

University of Sarajevo
Faculty of Philosophy
English Language and Literature Department

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Student: Mia Babić
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Supervisor: assist.prof. Ifeta Čirić-Fazlija, PhD

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POLITIČKA DRAMA U AMERICI POSLIJE DRUGOG SVJETSKOG RATA I U NOVOM
MILENIJU

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Student: Mia Babić
Broj indeksa: 2617/2017
Status: Redovan

Mentor: doc.dr. Ifeta Čirić-Fazlija

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1. Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to examine the Theater of the Holocaust and the Theater of Genocide in the context of the (postwar and new millennial) political drama in the U.S. The thesis is divided into several segments, beginning with the descriptive segment that features a short survey of the development of political drama in the U.S., within which I situate Theaters of the Holocaust and Genocide. The main analytical segment of the paper is subdivided into two sections, each dedicated to two of the four plays selected for the analysis: Shimon Wincelberg's *Resort 76*, George Tabori's *The Cannibals*, Kitty Felde's *A Patch of Earth*, and Katherine Filloux's *Silence of God*. The first two plays are included in *The Theatre of the Holocaust: Volume 1* (1982) by Robert Skloot, while the other two are to be found in Skloot's collection *The Theatre of Genocide: Four Plays about Mass Murder in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Armenia* (2008).

Wincelberg's *Resort 76* (1981) follows the lives of Jews in the Lodz ghetto in Poland. Five stories unfold in a realist dilapidated factory setting where Jewish victims live a life of deprivation and hardships – they are reduced to bare survival and as such struggle to retain their humanity. The presence of the perpetrators of the Holocaust is downplayed in favor of giving prominence to the victims' actions and their ethical implications.

The plot of *The Cannibals* (1967), as suggested by the play's title, centers on a moral issue of survival which is only possible by committing a barbarous act of cannibalism. The story is presented in a non-realist fashion, with prominent use of role-play, reminiscent of Brecht's theater, which prevents the audience from becoming emotionally invested in the lives of the characters. Similarly to *Resort 76*, *The Cannibals* is a darkly humorous exploration of moral choices, but one where the question of "who will tell the story" complicates the audience's judgment of the characters' actions.

A Patch of Earth (2007) is an example of documentary theater and follows the trial of one man, Dražen Erdemović, who helped perpetrate the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995. Dražen is haunted by the ghosts of his victims and shunned by his closest family, but it is his decision to speak up about his crimes that calls for audiences' sympathy, whether voluntary or not. By putting a face to one of the perpetrators, the play challenges the common perception of mass murder(s) being a result of inherent, irredeemable evil and foregrounds key factors that led to the genocide.

Filloux's *Silence of God* (2007) also asserts that even the perpetrators of mass murder(s) have both good and evil side to them, but unlike Felde, who does so by focusing on a common foot soldier, Filloux explores the issue through several characters, including Pol

Pot, the leader of Khmer Rouge responsible for the deaths of millions, and his political adversary, Ta Mok. Nevertheless, Filloux primarily relies on the figure of a journalist to pose questions and address the issues that dominate the play. As the play overall is a philosophical inquiry, many questions are left open, including the one about whether anything can be done to prevent mass murder(s) in the future.

In the course of my analysis I will first present brief summaries of the stories that the plays dramatize and then examine key thematic and formal elements. Moreover, I intend to highlight recurring themes of remembrance, trauma, and complicity – both individual and collective – as well as the selected plays’ attempt at tracing historical and cultural forces which could have created a fertile ground for mass murders to take place. In the penultimate chapter of my final paper, I will examine whether the selected plays’ focus is primarily on the victims or on the perpetrators, and to what extent and purpose. Since nearly three decades passed between the publication of the two anthologies, my aim is to explore whether a subtle shift in the treatment of the issues relevant to both dramatic subgenres took place. *Resort 76* and *The Cannibals* are primarily concerned with documenting the suffering of the Jewish people and other minorities, as well as affirming the dignity of the victims. On the other hand, *A Patch of Earth* and *Silence of God* take a closer look at the very perpetrators of mass murders, and endeavor to examine the nature of evil by pointing out the complexity of factors that led to the mass murders, and addressing the issues of complicity and accountability that relate to perpetrators and silent bystanders both.

