "actioned moments", he encourages actors to explore gestures and movement to highlight or counterpoint dialogue so that a line, a moment or a scene embody meaning'⁶² (Luckhurst, 2015, 147). Luckhurst highlights the relevancy of this technique for a play like *Far Away*: 'It is the gap between the characters' perception of their world and the spectator's horror at what they have become that Daldry exploited with such a creative ingenuity' (147-148). Daldry's gap and distance thus corresponded to Churchill's multiple layers of meaning. Katherine Tozer, the actress playing grown-up Joan described the challenge of not betraying the grotesque character of the play in her speech:

To get to grips with talking about killing cats and children under five and being mortally afraid of butterflies and deer takes some doing. It was a leap of faith and a tone that the play requires above all else. You mustn't flag up the preposterousness of this. It is deadly serious and terrifying that we were burning the grass that wouldn't serve. (...) They were facts. (Robert, 2008, 261)

Besides, the normalised status of violence and cruelty was conveyed by the body language of the actors. Their movements were slow, the bodies rather static and, only on rare occasions, showing signs of nervousness. As Billington (2000) acknowledged, disruption came from the

⁶² Wendy Lesser (1997). *A director Calls: Stephen Daldry and the Theatre*. London: Faber & Faber, 146, quoted in Luckhurst (2015).

playwright's lines: 'Churchill's best effects are achieved through the sudden injection of shock words that set off seismic disturbances'.

The production of *Far Away* ended as it had begun, with the front cloth of a deceiving utopia covering up the horror of a fictional world not so far from ours. Dymkowski (2003) comments on the audience's reaction to the play: 'Although the play itself (...) explicitly demands a cerebral response once the audience has left the theatre, it works on a visceral level *in* the theatre, appealing to intuition, instinct, and emotion' (65). This statement is in direct line with Artaud's vision of a theatre of Cruelty:

La longue habitude des spectacles de distraction nous a fait oublier l'idée d'un théâtre grave, qui, bousculant toutes nos représentations, nous insuffle le magnétisme ardent des images et agit finalement sur nous à l'instar d'une thérapeutique de l'âme dont le passage ne se laissera plus oublier. (1964, 132)

All in all, agency has to be found by the audience between the text's lines and the staging's gaps.

2.2. *Escaped Alone*

Escaped Alone numbers among one of Caryl Churchill's best and powerful plays and is the second dystopia whose analysis is the object of this thesis. The text contains clear echoes of *Far Away*, a resemblance noticed by Vicky Angelaki (2017) who contends that it is important to analyse *Escaped Alone* in relation to *Far Away*: 'Of all this work [Churchill's plays in the 21st century], *Escaped Alone* most strongly emerges as a political act to match *Far Away*, without suggesting that the latter play is a derivative of the earlier one' (22). As the play was only published and produced in 2016, the number of scholarly sources discussing it are considerably smaller than the ones about *Far Away*. Consequently, the present chapter reflects more directly a personal analysis of the play. The key features identified in the chapter devoted to *FA* serve as a guiding thread to support the theorisation of Churchill's dramaturgy via the examination of *Escaped Alone*. Dystopic elements, terror, trauma, agency, the status of language and the production of the plays are the features shaping this chapter.

2.2.1. Two-sided dystopia: personal distress and global disaster

The fictional world of *Escaped Alone* is highly confusing because it results from two opposite overlapping realities: an afternoon tea in a backyard and a collapsing surreal humanity. Their seeming antagonism however reveals an echoing trauma through a two-scale terror.

Synopsis

Escaped Alone is a short play written by Churchill in 2016. As revealed in the epigraph, the title comes from the biblical text *The Book of Job* quoted in Melville's *Moby Dick*: 'I only am escaped alone to tell thee' (Churchill, 2016, 3). Churchill's choice therefore may lead readers to expect a tale of catastrophe, implying severe trials. It also addresses the question of witnessing events and the witness' position.

The play is divided into eight parts, six of them following the same structure. Action is framed by the explanations of one of the four characters, Mrs J, who starts and ends the story by

describing to the audience how it all happened: 'I'm walking down the street and there's a door in the fence open and inside are three women I've seen before. [...] So I go in. [...] And then I said thanks for the tea and I went home' (*Ibid.*, 5; 42). The woman indeed joins her neighbour Sally and two friends of hers in Sally's backyard for their afternoon tea and small talk. These discussions about children, technologies, former jobs, jokes, etc. shape the biggest portion of each part. Except for the last one in which Mrs J leaves the place and the sixth one in which the women are singing, they all end similarly: Mrs J delivers a monologue in which she depicts catastrophic events that took place and led to an altered dystopian reality. There are no specific directions regarding who she addresses her speeches to. With these asides and the framing explanations of her presence, Mrs J plays the role of a storyteller, the witness, creating a distance with the fictional drama.

The gap between chit-chat and horror is reinforced by Churchill's use of the language. The old ladies chatter in few words, with small incomplete sentences which are sometimes loosely connected to one another:

VI: People always want to fly
LENA: fly like a bird
SALLY: that's always the favourite, what would you like
LENA: invisible
VI: languages, I'd like to be able to speak every
SALLY: but we do fly now
MRS J: planes isn't the same
VI: go to any country at all and understand
SALLY: and nobody looks out of the window
LENA: watching the screen (*Ibid.*, 23)

By contrast, Mrs J's asides are long and dense. Even longer are three monologues told by the other characters, each woman having one, at a different time in the middle of a part. Their content concerns private matters related to the person who is talking and explaining in a more detailed way some information the readers or spectators have been given little hint of before. Sally's aside is about her phobic fear of cats, Vi's speech is related to the fact that she killed her husband several years ago and Lena talks about her depressed state of mind. These monologues draw attention on the characters' profound loneliness:

LENA: I sat on the bed this morning and didn't stand up till lunchtime. The air was too thick. It's hard to move, it's hard to see why you'd move.
It's not so bad in the afternoon, I got myself here.
I don't like it here. I've no interest.
Why talk about that? Why move your mouth and do talking? Why see anyone? Why know about anyone? (*Ibid.*, 32)

Loneliness is emphasised by the absence of reaction from the other characters.

Except for Mrs J entering Sally's property, there are no physical actions in *Escaped Alone*. The dystopian reality is simply described by one character without stating the context and causes that led to such a situation. Among the scourges affecting this parallel world are fire, viruses, floods, chemicals, wind, abusive use of the media, etc. They result in an absurd society whose structure, if there is one, is seemingly incoherent:

The wind developed by property developers started as breezes on cheeks and soon turned heads inside out. The army fired nets to catch flying cars but most spun by with dozens clinging and shrieking, dropping off slowly. Buildings migrated from London to Lahore, Kyoto to Kansas City, and survivors were interned for having no travel documents. Some in the whirlwind went higher, the airsick families taking selfies in case they could ever share them. Shanty towns were cleared. Pets rained from the sky. A kitten became famous. (*Ibid.*, 28)

In between the lines, Churchill addresses the many issues related to globalisation. With each part starting again with a very common setting, as if nothing had happened or changed, it is possible to infer that she also tackles the indifference and inaction of wealthy populations.

Heterotopic ambiguities

The title of this subsection is borrowed from Dan Rebellato's article 'Nation and Negation (Terrible Rage)' (2018) in which he examines recent theatrical approaches to space in relation to the concept of nation in the United Kingdom. Importantly, he observes:

One strong feature of contemporary British playwriting is a detachment from place; in numerous recent plays, place is estranged, unspecified, annulled, orphaned, globalized, generalized, combined, relativized and scenographically anonymized. Does this represent an absence of nation? No (...). Instead, there is a restless deconstructive movement within the very identification of nation that moves to transcend it and this is captured and embodied in the heterotopic ambiguities of the spatially specific performance of the placeless play. (15)

Rebellato further cites the space of *Escaped Alone* as an example of 'orphaned' spaces because its seeming specificity is deceiving (26). As the theatre scholar argues, though Churchill indicates that the place of the action is 'Sally's backyard' (Churchill, 2016, 4), there is so little information about Sally herself, that the space remains 'generic'; 'it's an unspecific spatial specificity, surrounded by nothing (...)' (Rebellato, 2018, 26). The heterotopic ambiguity identified for the place of *Escaped Alone* therefore concerns a space that is both recognizable and anonymous. However, Churchill's world is more complex than the limited backyard, and

the heterotopic space can also be understood as the superimposition of the private place with the global collapsing world described in Mrs J's monologues. While there is no specification of Sally's garden, this other space is one of senseless multiplying characteristics giving birth to an apocalyptic fantasy world.