In the paper’s concluding remarks, I will reflect on the plays’ potential for peace-building and reconciliation, but also for processing and resolving trauma and secondary-trauma. My main argument is that the selected plays’ success in dealing with such highly sensitive topics lies in the authors’ deft use of historical accounts and real-life facts whose dramatization results in highly fluid and abstract settings that might potentially achieve universality without sacrificing the local and the individual. Although the paper primarily relies on my close reading of the primary sources, the theoretical background is drawn from Robert Skloot’s introductions to two anthologies. A range of secondary sources, listed in the bibliography and dealing primarily with dramatization of war, trauma, and memory have helped build and support my argumentation.

2. The Rise of the Political Theater in the U.S. and its Transformation

Artistic creation and expression has always invited exploration of questions and issues that strike at the very heart of human existence – by the beginning of the twentieth century, however, dramatic texts imbued with new destabilizing and rupturing currents of thought¹ have foregrounded bleaker and less savory aspects of human nature, namely humanity's tendency towards craving and exercising power, and its capacity for violence, for the sake of both surviving and establishing domination over others. This decidedly bleaker approach meant reexamination of the old questions concerning an individual's position and freedom within the society and humanity's inherently fallible nature, but also signaled the time when encounters with monumental events would become unavoidable; these events would go on to have a profound and lasting effect on the collective psyche. Due to its immediacy, theater has proven to be a particularly effective means of chronicling and addressing these new changes. Nevertheless, its potential to address pertinent issues was not always made use of; for a rather long time, theater remained an ally to those seeking escape and cherishing the status quo.

In the 19th century, melodrama and the well-made play – melodrama's most carefully contrived and artificially crafted form – were the most pervasive forms of theater (Wilson and Goldfarb 328). Although such theater was denigrated by playwrights and theater professionals who wanted to push the boundaries and experiment with this form, audiences were drawn to it: these plays succeeded in conjuring up the pleasant illusion of safety and stability, and thus, by pandering to one of the basic human needs, commercial success was guaranteed. Yet despite the ongoing threat of commercialization, theater remained a place of the most radical experimentations and daring questioning of reality, human nature and social order – the developments in the U.S. theater in the early 20th century certainly would reflect that.

In the second decade of the 20th century, people in the U.S., but also worldwide, who began to digest the new findings in the fields of biology, psychology and physics² had to also come to terms with rampant industrialization, as well as social and political upheavals. The “era of unrest was ushered in by World War I which [...] resulted in 8.5 million deaths” and was further deepened by the Russian Revolution of 1917 (Wilson and Goldfarb 336). The rise of the proletariat in Russia, in particular, made it impossible to ignore the existing socio-

¹Truly perception-shattering strands of thought began to take root in the nineteenth century, and by the twentieth century, their reach and influence increased to such an extent that there was no longer an option of substituting the new reality for the previous one. In such process, Wilson and Goldfarb highlight the key role of the following publications: *On the Origin of Species* (1859), *Das Kapital* (1867), and *Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) (336).

²In 1905 Albert Einstein had partially formulated his theory of relativity, casting doubt on the immutability of the laws that were thought to govern the universe and thus also other aspects of life (Wilson and Goldfarb 336).

economic conditions and the growing gap between Capitalism's staunchest supporters (and greatest beneficiaries) and the working class. For the U.S. context, the Great Depression of 1929 delivered the decisive blow to the economy, at the same time shattering the illusion of peace between the classes, but even prior to this event, there were artists who engaged in formal and thematic experimentation with the aim of producing plays that would fit this new reality shaped by myriads of unrests—many of them can be classified as politically-engaged and class-conscious theater that is often referred to through use of the umbrella term “political theater”.