Next to space, the other coordinate framing a dystopia is time. Not unusually, Churchill's indications are minimal: 'Summer afternoon. A number of afternoons but the action is continuous' (Churchill, 2016, 4). One then concludes that the eight parts are made of separate conversations between the old ladies but that there is no scenic interruption in the action of talking. This assumption is supported by Angelaki (2017): 'In *Escaped Alone* she [Churchill] takes temporal fluidity to a new level by denying her audience any firm indicators of time transitions' (24). The fluidity, however, is, in each part, brutally interrupted by Mrs J's ending speeches that introduce the reader/spectator with a different temporality. The chronology between the afternoons and the catastrophic surreal events is impossible to retrace. Although the woman speaks in the past when recounting the facts, there is no indication that one reality precedes the other. Churchill's purpose is perhaps to lead the audience to stop looking for a traditional reading grid, to lose reference points in order to question, not only the senseless elements, but also the more familiar ones.

2.2.2. Terror and trauma

Like in *Far Away*, terror in *Escaped Alone* is conveyed indirectly. Similarly, language is its main locus. The obliqueness of the terror's presence in Churchill's play takes two distinct paths: one of absurd and monstrous visions of horror, another one which reveals terror through the language of trauma.

A tale of the apocalypse

The visions of a destroyed world that emerge from Mrs J's speech partly recall some traits of the dystopian reality of *Far Away*. Babies and children are killed, animals suffer, survivors struggle and fight each other. Angelaki (2017), paralleling the two plays, insightfully remarks that '*Escaped Alone* continues where *Far Away* left off, except for the social and political

landscape that it has inherited is one of such extensive confusion and uncertainty that the play both speaks to its dramatic antecedent and surpasses it in terms of dystopian extremity' (22). Humans, for example, are partly exterminated and survivors have evolved into beings close to underground beasts with sometimes no digestive system and communicate by means of groans and taps (Churchill, 2016, 8). Villages, cities and wide areas were destroyed by rocks, floods, winds and fire. People were poisoned and suffered from illnesses. Each dramatic episode was caused by human actions. The tons of rock that smashed the heads of children were 'paid for by senior executives' (*Id.*); floods started because 'water was deliberately wasted in a campaign to punish the thirsty' (*Ibid.*, 12); the sources of poisoning were chemicals and money, i.e. two human creations (*Ibid.*, 17); global food shortages were caused by the entertainment business (*Ibid.*, 22); wind was 'developed by 'property developers' (*Ibid.*, 28); 'sugar developed from monkeys' is responsible for the illness first contracted by children (*Ibid.*, 29); some fires were lit by humans (*Ibid.*, 37). The collapsing world was therefore the result of human deeds. Nature reacted and it is as if a new reality developed from absurd and fake cause and effect reactions. For instance, due to the floods, 'yawls, ketches, kayaks, canoes, schooners, planks, dinghies, lifebelts and upturned umbrellas, swimming instructors and lilos, rubber ducks and pumice stone floated on the stock market' (*Ibid.*, 12). Other absurd consequences that convey a sense of grotesque are illustrated by the episode of hunger:

Smartphones were distributed by charities when rice ran out, so the dying could watch cooking. (...). The obese sold slices of themselves until hunger drove them to eat their own rashers. Finally the starving stormed the tv centres and were slaughtered by and smoked in large numbers. Only when cooking shows were overtaken by sex with football teams did cream trickle back to the shops and rice was airlifted again. (*Ibid.*, 22)

If *EA* goes beyond the surreal portrait of *FA*, the play nevertheless points to some issues and behaviours that belong to the well-known contemporary societal landscape: the waste of food while populations are starving, the profits made thanks to others' misery, sexual deviance, the place taken by technologies and entertainment, the immigration policies, etc. While the tale's time refers to a past situation, Churchill's alludes to the present and forces the audience to look to the future.

Trauma in ordinary lives

Next to the global terror whose victims are anonymous humans, the characters of *EA* experience or have experienced personal catastrophes. These ones range from phobias, depression to

murder and still impact on the lives of the old ladies as haunting traumas. First, Sally has a phobic fear of cats that sometimes changes her daily life into hell:

(...) I never think about a cat because if I do I have to make sure there's no cats and they could be anywhere they could get in a window I have to go round the house and make sure all the windows are locked and I don't know if I checked properly I can't remember I was too frightened to notice I have to go round the windows again I have to go round the windows again (...). (*Ibid.*, 25)

Noticeably, trauma permeates the language, a feature discussed in the subsection dedicated to Churchill's formal approach. Second, Lena suffers from depression, which plunges her into a lethargic state, one of sensibility to the meaninglessness of life, as illustrated by the following excerpt: 'If I think about a place I could be where there's something nice like the sea that would be worse because the sea would be the same as an empty room so it's better to be in the empty room because then there's fewer things to mean nothing at all' (*Ibid.*, 32). Third, Vi experienced a serious traumatic situation. She killed her husband. The woman claimed it was in self-defence but her friend, who witnessed the action, says that 'it was complicated' (*Ibid.*, 43). In the last part of *EA*, Vi talks about it in a long monologue:

I can't love a kitchen, I can't love a kitchen any more, if you've killed someone in a kitchen you're not going to love that kitchen (...) when he fell down you think oh good oh good and then you think that's a mistake, take that back, the horror happens then, keep that out, the horror is the whole thing is never the same, he's never a person alive somewhere any more, never the same with my son (...). (*Ibid.*, 40)

Despite the fact that the women's situations have been discussed before these long personal confessions, the latter appear as soliloquies, unheard from the other characters, or to which no one pays attention. This element reinforces the solitude inherent to trauma. The conversations that make up the major part of the play are inconsequential chit-chat. By contrasting this with the grave monologues and Mrs J's catastrophic description, Churchill isolates the 'horror', a recurrent word in the women's extended speeches. A hypothesis suggested on the basis of this analysis is that the British dramatist, in doing so, lays stress on the denial of catastrophes and their consequences, whether on a small or large scale, when one is not directly impacted by them. There is therefore a political tone in *Escaped Alone*, one that, like in *Far Away*, pervades Churchill's indirect approach to terror. This observation concurs with a more general characteristic of her dramaturgy of terror identified by Elin Diamond (Aston & Diamond, 2009):

(...) what interests Caryl Churchill is (...) the indirect atmospherics of terror, the way it leaches into the psyches of ordinary citizens and ordinary lives. Ordinary lives are always dialectical for Churchill, individually marked yet ensnared, obscurely or directly, in political and historical force fields. (126)

The fourth character, Mrs J, does not confess anything, as she is the outsider. However, through her specific status, her words echo another sense of trauma, one that is not personal but collective.

2.2.3. Agency

Dystopian fictions generally portray individuals who lack freedom and whose fields of action are severely restricted. In their bleak atmosphere, one character often attempts to subvert the repressive rules, successfully or not. With the collapsing world of *Escaped Alone* and the contrasted reality of an afternoon tea, Churchill tackles the issue of agency on different levels, fostering reflexions about the presented state of affairs and the possibility of change.

Women's voices

Escaped Alone is a play that is exclusively made up of women's voices. Moreover, of women who 'are all at least seventy' as indicated by Churchill in her presentation of the characters (Churchill, 2016, 4). Despite all the progress regarding gender equality and the issue of ageism, the place left for women and especially older women on stage does not balance with the dominating presence of men in the theatrical sphere. In this respect, *EA* is a cut above the rest, as noticed by Vicky Angelaki (2017):

It is important that the agency of women is highlighted, regardless of interpretation – and that their experience is shown as at the same time poetic and mundane, astute and withdrawn. In other words, all-encompassing in a society that has not yet worked through its ongoing gender bias crisis, let alone its ageism. (25)

Churchill indeed astutely depicts a glimpse of these old ladies' everyday life, with talks about more or less serious topics, ranging from jokes, shopping malls, to their personal struggles. From the conversations, however, arises a sense of powerlessness. Friends attempt to give one

another a shaking-up out of their solitary habits or their stories in which they appear to be locked-up. For instance, Lena's friends suggest that she should get out more often:

Vi: but it's good for you to go yourself
Sally: good to get out
Lena: I do get out
Sally: you're here
Lena: it's not easy (Churchill, 2016, 9)

Another occurrence of this pattern is the scene in which Vi tries to confront Sally with her phobia:

Vi: shouldn't we just say it, say black and white, tabby, longhaired, shorthaired, Siamese
Mrs J: I've got a lovely tabby but he's a tom so
Lena: stop it
Vi: expose her to it and nothing bad happens and gets used to nothing bad
(...)
Sally: I know you hate me sometimes
Vi: no, I
Lena: see?
Sally: you just need to face
Vi: I need to face?
Sally: how unpleasant you can be (*Ibid.*, 15)

And lastly, Vi's story about killing her husband in self-defense is called into question by Sally who witnessed the scene. She insinuates that the murder was intentional, even though there were good reasons to justify her friend's act. The sense of powerlessness that pervades the play is reinforced by the characters' increasing awareness of their mutual incomprehension. On the one hand, phobia and depression are not taken seriously, on the other hand a woman discovers that she has been considered a murderer by a friend for decades. From the outside, these old women seem to be grappling with their own difficulties, incapable of finding a way out. In addition, there is a feeling that whatever the problems or desires they share with each other are, that all belongs to the past and there is no point in proposing a change. However, as it has already been stressed, there is always more in Churchill's play than its surface normality. The playwright gives the reader a hint about it in the introduction to a collection of her plays (Churchill, 2019): '(...) there was more to *Escaped Alone* than once seeing some women in a back yard through an open gate in a fence' (viii).

Brechtian influence: the survivor's tale

The issue of agency is tackled in a complex and rich way by Churchill through the character of Mrs Jarrett. From the very beginning, she is depicted as the outsider, and through the play she remains, as Rebellato (2018) puts it, ‘the woman who has been our guide, the play’s Virgil into this tranquil hell’ (16). The action of *Escape Alone* is indeed framed by Mrs J’s entrance and exit that the character describes as additional pieces of information to contextualise the drama. Her lines are not delivered to the ladies in the garden but directed to the audience. In doing so, Churchill gets rid of the theatre’s fourth wall, which is the imaginary wall that separates the fictional world of the stage from the reality of the audience, giving the spectators the illusion that they witness actions forming an independent reality of its own. The will to deconstruct the theatrical illusion reflects the Brechtian influence that permeates Churchill’s work. Her epic aesthetic has been highlighted many times by critics and theorists such as Elin Diamond⁶³. The process used by Churchill in *Escaped Alone* is in direct line with Brecht’s distancing effect. German playwright and stage director Bertolt Brecht developed a conception of theatre that has had, since the twentieth century, a major impact on this artistic field. Brecht theorised his approach of an epic theatre that seeks to deconstruct the *mimesis* as a unified representation of the reality (Sarrazac, 2001, 69). Using processes such as fragmentation, ellipsis or the distancing effect, the epic theatre’s purpose is to foster a critical thinking of the audience. The political agenda of the German playwright whose notes are collected in the book *L’Art du comédien* (1999), particularly through the distancing effect, finds echoes in Churchill’s vision of the theatre:

Dans la formulation de principes artistiques nouveaux et l’élaboration de méthodes de jeu nouvelles, il nous faut partir des tâches que nous impose notre temps, un temps situé à la jonction de deux époques historiques. Voici qu’une refonte de la société paraît possible et nécessaire. Tous les processus qui mettent des hommes aux prises avec d’autres hommes seront étudiés, *tout* devra être observé du point de vue social. Pour sa critique de la société et sa relation historique des transformations accomplies, un théâtre nouveau aura besoin, entre autres effets, de l’effet de distanciation. (59, original emphasis)

The distancing effect – the original term coined by Brecht is *Verfremdungseffekt* – is thus part of a broader vision that relies on the belief that people can foster social and societal changes by questioning their reality. About this theatrical device, Brecht (1999) explains:

⁶³ See Elin Diamond’s essay ‘Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism’ in Martin, C. (Ed.). (1996). *Sourcebook of Feminist Theatre*, London: Routledge, 120-135.

Le but de l'*effet de distanciation* était d'amener le spectateur à considérer ce qui se déroule sur la scène d'un œil investigateur et critique. Les moyens utilisés étaient ceux de l'art. L'emploi de l'effet de distanciation dans cette perspective dépend de la réalisation d'une condition préalable : il faut débarrasser la salle et la scène de toute « magie » et n'y susciter aucun « champ hypnotique ». (128)

Churchill uses this process in *Escaped Alone* by placing one of her characters outside the fictional realm of the garden. The audience is invited to participate in the dramatised action, not as a mere passive witness but as an active member, each spectator consciously choosing whether to adhere to the characters' actions and speeches, or not (*Ibid.*, 48).

Furthermore, the particular status of Mrs Jarrett illustrates another Brechtian device used by Churchill which is the historicisation⁶⁴. It is defined in Mary Luckhurst's introductory chapter to *Caryl Churchill* (2015) as 'the deliberate, self-reflexive creation of two realities – the past timeframe (an action that has occurred) and the present timeframe for performer and spectator (an action that the actor narrates and demonstrates in a way which causes the spectator to deliberate on the alternative actions)' (21). Similarly, with Mrs J Churchill presents the spectators with two separate time frames.

First, she is the guide through which, in the same way she saw her neighbours through the open door in the fence of Sally's garden, the spectators will get a glimpse of the fictional action on stage. Because of her monologues describing apocalyptic events in the past, it is possible to deduce that she is the one 'escaped alone to tell thee' of Churchill's epigraph. This one comes from Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, as indicated in the text (Churchill, 2016, 3). The quote appears in *Moby Dick*'s epilogue wherein one learns that the narrator Ishmael is the only survivor of the shipwreck of Captain Ahab's whaling boat (Melville, 1980, 730-731). Melville's fiction is presented as his tale of events that led him to that point. Moreover, this quote is a biblical reference to the *Book of Job* in which Job, a wealthy man, is faced with multiple catastrophes but keeps his faith in God. The tale of the first tragic events are reported to Job by a messenger who 'escaped alone' to tell them to the man (Job. *La Bible*, 1988, 931). A parallel can therefore be drawn between those two references and Churchill's play as the three sources – or excerpts from the main source – are presented as the survivor's tale. In this regard, Mrs J is on stage to tell the audience about a series of events that led to the destruction of everything and everybody but her. As it has been highlighted by the analysis of *EA*, human

⁶⁴ This process has already been identified in Churchill's previous works by Elin Diamond (see Luckhurst, 2015, 21).

actions are the cause of this state of affairs. By borrowing some traits from Brecht's epic theatre, Churchill lays stress, not only on the warning about societal issues that may bring disaster to the contemporary world, but also on the role and responsibilities of individuals who need to leave their spectator's seats and take part in the action.

Second, the other time frame of *EA*, the one of the afternoons in Sally's backyard, also includes Mrs J. These fictional moments are difficult to locate. No one can be certain that they occurred before or after the time frame Mrs J talks about. On the one hand, she speaks in the past about the collapsing world and exits the garden in the end, which may indicate that the afternoons come after the terrible events. On the other hand, if she is the only survivor, these moments with her neighbours may also belong to the past. Chronology is not the focus of Caryl Churchill in *EA*, though she frequently and playfully distorts temporality in her plays. Whether it is past or future, the emphasis is put on the very possibility of echoing events occurring in our actual present world, events that are reversely mirrored by the dystopian visions in the play. Angelaki (2017) supports the view that, considering Mrs J's particular status in comparison with the other old ladies, she is the only character who embodies a sense of agency:

The three women's extensive revelatory monologues focus on themselves, their histories and their experiences. (...) Mrs Jarrett, however, does not engage in this. In a group of characters involved in their own personal narratives, she is the only sensitized citizen who imagines herself a participant and not a detached observer. Therefore, Mrs Jarrett does not indulge in the narrative of the self, but vocalizes the narrative of society (25).