Similarly to Europe and its independent theaters³, the wave of experimentation in the U.S. rose due to the so-called *little theater* movement (Wilson and Goldfarb 344). Despite the (not so) subtle variation in approaches, these individuals and groups were all dedicated to providing “alternatives to commercial theatre [and] often presented experimental, nonrealistic work [while] offer[ing] a haven for controversial or unknown realistic drama (Wilson and Goldfarb 329). Bigsby posits that, prior to these developments, the 19th century U.S. theaters “provided both distraction and a displaced sense of potential” and even its serious, social problem drama was tinged by elements of melodrama (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Volume 1: 1900-1940* 1). The theater enthusiasts and professionals that reinvigorated, and for the first time established truly American theater, were the pioneering Provincetown Players of Provincetown. Their innovations and experimentation, however, did not result in self-contained theater that neglected the political and/or social dimension. The work of Eugene O’Neill and Susan Glaspell of the Provincetown Players, for example, embodied artistic experimentation while also pointing out pressing political issues: in *The Hairy Ape*, a 1922 expressionist piece, O’Neill tackles class relations and, through the character of Yank, foregrounds the profound dehumanization with which a (working) human being somehow has to cope, while Glaspell’s *Trifles* (1916) raises awareness about the precarious position of women in a male-dominated society while promoting the sense of female agency and community. While these two plays may be perceived and interpreted as political due to the themes they explore, not all critics would support the classification of them as political plays.

In his 1975 paper, titled “On Political Theatre”, Michael Kirby discusses salient features of political theater, ultimately proposing a rather restrictive definition of what political theater is; he does this by, among other things, focusing on what it cannot be. Kirby

³Wilson and Goldfarb highlight the importance of the Théâtre-Libre, the Freie Bühne, the Independent Theatre, and the Moscow Art Theatre in particular (342–343).

introduces his argument by listing four different meanings of the word “political”⁴ and emphasizing the definitions’ stress on “active intent”:

Theatre is political if it is *concerned with* the state or *takes sides* in politics. This allows us to define “political theatre” in a way that distinguishes it from other kinds of theatre: it is a performance that is intentionally concerned with government, that is intentionally engaged in or consciously takes sides in politics. (129)

Following this definition, but also keeping in mind additional arguments that highlight the intellectual dimension of political plays and their ideological coloring (Kirby 130–131), only those plays that are affiliated with either the left or the right⁵ and that are plainly didactic can qualify as political plays. Moreover, it is the function of the political theater to pose political questions and propose solutions to specific issues and societal ills, but even more so “to change the beliefs and opinions of the spectator [...], seek[ing] political action based upon these changes” (Kirby 132). The earliest formulations, beginning with Erwin Piscator, were more revolutionary still:

Piscator was one of the first to define political theatre in the early part of the twentieth century. [He] advocated a theatre that championed the cause of the proletariat in the battle against the bourgeoisie (Kershaw 1999, p. 67) [sic!]. His vision, underpinned by Marxism, was to produce theatre that would promote revolution and the overthrow of capitalism. (Caceres 9)

In order to inspire these changes in the American society, the political theater in 1930s needed to be entertaining and instructive, with themes that would resonate with the American citizens and exploiting suitable techniques in presenting them:

[T]he “agit-prop” play, borrowed from the Russian theatre of the Revolution when the Soviet Communist Party’s Agitation and Propaganda Department was very active. [...] It was largely used by Brecht but in most productions that were successful in the United States, “agit-prop” plays were unquestionably American as far as their content was concerned. (Anton-Pacheco 23)

⁴The four meanings that Kirby draws from Merriam-Webster dictionary are: “1. of or concerned with government, the state or politics; 2. having a definite governmental organization; 3. engaged in or taking sides in politics: as *political* parties; 4. of or characteristic of political parties or politicians: as *political* pressure” (qtd. in Kirby 129).

⁵Political theater seems inherently leftist. Both the 1930s U.S. context and new millennium theater seem devoid of such plays, or perhaps they are simply an oddity and are neglected by academic studies. Several articles, from both sides of the Atlantic, examine why that is so (see Cohen; Rayner; Douglass).