In spite of this correct observation, Mrs J voices a frustration in a monologue that is included in the last part, like the other characters' soliloquies. As observed by Angelaki (2017), 'the monologues reveal each woman's melancholia at being bound to a situation that has defined them against their will: a phobia (Sally), an illness (Lena) or a violent past (Vi)' (24). The 'terrible rage' she utters repeatedly, can thus be interpreted both as the expression of a personal trauma, hers or the feeling conveyed by the other women's traumatic tales, and as the verbalised expression of the regained possibility of agency.

2.2.4. Formal approach: the aesthetic of silence

Churchill's formal innovations are a recurring and significant feature of her dramaturgy. The interrogation about meaning that was central in *Far Away* is resumed in *Escaped Alone*. In

addition, the two partitioned realities of the play give birth to separate linguistic techniques that, in various ways, point to the difficulty to communicate and the ambiguous status of language.

Communication

The examination of the approach to language in *Escaped Alone* stems from an insightful observation made by Ramón Prado Pérez in 2002 about Churchill's dramaturgy, and that remains particularly accurate in the present play: 'Churchill's plays can be said to have moved towards an aesthetic of silence. Silence in her work does not necessarily mean the end of speech, but the problematization of communication by linguistic means' (101). This problematisation is especially noticeable in the formal aspect of *Escaped Alone*'s text. The conversations between the four women present themselves as a succession of short, interrupted sentences, bouncing from one idea to another. The reader, contrary to the spectator, is deprived of the clarification brought by the staging and the clear identification of each character. The difficulty to enter the reading of *EA* is illustrated by the following excerpt, which is prototypical concerning the conversational pattern:

LENA: Barney never out of his phone
VI: I'd have been the same
LENA: looking pale
VI: whole worlds in your pocket
LENA: little bit worried about Kevin and Mary, never hear an endearment
SALLY: but nobody ever knows
MRS J: you'd be surprised what goes on
LENA: twenty years in June
VI: we had to wear hats
SALLY: a pink one and I didn't
VI: so you gave it to Angela (Churchill, 2016, 6)

Several connecting threads run through the conversation but they seem to be a simple means for each woman to become the speaker again and add a little piece to the fragmented talks. Sentences are rarely completed, which is noticeable in the reading because of the repeated absence of capital letters and full stops to frame them. Next to interruptions from another speaker, the fragmented lines are sometimes the result of the characters' own ending of speech, as if the rest of the sentence belonged to silence and that the conversations kept going in the women's minds. This trait is clearly emphasised by the soliloquies which do not trigger any reactions and can therefore be interpreted as the women's inner monologues. Both conversations and soliloquies point to the problematisation of communication.

A third element that tackles the issue of constructed linguistic exchanges is Mrs J's intervention at the end of each part. The utterly disparate nature of the discussions and Mrs J's monologues call into question the possibility and the relevancy of communication. The descriptions of the apocalyptic reality indeed illustrate a feature of the theatre of the absurd that Merle Tönnies (2017) associates with *Far Away* but which is also used by Churchill in *Escaped Alone*: 'the denial of rationality' (157). This type of theatre strives to express its sense of the senseless of the human condition and the inadequacy of the rational approach by the abandonment of rational devices and discursive thought' (Martin Esslin⁶⁵ quoted in Tönnies, 2017, 159). Mrs Jarrett portrays a fantasy world in which surreal events pile up to form an ungraspable picture:

Some groups lost their sexuality while others developed a new morality of constant fucking with any proximate body. A young woman crawling from one society to the other became wedged, only her head reaching her new companions. Stories of those above ground were told and retold till there were myths of the husband who cooked feasts, the wife who swam the ocean, the gay lover who could fly, the child who read minds, the talking dog. Prayers were said to them and various sects developed with tolerance and bitter hatred. (Churchill, 2016, 8)

It is as if anything could be added to her sentences without changing their grotesque content. The absurdity of this reality is also conveyed through the antagonistic coexisting realities, as exemplified by the last sentence of the previous excerpt, opposing 'tolerance and bitter hatred' (*Id.*), and also in the consequences of the floods: 'Some died of thirst, some of drinking the water' (*Ibid.*, 12). The failure of logic responds to the difficulty to make sense of brutal realities. In this respect, Churchill's text may illustrate a crisis of language, a language whose words have abandoned any claim at depicting life in a realistic way. Not only is the communication challenged between characters, but also with the audience that is forced to take some distance with the representation.

Between words and gaps: trauma

The analysis of Churchill's dramaturgy of terror in *Escaped Alone* in the previous subsections has resulted in the identification of traumas that permeate the play. The personal ones experienced by the old ladies echo a wider sense of trauma, one that is collective and touches, in *EA*, a collapsing world. Conversely, their personal stories may be the echo and embodiment of a collective traumatic reality that is ungraspable and therefore finds other – smaller – ways

⁶⁵ Esslin, M. (1961). *The Theatre of the Absurd*. London: Penguin, 24.

to show. The links between literature and trauma theory, presented in Geoffrey Hartman's article 'Trauma within the limits of literature', have been highlighted in section 1.2.3. 'Trauma and terror/-ism' of the present thesis. Hartman's characterisation of the approach to language in order to tackle trauma proves to be greatly significant to grasp the textual matter of *Escaped Alone*. In his article, Hartman (2003) posits the view that literature, because of its paradoxical nature in which words and gaps coexist, responds to the ambivalent status of language in its attempt to address trauma. The ambivalence Hartman refers to is the fact that words can convey a wound and be the preferred means of expression to heal it while, at the same time, there may be an inadequacy between what has been experienced as traumatic and the limitation of language to speak about it (259). The dialectics between words and gaps is a key element to understanding Churchill's aesthetic of silence. Gaps are part of her text and materially included through the unfinished sentences of the characters. However, gaps are not the only formal expression of a silence that seeks to express trauma. Words, their abundance, distortion, repetition, etc. are Churchill's tool to tackle its complexity. Importantly, her formal work shares similarities with Hartman's theory about the relationship between words and trauma:

We are taught to read for what is without words, or as yet beyond their reach: for the wound as well as the power of signification that contains or composes it. Such reading presupposes of *literary* words that in some way they bear the wound or are scarred by it. In many cases (...) style means distressing the word, disturbing its sound-shape and semantic stability, marking it individually, even if the result is not a remarkably rich verbal texture, but also a not always resolvable ambiguity or plurisignificance. (2003, 260, original emphasis)

The words and sentences of the women's soliloquies bear the scars mentioned by Hartman. For example, Sally's speech about her phobic fear of cat reflects this phobia. The commas gradually disappear while repetitions increase, which gives the reader an impression of rhythmic acceleration:

(...) a cat could be in the fridge in the freezer in the salad drawer in the box of cheese in the broom cupboard the mop bucket a cat could be in the oven the top oven under the lid of the casserole in a box of matches behind a picture under a rug back to the bedroom a cat could be under the bed in the duvet in the pillowcase in the wardrobe a cat could be in a shoe on a hanger under my dress in a woolly hat (...). (Churchill, 2016, 26)

The musical patterning reflecting a modernist influence identified by several scholars in Churchill's previous text is clearly a linguistic technique that the playwright uses here. Angelaki (2017) points to it in Mrs J's multiple utterances of the words 'terrible rage': 'as the words are repeated, gathering momentum, they become, beyond a confession, a political statement, an indictment, even a chant' (24). Moreover, Churchill's approach to language in *Escaped Alone*

relies on contrasts. Trauma visually marks the page with an alternation between the domination of spaces and gaps, and the lengthy black form of the monologues. The tone is also part of the contrast. The dialogues reflect ‘an almost, yet not quite “normal” feeling of neo-absurdist verbal playfulness’ while in between the lines one can read violence, loneliness and powerlessness (Angelaki, 2017, 24).