For American playwrights such as Clifford Odets and Lillian Hellman the preferred approach was a decidedly realist one. Just like Bertolt Brecht was well-acquainted with Marxist thought, both Odets and Hellman held leftist beliefs that were expressed (more or less overtly) in their plays. The message to those sympathetic to the cause was conveyed, but without the protection afforded by concealing theatrical experimentation, it also reached the wrong ears – Hellman and Odets were among those artists who received summons for hearing by the House Un-American Activities Committee.⁶

Kirby's proposed definition, however, excludes both the Group Theater, which, in Bigsby's words, "never adopted a coherent political position [...] and yet [...] was animated by social vision" (*A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-Century American Drama, Volume 1: 1900-1940* 161), and the government-sponsored Federal Theater Project. If this understanding of the political theater was not fully applicable during an era of the boldest agit-prop drama and incredibly zealous converts, then it was utterly shattered with the rise of the counterculture and new battlefronts that the different minority groups of America had opened up.

When one looks at the definitions of political theater that are available online, particularly in different educational resources, one may encounter this definition:

[Political theater is] a term denoting theatre used for political purposes, usually as part of a campaign or movement, sometimes as part of the work of a political party. At its loosest, it can have a wide application ranging from community theatre to consciousness-raising by groups with a specific identity such as women's, black or gay companies. [...] Common themes emerged – for peace against war, for democracy and justice against exploitation and tyranny – and common forms too, e.g. Agitprop. ("Political Theater")

This definition found on *Drama Online* offers a succinct view of the political theater as a means of fighting against not just the Capitalism of the governing system, but all the marginalizing policies with which the system aims to preserve its power. As Leticia Caceres stresses, this theater can then be said to "operat[e] within the dominant, [...] providing through the poetics of theatricality, the means of resistance" (9).

⁶ House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was established in 1938, gaining considerable influence during the second "Red Scare". The committee inquired into all subversive and treasonous activities that suggested Communist ties (History.com Editors "HUAC"). Many artists summoned for a hearing, including Lillian Hellman, were blacklisted for their refusal to answer the committee's questions and name individuals ("I Cannot and Will Not Cut My Conscience to Fit This Year's Fashions": Lillian Hellman Refuses to Name Names).

In his paper Kirby concludes that a successful political theater play does not always have to reach new people and change their opinions; it is of nearly equal value if it can give emotional and intellectual support to those who already agree with its position [...] giv[ing] them the feeling that they are not alone in their beliefs, that others are actively involved and pursuing the same goals. Thus, it can be an important force in political change. (Kirby 135)

Despite arguing for a fairly limiting definition of the political theater, Kirby acknowledges that political theater draws its power from empowering those who are actively seeking change—this role became more prominent with the beginning of the sixties and seventies when the political theater became the means of proclaiming one’s determination to seek equality and live one’s identity freely. Plays by African-American authors of the Civil Rights Era, such as Lorraine Hansberry, have been lauded for both their artistic and political dimension, but the very act of producing an African-American play or Chicano play or Gay and Lesbian play is a political act.

In his essay on political theater, Tony Kushner criticizes attempts at separating the personal and the political; the former is given a mythical quality and perceived as tragedy-producing hubris while the latter is added to heighten the plot, but can never be the motivation for it:

In a lot of theater in this country, the personal is what you make art out of and the political is what you try to avoid discussing at parties; or maybe an occasional current event worms its way into the theater you do, which is fine. Politics in moderation spices up the proceedings, adds a contemporary punch to that tired second act, [...] as long as the real issues are adhered to: Joe Jr.’s rotten childhood, caused by Joe Sr.’s rotten childhood. (Kushner 21)

In Kushner’s view, if the political background of the event is denied, then one freely grants the oppressor the power to define both events and whole identities. If one identifies “oneself as a pariah, as Other, [he/she] take[s] the right and privilege of definition away from the oppressor” (Kushner 26). Moreover, by doing so, one gains control of his/her personal narrative and offers a historical account that will prevent, or at least minimize distortion of history, a particularly common occurrence if it holds accounts of unjust and deplorable treatment.