The formal approach in *Escaped Alone* not only conveys and addresses different traumas, but it also reflects a crisis of language that challenges representation. Each part, except the last one and the one whose only action is the women singing, is built on the same model; each one begins as if there has been no intervention from Mrs Jarrett. Repetition thus works on the micro- and macro-levels of the play. This feature is characteristic of a series of plays that pertains to the ‘new English dramaturgies’ analysed by Angel-Perez (2003). She astutely remarks that in such works, the playwrights ‘tell us about the impossibility of representing history in linear terms’ (7):

Writing becomes circular, obsessive: it cannot stop reworking the same figures over and over again in an attempt to escape the aesthetic and ethical aporia of the post-Shoah world. What is at stake is the discovery of a language whose mission it would be to stage what cannot be voiced through logos, to voice the unvoiceable, to scribe what cannot be de-scribed. (*Id.*)

The aesthetic of silence highlighted here mirrors the aporia related to language when it grapples with a horrifying reality that extends beyond its compass, that confronts words to their own limitations as well as their paradoxical ability to ‘voice the unvoicable’ (*Id.*). This aporia is the same as the one Maurice Blanchot addressed when, in *L’Écriture du Désastre* (1980), he wrote: ‘Il écrivait, que ce fût possible ou non, mais il ne parlait pas. Tel est le silence de l’écriture’ (156).

In conclusion, Churchill’s approach to language mirrors a difficulty to speak about the contemporary world. She achieves it by taking detours such as the use of the absurd, of a circular pattern with repetitions of words, sentences and scenes. While the character who has ‘escaped alone’ physically indicates her way out, no such exit from the terror and trauma is proposed by the playwright to the audience. On the contrary, Churchill’s purpose, through her innovative language, is at the same time to allow the spectators to take some distance from the stage and its cruelty, and to force them to question both the play and what it alludes to in their contemporary society. One cannot leave the theatre in the same way Mrs Jarrett exits the garden, as if nothing had happened. The collapsing world presented in front of the audience is paralleled

with the collapsing of meaning. The same reasoning as the one Angel-Perez followed in her analysis of *Far Away* (in Angelaki, 2013, 79-95) could be applied to *Escaped Alone*, i.e. the interrogation about the meaning of words leading to two different understandings of the play. First, the hypothesis of a text that holds to the original meaning of words and therefore plunges the reader into an absurd and senseless world. Second, the postulation of a hidden meaning, different from the original one – and perhaps due to constrained writing, for example – that confronts the spectator with an ungraspable terror that is all the more threatening. All in all, ambiguities pervade the text of *Escaped Alone*. Its multiple layers of meaning, once again, may lead to the conclusion of the heterotopic nature of language.

2.2.5. From the page to the stage: James Macdonald's production

Escaped Alone was performed for the first time in 2016 at the Royal Court Jerwood Theatre Downstairs in a direction by James Macdonald. It is interesting to examine how some key elements identified in the analysis of the text, were tackled in the staging of the play. Two of these elements are particularly important to discuss: the set design in relation to the epic tone and the staging of the soliloquies that voice the unvoiceable.

The Brechtian influence regarding the epic tone of *Escaped Alone* has been highlighted in a previous subsection. It frames the play with the character of Mrs Jarrett who contextualises her entrance and exit of the fictional action for the audience. Through this process, the fourth wall of illusion that stands between the stage and the spectators no longer exists. Remarkably, the set designer Miriam Buether did install a wall which was a wooden fence hiding Sally's backyard. Linda Bassett who played Mrs J appeared in front of the wall clearly explaining to the audience what she saw, then went through the door. The fence was used once more at the very end of the play when Mrs J exited the garden. Her particular status was therefore stressed from the beginning in the staging. The garden itself, in its textual form, is understood by Dan Rebellato (2018) as an orphaned space that is deceptively specific and belongs to a 'placeless play' (15). Discussing Macdonald's production, the theatre scholar contends that its design maintained the garden's particular characteristic: 'this [the false particularity of space] was emphasized in Miriam Buether's design for the Royal Court production, the garden being both fully realized and stripped of anything particular, seeming to signify just "garden"' (*Ibid.*, 26). The second element conveying strongly an epic nature is Mrs J's addresses at the end of each

part. Linda Bassett, in an interview about the play (Wiegand, 2016), explained that ‘the thing about those speeches is you have to include the audience’. This inclusion, which marked a break from the fictional afternoon talks, was made possible by a specific setting. The stage was plunged into darkness, with the exception of a rectangular frame made of red lights and in front of which Mrs J was speaking directly to the spectators. As judiciously noticed by Angelaki (2017), ‘In Miriam Buether’s set she [Mrs Jarrett] literally steps outside the frame of conspicuous normality to offer, with somber recognition and pragmatism, grim tales of a world that is now past the threshold of destruction and at a new stage in its history’ (23). The illusion of the peaceful meeting between the ladies was thus broken but there was nothing more than Mrs J’s words to portray the other apocalyptic reality. While there was an escalation in the absurd sentences of her speech, each new fact seeming more unbelievable than the previous one, her tone remained calm. Her attitude was the one of a museum guide describing an ancient era, trying not to omit details. The consequence of this detached position mixed with Churchill’s dreadful words was that it triggered laughs from the audience. A true distancing effect was created by James Macdonald.

The other challenge of the text was the contrast between the playful discussions and the women’s soliloquies. Astonishingly, when voiced, the fragments lost their cut, incomplete aspects. Bassett (Wiegand, 2016) made a similar comment: ‘She [Caryl Churchill] gives you a fragment, an impression of a conversation. When you put them all together, and play it with the right rhythm, you feel like you’ve heard a whole conversation’. The discussions were easy to follow and the personalities easy to differentiate one from the others, which is harder in the sole reading of the text. Regarding the monologues – including Mrs J’s ‘terrible rage’, the emphasis on the characters’ solitude was cleverly staged. During each soliloquy, the other women froze while a dim light was falling on the speaker. When the monologue ended, the other characters resumed their discussions as if brought to life again. The tone varied according to the issues of the characters: Sally’s accelerated rhythm and her posture on the chair clearly conveyed panic while Lena took a soft and sad tone to explain her uneasiness. As described by Rebellato (2018), ‘Linda Bassett’s performance of these words was determined, harsh, insistent, the repetitions cascading into each other and becoming, it seemed to me, another final image of hell’ (16). The unvoiceable trauma was in the end subtly voiced.

On the whole, Macdonald’s aesthetic approach to Churchill’s text was faithful to the playwright’s will not to impose a meaning. Aleks Sierz’s critique of James Macdonald’s

direction of Churchill's *Drunk Enough To Say I love You?* could apply to *Escaped Alone*. He judged the staging to be 'rather unadventurous' and Macdonald's approach 'rather timid' (2007, 6). Sierz concluded: 'In neither case [speaking of two productions of Macdonald], could you feel that he had released the imaginative potential of the work' (*Id.*). This minimal interpretation, however, is perhaps a consequence of the rich textual world proposed by Caryl Churchill. As Lina Bassett (Wiegand, 2016) summed it up, 'you just have to say the words: you have to not get in the way of the words'.

2.3. Synthesis: Churchill's aesthetic of language

Paralleling the analyses of *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone* permits the probing of Caryl Churchill's dramaturgy of terror. The kernel of her work is her formal approach to language which reveals a constant will to innovate and explore the many possibilities hidden in words. Churchill's aesthetic of language is characterised by the emphasis on its inherent aporia. The development of this argument draws on several significant observations made by Theodor Adorno on the paradoxical nature of art. These observations are discussed in Catherine Bernard's article 'L'art de l'aporie: penser l'impensable avec Adorno et Benjamin' (2005). Bernard points out that Theodor Adorno and Walter Benjamin were the first theorists to tackle the complex status of art as the embodiment of human contradictions and as the place in which the modernist aporia was best expressed. She further explains the nature of the aporia they identified in art: '(...) l'art se fait l'agent de tous les renversements ontologiques. En cela il apporte autant la preuve de la faillite dystopique de la modernité qu'il se fait le porteur d'une promesse utopique sur les ruines mêmes de l'utopie' (32). Contradictions and a seeming incompatibility are present in Churchill's texts. Through her theatrical work, language becomes the locus of elements which normally silence the possibility of representation: terror and trauma.

2.3.1. The hidden terror in *Far Away*

The difference between terror and terrorism theorised by Anthony Kubiak (1987) in 'Disappearance as History: The Stages of Terror' has been discussed in Section 1.2.3. 'Trauma and terror/-ism'. Kubiak importantly contends that 'the real terror, the terror that silenced performance itself, remains hidden' (82). Moreover, 'terror operates in this theatre of the seemingly unspeakable, and the apparently unrepresentable' (*Ibid.*, 80). These characteristics are key elements that pervade Churchill's play *Far Away*. The unspeakable nature of terror is clearly illustrated in the first act via the discussion between Harper and Joan. The girl who witnessed violent and inhuman actions tries to make sense of them but the very nature of this brutality is concealed by the denial of her aunt. The latter replaces the truth by a false idealised vision of heroism and blurs Joan's experience of a terrorising real. In the second act, the cruelty of a totalitarian system is unquestioningly accepted by the protagonists. In their will to

denounce the corrupted working system, they seek some truth and justice, but these remain absurdly peripheral. The macabre parades of prisoners, as a direct staged action, appears as the exception to the unrepresented terror. In other words, the scene, in its 'reification of terror as an image or a fact' (*Ibid.*, 82), is perhaps the most direct confrontation with terrorism experienced by the audience. However, in her conception of a scene that recalls the atrocities of the concentration camps and whose problematic representations have been questioned in many postmodern discourses, Churchill introduces a grotesque device which diverts the attention from the real horror: the preposterous hats. It is certainly the last act of the play which confirms the status of language as the very locus of terror. The dramatist portrays a world that is so unfamiliar that it fosters an interrogation about the words' meaning. This consequence echoes a more general questioning about the sense of words and the relevancy of language to depict a reality whose brutality extends beyond the grasp of a definite system of signs. In the post-Auschwitz context, for instance, a formal response to the senselessness of the events was to advocate the absence of meaning in art and the absence of unity. Samuel Beckett, whose dramaturgical work has had a considerable influence on numerous playwrights, including Churchill, set up the destruction of meaning in his plays. Adorno commented on the aporetic nature of his work:

Beckett's œuvre already presupposes this experience of the destruction of meaning as self-evident, yet also pushes it beyond meanings's [*sic*] abstract negation in that his plays force the traditional categories of art to undergo this experience, concretely suspend them, and extrapolate others out of the nothingness. (Adorno⁶⁶, quoted in Bernard, 2005, 34).

The destruction of meaning is a means for Beckett to ask what might be the future when one considers the present's nothingness. In short, the collapsing of meaning forces to question the collapsing world. Conversely, Caryl Churchill plunges the reader/spectator into a collapsing dystopian world to stress words' ambiguous status, i.e. to question meaning.

The examination of the status of language in Churchill's work and the particular defamiliarisation she creates in *Far Away* has given birth to various interpretations that put forward arguments about the political nature of meaning (Dymkowski, 2003) or the failure of language (Angel-Perez in Angelaki, 2013). Angel-Perez's article 'Language Games and Literary Constraints: Playing with Tragedy in the Theatre of Caryl Churchill and Martin Crimp' (Angelaki, 2013) is particularly noteworthy because the author examines two hypotheses

⁶⁶ Adorno, T. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory*. London: The Athlone Press, 153.

regarding the language in *Far Away*. A first possibility is that words keep their literal meaning and therefore lead to the construction of a grotesque world. The second one is based on the hypothesis of a hidden or altered meaning resulting from the formal exercise of constrained writing (Angelaki, 2013, 87-88). The latter view concurs with the emphasis on a terror that is hidden in Churchill's dramaturgy, because, as explained by Angel-Perez: 'verbalized in a language bereft of its referent, the threat remains unrepresented' (*Ibid.*, 88). This analysis leads her to conclude that *FA* illustrates a crisis of language: 'there is no situation, no clue to allow us to make sense of what is being said' (*Id.*). Although Churchill's dystopian universe is shaped by a senseless brutality and an all-threatening atmosphere that blurs the characters' and the spectators' understanding, what has been argued in this thesis is that there is more to Churchill's dramaturgy of language in *Far Away* than a simple acknowledgement of the failure of language. The duality of the words' meaning noticed by Angel-Perez proves to be a sign of the richness of the language which can be comprehended in the light of Foucault's concept of *heteroropia*. Heterotopias are spaces which carry multiple layers of meaning, which are at the same time the physical place noticed by everyone and also the virtual spaces to which the physical one relates back. They connect the material world with the imaginary spaces invested with mirrored images of our society, with ideals and abstract concepts, i.e. utopias (Foucault, 1994, 755-756). In this respect, to consider the language to be heterotopic permits a better grasp of the ambiguous status of meaning. The dystopian world of *FA* therefore becomes both absurd and terrorising. The images evoked in the characters' speeches at the same time pertain to the realm of the impossible – e.g. animals becoming allies in wars, rapists, etc. – and convey realistic possible concerns about the Earth's future – e.g. the end of our anthropocentric vision and the extinction of humans. As advocated by Adorno in his conception of art (Bernard, 2005, 34-35), through the 'well-formed English sentence' (Aston & Diamond, 2009, 140), the theatrical language of Churchill embraces its own contradictions, its antagonism.

2.3.2. Trauma and the aesthetic of silence in *Escaped Alone*

One of the main seeming contradictions of language is undoubtedly the silence it is able to convey, a silence that is not necessarily synonymous with the end of speech but that reflects a 'problematization of communication' (Ramon Prado Pérez, 2002, 101) or bears the marks of trauma. The aesthetic of silence is another facet of Churchill's aporetic language. The discussions and soliloquies of *Escaped Alone* remarkably embody several traumatic

experiences that find their way to show between the words and gaps of the text. As stated by Hartman (2003), the language of trauma is scarred by the wounds it speaks of, and consequently, words are often distressed, whether is it on the formal level of the sentence or on the semantic level (260). Churchill, in *EA*, works on both levels which correspond to different scales of horror. The personal exchanges of the old ladies are challenging the sentence as a complete unit of meaning. On the page, they appear as fragments that make the conversations difficult to follow. On stage, however, once they are uttered out loud, one is forced to notice that their meaning is easy to grasp and, whereas each sentence is interrupted by the following one, they give the impression of a full-length conversation. Trauma truly permeates the soliloquies of *Escaped Alone* in which each woman talks only to herself about a phobia, a depressive state or a violent past that still imprisons them and isolates them from each other. The absence of reactions to these speeches reinforces that feature and is another kind of silence that emerges in language. Formally speaking, the soliloquies are made of repetitions, of vanishing punctuation marks and even disintegrating sentences. A representative example of Churchill's formal work is the end of Lena's monologue:

LENA: I'd rather hear something bad than something good. I'd rather hear nothing.
 It's still just the same.
 It's just the same.
 It's the same. (Churchill, 2016, 32)

The distance created by a language that is no longer used to communicate reflects a Brechtian influence, as pointed out by Angel-Perez (2006):

Si notre langue perd sa fonction de communication et d'information lorsqu'elle est confrontée à la représentation de l'horreur (...), il faut donc inventer une langue défamiliarisante – et c'est la grande idée brechtienne que l'on retrouve ici réconciliée avec le sentiment d'empathie –, une langue qui mette à distance le traumatisme pour mieux le faire comprendre. (22)

It is in this distancing process that the dialectics between words and gaps illustrates once again Churchill's aesthetic of silence.

Next to the interactions, a different catastrophic reality is portrayed in Mrs Jarrett's monologues. They linguistically function like Joan's final speech in *Far Away*. The sentences are all enunciative clauses, deprived of any emotional marker. In addition, the same interrogation regarding the status of meaning runs through these fragments, as their descriptions of a collapsing world shape a grotesque and senseless universe. One is therefore tempted to suggest, as Angel-Perez (in Angelaki, 2013) did for *Far Away*, that Churchill destroys the literal

meaning of words to characterise an ungraspable state of terror. A slightly different interpretation that nonetheless stems from the observed ambivalence of language is that Churchill creates a defamiliarising reality by drawing on the existing absurdities of contemporary societies she wants to stress. Moreover, as indicated by the title and the epigraph, the character of Mrs J is the one who has ‘escaped alone’ and her monologues are, in this sense, comparable to a survivor’s tale. Their senselessness can therefore be understood as the echo of the meaningless barbarity described in numerous post-Auschwitz accounts from survivors.