Theatre has the unique ability “to incorporate in dramatic material profound, provocative, timeless observations about the human condition” (Wilson and Goldfarb 8). After the unprecedented scale of violence and destruction in the 20th century, it became impossible for authors and spectators to ignore the mounting fear and new conclusions about human nature and the course in which the entire humanity is heading. It has become impossible not to entertain questions and issues that strike at the very heart of human existence: if some of us are capable of such crimes, is all of human nature then ultimately fallible, violent and evil? Certain monumental events strike at our very core, destabilizing and threatening to undo us. These events carry such power that it bears little significance whether they have taken place at our doorstep or somewhere far away – processing them is a challenging, difficult process.

The concern for ordinary men and women consumed by the capitalist system and the leftist political sentiment of figures such as Clifford Odets, Irwin Shaw, and Lillian Hellman, but also of theatre companies such as the Group Theater, signaled the initial rise of the political drama in the U.S. As the century progressed, the political function of theater only became more prominent as various marginalized and otherized groups began to fight for their right towards “the pursuit of happiness”. Political theater, however, continued to evolve beyond the examination of working-class issues and exploration of political function of drama written by, for and about those groups that faced marginalization and discrimination based on some or several core aspects of their identities. In fact, this new form of theater explores the extreme outcome that results from the meeting of oppressive political system and hatred of the Other: mass killings.

Among the forms that began to emerge after the Second World War, witnessing further expansion in the first two decades of the new millennium, one of the most challenging and perplexing is the one that tackles the theme of mass killings: one form of it may be examination of great loss of lives atrocities and genocide. For all the reality-shattering effects of different social phenomena and events, the twentieth century will be remembered first and foremost by the unprecedented scale of crimes and atrocities suffered individually and collectively, while the world stood witness. If human nature can perpetrate and allow the Holocaust or Armenian, Cambodian, Rwandan and Bosnian genocides to occur, then the belief in humankind’s unceasing improvement and betterment cannot remain intact. Theater and other art and literary forms, however, have offered a way to restore balance and peace of mind while simultaneously expressing sharp criticism of this humanity’s failure. A subgenre of a political drama that contains both of these elements is a subject of interest of Robert

Skloot who has collected several such plays in two anthologies titled *The Theatre of the Holocaust: Volume 1*, and *The Theatre of Genocide: Four Plays about Mass Murder in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Armenia*, published in 1982 and 2008 respectively.

Robert Skloot, a longtime professor of Theater, Drama and Jewish Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, coined both the term “Theatre of the Holocaust” and “Theatre of Genocide” in an effort to draw attention to plays that dramatize mass killings and atrocities, treating them as separate from the theater that takes war as its subject matter, although they share similar strategies and concerns. In his introduction to *The Theatre of the Holocaust: Volume 1*, he stresses that the focus of this type of drama is on nothing less than “events of shattering and lasting effect on whole peoples” (Skloot 3). Skloot, however, immediately argues that such events are intensely relevant to the entire humanity, by identifying the Holocaust as *the* event that disturbed the collective consciousness and cast doubt on all the progress that the human race had achieved up to that point – for all the legacies of the Holocaust, at “the heart of its heritage is the continuing moral inquiry into the meaning of the events of that time” (“Introduction” 9). What does such rapid and unimpeded flourishing of evil on such a large-scale tell us about ourselves and about humanity in general? Art has offered space for these and many other related questions, and none have seemed as fitting to address the horrifyingly personal effect of the Holocaust as the theater whose “temporal and physical nature evokes immediate and intense interaction, permitting less evasion by encouraging greater subjective involvement” (“Introduction” 16).