All in all, the formal aesthetic of the British playwright in *Far Away* and *Escape Alone*, gives the impression of following one of Giorgio Agamben’s statements in his book *Idée de la Prose* (1998): ‘Là où finit le langage, ce n’est pas l’indicible qui commence, mais la matière de la langue’ (19). The ascetic language of Churchill emphasises the matter of words and thereby reveals a terror and traumas that are raw. In the end, it is perhaps the heteroropic nature of such a language that encapsulates best what Balasopoulos (in Vieira, 2013) names ‘something like the pure, distilled form of hope’, ‘the pure kernel of a desire that refuses to give way, to surrender, or to capitulate to silence’ (61). Furthermore, theatre, like Milner’s description of language (2009) points to something that lies beyond its compass. In doing so, it matches Angel-Perez’s view of what is the mission of the new dramaturgies, i.e. ‘no longer the explicitation of a situation’ (7). She strongly believes that ‘theatre has to create a new space in which to experiment and experience emotions that will perhaps lead the audience to build a different world for themselves’ (*Id.*). Churchill’s dystopias conceal the premises of a utopian vision that can only be pursued in fostering the spectators’ sense of a regained agency.

CONCLUSION

The world can collapse. Theatrical worlds do repeatedly, perhaps as a means to remind the spectators, and more generally humans, of the fragile and uncertain nature of a peaceful existence. Antonin Artaud forcefully stated this in *Le théâtre et son double* (1964): ‘Nous ne sommes pas libres. Et le ciel peut encore nous tomber sur la tête. Et le théâtre est fait pour nous apprendre d’abord cela’ (123). Caryl Churchill, in her dystopian plays *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, follows Artaud’s thinking about the mission of theatre. As a British playwright, she is part of a long theatrical tradition that is marked by its dialectical connexion with society. The will to address societal dysfunctions and breaking with the British realistic tradition of the *well-made play* strongly impacted the theatrical productions in the middle of the twentieth century. The critical and political tone of playwrights grew hand in hand with their exploration of new forms and a creative use of language. What is called ‘the New English Theatre’ was born with a generation of artists who believed in its social function and rose, among others, against military politics, global conflicts, market laws and social determinism. This political vein asserted itself in the eighties and was followed, in the nineties, by a radicalisation of the dramatists’ aesthetical and political positions with genres such as the *In-Yer-Face* theatre. The end of the twentieth century was characterised by a cultural blending and a formal hybridity. Today’s British theatre remains highly related to its societal context and seeks to foster reflections about burning issues.

The bleak historical events of the twentieth century, which include the two World Wars, The Holocaust, the nuclear bombings and the Cold War, caused a significant disruption in the field of human sciences and in artistic spheres. The horror of concentration camps in particular, with Auschwitz as the epitome of an unprecedented barbarity, called into question the notions of humanity, of unity and general truth. The postmodern movement that developed after the Second World War reflected this loss of faith in grand narratives. The theoretical discourses about the status of language as a means to convey a reality that seemed ungraspable had and still have a major impact on the literary and theatrical fields. Literary theorists and writers such as Georges Steiner, Theodor Adorno and Maurice Blanchot pointed out the break in the perception of language that marked a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ the Holocaust. Observing a linguistic crisis, they commented on the limits reached by representation when confronted with a horror that extends beyond the reach of words. Adorno and Walter Benjamin were among the

first theorists to tackle the complex status of art as the embodiment of human contradictions. Art was understood as the place of an inherent aporia related to the failure of the modernist utopia which, paradoxically, bore a utopian hope that could rise from the present nothingness. Practically speaking, the artistic responses to these theoretical discourses favoured the destruction of meaning, of unity and, consequently, fragmentation became a recurring device. In the theatrical field, there was an increased amount of productions wherein text became a component among others. The play's creation started on stage and abolished the authorial authority. Hans-Thies Lehman compiled the features of these new stagings that refuted the mimetic representation of a fictional story as a complete and coherent unit. He grouped such performances under the term of 'postdramatic theatre'. It has been argued, however, that Lehman's use of the term 'dramatic' as a historical – i.e. Aristotelian notion – 'is no longer appropriate or relevant to the work being produced by significant numbers of dramatists at the turn of the twenty-first century' (Liz Tomlin, in Angelaki, 2013, viii). Several scholars have indeed noticed a revival of the faith in language to address real issues, to portray society and convey meaning. The theoretical overview proposed in this thesis was not aimed to oppose trends and assess whether Caryl Churchill's plays belong to the dramatic or the postdramatic tradition. Her work, like theatre in general, must be approached in its plurality, its complexity and its richness. The point of this close examination, however, was to shed light on the evolving status of language, which is the key element of Churchill's aesthetic, and the dialectical relationships between text and stage that are both challenged by the representation of terror. Terror is defined by Anthony Kubiak (1987) as a direct and immediate experience that eludes its enunciation or representation and silences the performance (80-82). It is therefore different from terrorism which is 'the reification of terror into history as historicized "fact" or image' (Kubiak, 1987, 82). While several patterns of Churchill's plays allude to the horrors of the Holocaust as well as the all-threatening political climate caused by the increasing amount of terrorist attacks these last two decades and the War on Terror, her literary tour de force is to tackle a notion, i.e. terror, that defies its own representation.

The object of this thesis was to analyse two dystopian plays by Caryl Churchill: *Far Away* and *Escaped Alone*, respectively written in 2000 and 2016. The purpose of these analyses that led to the identification of the cardinal features of her theatrical aesthetic, was to shed a new light on her dramaturgy of terror. Tackling barbarism, violence and horror on stage has always called into question the limits of representation. The British stage has shown a fierce and compulsive will to question the theatre's *raison d'être* in its attempt to address human barbarism.

Dramatists, in the twentieth century, wrote about the anguish of destruction in the *comedies of menace*. Humanity's darker portrait was the central topic of Barker's *theatre of catastrophe* in the eighties. A decade later, the staging of horror reached a climax with the wave of the *In-Yer-Face* theatre, determined to violate taboos about sex and violence and to confront the audience with representations whose effects relied on abjection and shock. The last two decades have been marked by the emergence of another type of terror: terrorism has become a recurring pattern in the media, political discourses, private discussion or daily life. Significantly, *Far Away* has been considered by many critics and dramatists as 'one of the most theatrical and thrilling responses to 9/11' (Sierz, 2005, 60), whereas it was written a year before the events. In order to get a better grasp of Churchill's dramaturgy of terror, the difference between terrorism and terror, and the way the latter impacts language and performance were discussed in this thesis along with the presence of trauma that often permeates tales of terror and maintains an ambiguous relationship with language. Through the analyses of both plays, the main emphasis was laid on Churchill's formal approach. Its close examination reveals the ambiguous status of language, her innovative work on words and her questioning of the political nature of meaning. While numerous scholars have put forward the opacity of meaning in her plays and concluded to a purposeful failure of language, the argument advanced in this thesis was that Churchill's response to the senselessness of terror was more complex than a mere destruction of meaning. Instead her aesthetic reveals a heterotopic nature of language, i.e. the presence of multiple layers of meaning which compose the dramatist's aesthetic of silence.