In line with the idea of coming to terms with the Holocaust, but also with the need for an engaged approach, the framework which Skloot used to write down the tenets of the “Theatre of the Holocaust” had more to do with the playwrights’ motivation and aims, rather than strict outlining of thematic and formal treatment of the subject matter:

In general, playwrights of the Theatre of the Holocaust are motivated by five objectives, often simultaneously pursued: 1) to pay homage to the victims, if not as individuals then as a group; 2) to educate audiences to the facts of history; 3) to produce an emotional response to those facts; 4) to raise certain moral questions for audiences to discuss and reflect upon; and 5) to draw a lesson from the events re-created. (“Introduction” 14)

In this paragraph, one can recognize the key elements of a political theater, namely the intertwining of the personal and the political that seeks the audience’s engagement on two levels, the individual and the societal, with the crucial difference being the lack of specific

strategies and solutions to the questions posed by the plays. The listing of the objectives also leads me to conclude that characteristics of the “Theatre of the Holocaust” and “Theatre of Genocide” overlap significantly and that the latter may be observed and examined as the evolution of the former. A short overview of the terms “Holocaust” and “genocide” offers a good starting point for further development of this claim.

The first use of the term “genocide” dates back to 1944 and to the publication of *Axis Rule in Occupied Europe* (“Coining a Word and Championing a Cause: The Story of Raphael Lemkin”). In it, Raphael Lemkin, a Polish-Jewish lawyer and human rights advocate, introduced the term genocide as denoting “the destruction of a nation or of an ethnic group [...], the actions involved [...] directed against individuals, not in their individual capacity, but as members of the national group” (Lemkin qtd. in “Coining a Word and Championing a Cause: The Story of Raphael Lemkin”). Ten years after the first nation-wide escalation of violence towards Jewish people⁷, a mere prelude to the horrifying persecution and killing that would follow, “genocide” was recognized by the international law⁸. The nearly unimaginable scale of the extermination, as well as the ruthlessness of the methods used, led to the Jewish genocide being more often referred to as “the Holocaust”⁹. The Holocaust entered the collective consciousness of the humanity, becoming the “paradigmatic genocide” (“Education Working Group Paper on the Holocaust and Other Genocides” 1), but it also ensured that the genocides that preceded it¹⁰, as well as those that would follow, were recognized as such and closely studied.

A mere glance at the titles of Robert Skloot’s two anthologies – published twenty-six years apart – is enough to note the same increase in scope, but the issue of comparing the characteristics and motivation behind “The Theatre of Holocaust” and “The Theatre of Genocide” is significantly more complicated. In my paper, I attempt to prove that although the plays collected in Skloot’s second anthology, titled *The Theatre of Genocide: Four Plays*

⁷ On November 9-10, 1938, close to two hundred synagogues were destroyed and thousands of people were assaulted throughout Germany (“Introduction” 7). This event came to be known as the *Kristallnacht* or “The Night of Broken Glass”, due to “the shattered glass that littered the streets after the vandalism and destruction of Jewish-owned businesses, synagogues, and homes (The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum “Kristallnacht”).

⁸ According to an entry in the Holocaust Encyclopedia: “On December 9, 1948, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide” (“Coining a Word and Championing a Cause: The Story of Raphael Lemkin”).

⁹ In their examination of the term “Holocaust”, Zev Garber and Bruce Zuckerman trace its origins to the Ancient Greek word *holokaustos*, meaning “something wholly burnt up”. They assert that “[t]he connotation of not merely massacre, but destruction by fire” (189) evokes very powerful images of the very real Nazi furnaces/crematoriums.

¹⁰ As claimed by unnamed authors of “Education Working Group Paper on the Holocaust and Other Genocides”: “In part due to [the] investigation of the Holocaust [...] the crimes against the Armenians have been restored to history and scholars are studying numerous other instances of inhumanity” (1).

about Mass Murder in Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, and Armenia, do not demonstrate significant innovation either thematically or formally, it is possible to identify a subtle shift in approaching the themes of genocide and mass atrocities – for this reason, the slight difference in the names of the two theaters does not reflect merely the increase in scope, but may indicate a changing treatment of genocide in theater and art that coincides with the scientific studies of this phenomena.

For the purpose of shedding light on both the similarities and differences, the four analyzed plays are divided into two sections, based on the anthology-cum-theater trend from which they originate. The chapter that follows focuses on two “Holocaust plays”, *Resort 76* by Shimon Wincelberg, and *The Cannibals* by George Tabori.

3. Affirming Humanity and Documenting Evil: Wincelberg's *Resort 76* and Tabori's *The Cannibals*

In the eyes of the Nazi regime, the groups that were marked for persecution and death – Jewish people, Roma people, homosexuals, the physically and mentally disabled, Slavic peoples, and religious and political dissenters – were all inherently subhuman and thereby a threat to the purity of the Aryan master race, but the ones who were singled out and subjected to the most atrocious physical and psychological tortures were the Jewish people.¹¹ Although the unprecedented scale and ruthlessness of the atrocities committed during the Second World War left a deep imprint on the humankind's collective psyche, those who either inherited the trauma or suffered it first-hand were left to carry an even greater burden of bringing stories of such treatment to light. Many playwrights succeeded in dramatizing the Holocaust by moving beyond documentation and purely factual accounts, but still relying on a framework that would reveal the specific practices used against the victims – both Shimon Wincelberg's *Resort 76* and George Tabori's *The Cannibals* deftly combine fact and fiction, albeit in two completely different ways.

Wincelberg's *Resort 76* (1982) was originally published as *The Windows of Heaven* in 1961 and based on a novella titled *A Cat in the Ghetto* which was written by Rachmil Bryks, a survivor of Auschwitz (Plunka 76). In the span of three acts, *Resort 76* attempts to chronicle the life of the Jewish denizens who are trapped in the Lodz ghetto in Poland and forced to operate a rug factory that simultaneously strengthens German economy and helps conceal its crimes. Written in a realist manner with a touch of black comedy, the play pays a tribute to the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime by foregrounding their difficult living conditions and choices. At first glance, one can freely interpret the previous sentence as being used in reference to George Tabori's *The Cannibals* (1968) – the difference would amount to the structure of the play and formal elements of Epic Theater that Tabori incorporated in the play in order to achieve an alienating effect. Due to its Auschwitz setting and the central question of whether the diverse cast of bunkmates (including a Roma, a Greek, and a gay man) will turn to cannibalism, one may also conclude that Tabori's play also centers on the same questions of morality and taking responsibility for one's actions, but simply deals with more extreme circumstances and leaves space for significantly more cynical conclusions.

¹¹ For this reason, mentioning the systematic extermination of the “undesirables” in labor and death camps tends to bring to mind primarily the Jewish population. This is reflected in the term “Holocaust” as it generally seen as denoting the deaths of Jewish people under the Nazi regime, rather than those of all persecuted groups (Schwartz “The Holocaust: Non-Jewish Victims”). The usage itself may vary, however. Moreover, as demonstrated by one of the selected plays (*The Cannibals*), certain authors writing about the Holocaust may decide to address the plight of other groups who had faced imprisonment and potential annihilation.

3.1. Shimon Wincelberg's *Resort 76*

The play's stage directions immediately set the tone of the play and provide the necessary context – the action takes place in “a small factory for the salvage of textile wastes” (Wincelberg 41) in the Lodz Ghetto, one of the so-called Rehabilitation Zones in Poland. Wincelberg revealed the precise location in a footnote clarifying the meaning of “Rehabilitation Zones” (Wincelberg 41), but otherwise suggested that the play's setting could be any ghetto in any occupied Eastern European country ; this provided him with an opportunity to pay homage to *A Cat in the Ghetto* on which his play had been based and to add a degree of authenticity to the experiences of the ten occupants of the Resort 76 that he focused on in the play. The first thread of the story is the arrival of the Nazi apologist, Krause, who Wincelberg simply characterized as “an outsider” (41) and an audience surrogate. The audience (hopefully) does not share Krause's beliefs, but certainly shares the lack of intimate knowledge of the living circumstances of the imprisoned Jewish laborers.