The British female playwright, with a career spanning over sixty years and more than forty plays written and produced, is well-known for her political tone and her will to address topical issues on stage. Furthermore, she is also famous for her reluctance to impose any fixed meaning on her work. As she contended, 'playwrights don't give answers, they ask questions. We need to find new questions, which may help us answer the old ones or make them unimportant, and this means new subjects and new forms.' (Roberts, 2008, xxvi). *Far Away* is one of Churchill's most cited plays which exemplifies, next to *Escaped Alone*, her specific approach to language in her dramaturgy of terror. The dystopian tale plunges the reader/spectator into an all-threatening environment. Although space, time and any historical references are blurred by the dramatist, allusions to the contemporary real world proliferates. The play is composed of three acts linked together by the character of Joan. They are marked by an escalation of violence. In the first act, the little girl witnesses brutal acts perpetrated by her uncle on people hidden in the family shed and transported in a truck. Manipulated by her aunt who convinces her that they

are on the side of the people that make things right, she appears, several years later, as a worker in a mass-murdering system that organises grotesque parades of prisoners on their way to executions. Finally, the play ends with the characters' description of a global state of wars wherein animals are fighters alongside countries, in which any object can be a lethal weapon and nature rebels against humans.

Churchill's post-apocalyptic topography shapes a world that is not as 'far away' as it may seem. The references to the Holocaust and Hiroshima permeate her text. The discourses of the characters who try to make sense of the conflicts and discriminate enemies via absurd categorisations can be understood as a warning against political discourses which rely on the opposition between 'us' and 'them' in order to justify wars on terror. The status of the latter in the play is especially significant in Churchill's dramaturgy. The violence is mainly conveyed indirectly and terror remains mostly hidden, with the exception of the parades, albeit their grotesque aspect is another device that participates in the obliqueness of the representation of cruelty. As it has been pointed out in the analysis, the true space of terror is language. Rather than direct actions, it is through the characters' discourses and accounts of the events that the barbarism of the imaginary world is really shown. The parades, however, confront the audience with a direct depiction of terror, which raises the issue of voyeurism and the role of spectators. The meta-theatricality of the scene, relying on the logic of spectacle in a spectacle, creates a distancing effect that reflects a Brechtian influence in the play. Another feature of Churchill's dystopia, directly connected to this is the question of agency that concerns characters in their oppressive environment and spectators on their seats. The possibility of reacting against their oppressive environment is made difficult because of their participation in its terror. The frontier between good and evil is blurred by the playwright who explores the grey zone between executioners and victims. Moreover, the rebellion of natural elements may be understood as an attempt to redefine the relationships between nature and humans.

Of all the ambiguities present in *Far Away*, the most significant one concerns language. The argument proposed in this thesis is that the double-edged nature of Churchill's language can be grasped in the light of Michel Foucault's concept of *heterotopia*. The status of meaning in the text indeed appears as dual. On the one hand, if words keep their literal sense, the world of *FA* remains a grotesque deformed universe. On the other hand, if the language hides another meaning, via the hypothetical use of a language game such as constrained writing by the dramatist, its opacity plunges the reader into an unfamiliar fearful atmosphere of terror. The

second possibility confronts the spectators with their own powerlessness because language is no longer an instrument to map the world and dominate it (Angel-Perez, in Angelaki, 2013, 88). Instead of concluding that Churchill's formal approach is a response to the crisis of language, the hypothesis advanced here is that language in *Far Away* is heterotopic. The spatial concept refers to real spaces that have a particular function in our society, but which are at the same time some sort of concrete utopia because they relate to other spaces that they comprise and that exist out of any physical location (Foucault, 1994, 755-756). Parallely, in *Far Away*, words are composed of several layers of meanings and the horror hides in between. This observation permits to conclude that Churchill, in relying on an indirect and multi-faceted approach to language, directly tackles terror, which, in Kubiak's theorization of the concept (1987), silences the performance. Language is the space of terror that is concealed in the well-formed English sentences. This ascetic form, in its bareness, however, bears 'lineaments of hope' (Balasopoulos, in Vieira, 2013, 61). The ending of *Far Away*, through the simplicity of its formal expression that mirrors a renewed relationship between humans and nature, takes a poetical accent and bears the marks of a utopian impulse. In its respect, Churchill's dramaturgy follows Adorno's vision of an art that should embrace its own contradictions, its antagonism, instead of aiming to create a false idealisation (Bernard, 2005, 34-35).

The aesthetic of silence also characterises Churchill's approach to language in *Escaped Alone*. Written sixteen years after *Far Away*, the plays share important similarities. Both dystopias portray worlds of piled-up absurd violent deeds. Their unfamiliar or defamiliarised settings destabilise the audience and foster reflections about the reality that is reversely mirrored. *Escaped Alone*, however, next to the dystopic world that is described by Mrs Jarrett in direct addresses to the audience, confronts the spectators with a drastically different picture, the one of four old ladies chatting in a garden on a summer afternoon. While the discussions are playful and the tone is alternately light or serious, they reveal personal distresses that are exposed in lengthy soliloquies. These distresses parallel the global disasters from which Mrs J has 'escaped alone'. Both situations, the one of the ladies and the survivor's position convey a feeling of solitude, a difficulty to bond and the loss of agency. However, Churchill's epic use of a distancing effect and historicisation, via the particular status of Mrs Jarrett which stresses the fictional world of the stage, allows the audience to develop a critical thinking and therefore regain some agency. Language, in this two-sided dystopia, is the space of trauma. The paradoxical nature of the former, made of what is said (words) and what is left unsaid (gaps) responds to the difficulty to convey a traumatic experience. Besides, Churchill's words are

scarred and distorted by the traumas they describe. Repetitions, disappearing punctuation marks, musical patterns and disintegrating sentences compose the characters' accounts of a phobic fear of cats, a depressive state and a murder, i.e. events that have defined the women's lives. All in all, Churchill's approach to language mirrors a difficulty to speak about the contemporary world. She achieves it by taking detours such as the use of the absurd, or of a circular repetitive pattern that illustrates the problematisation of communication.

In addition to the textual analyses, the first British productions of each play was briefly surveyed in order to observe how the identified features of Churchill's theatrical aesthetic were tackled on stage. Both productions, Stephen Daldry's *Far Away* and James Macdonald's *Escaped Alone*, proved to be sober responses to the many challenges posed by the texts. An epic aesthetic was identified in the two stagings: Daldry with a carnivalesque show for the parade and Macdonald with the emphasis on Mrs Jarrett's status of the outsider, the guide for the audience. Daldry, in *Far Away*, emphasised the dreamlike – nightmarish – aspect of the play, comparable to a fable that cautiously hid its pervading terror. Besides, the normalised status of violence was conveyed by the calm tone and the body language of the actors. His work on the gap between the blindness of the characters regarding their fictional universe and the distanced vision of the audience judiciously reflected the text's multiple layers of meaning. Macdonald, in *Escaped Alone*, addressed the difficulty to voice a traumatic experience and the resulting feeling of solitude. Furthermore, the ungraspable nature of barbarism was enhanced by the disbelief and surprise of the audience that the monologues of Mrs J triggered. On the whole, the directors were faithful to the playwright's will not to impose meaning.

To conclude, Caryl Churchill's formal approach to language, which is the kernel of her dramaturgy of terror, reveals a constant will to innovate and to explore the many possibilities hidden in words. Her aesthetic is characterised by the emphasis on the inherent aporia of language, a language that aims 'to stage what cannot be voiced' (Angel-Perez, 2003, 7) and that, beyond its seeming failure and senselessness, proves to bear multiple layers of meaning. In this respect, it responds to Adorno's call for a utopian hope that would grow from the ruins of a collapsed world:

Seul l'art, lorsqu'il se détourne des chimères de la réconciliation, peut dévisager la catastrophe et dans ce face à face faire advenir une forme encore impensée d'utopie : « Only by virtue of the

absolute of collapse does art enunciate the unspeakable: utopia » (Adorno⁶⁷ quoted in Bernard, 2005, 34).

Churchill voices the unvoiceable. Through her aesthetic of silence, she lays terror and trauma bare, two motifs which have been theorised as existing outside the realm of language. Her formal work echoes the words of the American writer Susan Sontag. In her essay 'The Aesthetics of Silence' (2002), she made the following observation about the dialectical relationship between language and silence in art: 'As language points to its own transcendence in silence, silence points to its own transcendence – to a speech beyond silence' (18). The possibility of utopia that hides between the lines of Churchill's dystopias is perhaps the very expression of a speech beyond silence.

⁶⁷ Adorno, T. (1997). *Aesthetic Theory*. London: The Athlone Press, 32.

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