Together with Krause, the audience is transported into an entirely different realm where they are greeted by “a sullen, sunless sky” and a “WORK IS FREEDOM” poster (Wincelberg 43), the universal signifier of the Holocaust. To make the ghetto seem as alien to Krause (and the audience) as possible, the first person he encounters is Yablonka, a hustler “with a wild, wiry shock of red hair and the large, staring, shrewd, hooded eyes and nutcracker jaws of a Punch puppet” (Wincelberg 43). He appears a carnivalesque figure due to his appearance and frequent, dark cracks about the status of Jews in the Polish ghetto, one such being a remark that “(their) neighborhood has begun to look like Hollywood in America. Wherever you turn, you see a star” (Wincelberg 47). Yablonka is not the only such character – the other most obvious example being Hupert – since Wincelberg frequently employs dark humor and witticisms as a way of indicating the characters' coping mechanisms and drawing laughter from the audience, making them complicit. I would argue, however, in line with the play in its entirety, that the primary function of humor in this play is actually meant to be life-affirming and indicative of the characters' resolution to survive for as long as possible.

Wincelberg's stage directions invite us to imagine a decaying industrial city on a cold winter afternoon, but while the imagery of death and destruction is ever-present on the outside, the interior of the factory (named Resort 76 by the occupying forces, but also embraced by the occupants in an act of defiance) reveals hints of life that refuses to be extinguished:

The windows look out upon the huddled roofs and chimneys of a bomb-scarred industrial city. The room holds a table, covered with a tattered lace tablecloth, a bench, an assortment of chairs; a tall, ornate mahogany cupboard, and numerous flimsy or improvised chests and suitcases, elaborately locked. Also a dead grandfather clock, a washtub, a small, hidden bookshelf, the corpse of a bicycle, and a baby carriage filled with soil which bears a number of sullen, colorless plants. The window ledges are covered with flower pots and improvised planters, some of which also have begun to yield a sickly gray leaf here and there. (Wincelberg 48)

The listing of furniture items, but particularly flower pots and improvised planters suggest that the occupants of the Resort 76 are clinging to life, although the hard labor of producing rugs from discarded clothes continues to push them to their limits. Wincelberg describes the whole area as devoid of color, except for “the garish spectrum of indelible dye-stains on people’s hands, faces, hair, clothes” (Wincelberg 48) – the presence of color, even if it results from exhaust fumes, evokes a sense of vitality that further supports the previous argument, but the difficult living conditions and the sense of fear and despondence are a constant presence throughout the play.

Prior to Krause’s arrival, the occupants of Resort 76 are: engineer Blaustain, his pregnant wife Esther, Yablonka and Hupert, a hustler and a charlatan, former military officer Hauptmann, a teenager Beryl who questions his faith, and his religious teacher, Schnur, who is a slaughterer by occupation,. The whole cast consists of ten characters, the aforementioned six and the newly arrived Krause together with Madame Hershkovitch, who does not live in the Resort 76, and Blaustain’s sister Anya who attempted to flee the ghetto only to be denied passage because of the increasingly steeper price of a “Certificate of Baptism” (Wincelberg 84) that carried proof of a more “suitable” ethnic and religious background – those with even a hint of a Jewish ancestry soon found themselves imprisoned. Wincelberg uses the character of Krause to foreground and address this and all other means of “saving” the superior race by having the Jewish population removed.

Although the introduction of Anya, and especially Madame Hershkovitch, drives the plot further and increases the tension among the inhabitants of the Resort (and arguably the entire ghetto), the initial calm, albeit gloomy atmosphere is first broken by Krause, an upstanding German citizen whose grandfather is revealed to have been “[p]olluting an innocent Aryan girl with his bestial Asiatic lusts!” (Wincelberg 74), as Krause phrases it. Krause’s black-and-white worldview and the amount of hatred he demonstrates is startling,

but plausible, particularly if one takes into account the aggressive state propaganda against the Jewish population. His attempt at justifying his own relocation, however, may be interpreted as exaggerated: “And if *they* have decided I am not fit to live among human beings, they probably know what they’re talking about” (Wincelberg 75). Denial and shifting of blame, however, are natural responses to emotionally stressful situations, and this fact, coupled with Wincelberg’s aim to underline the German citizen’s (ill placed) trust in the government, manages to account for Krause’s blindness. Blindness, which is central to Krause’s character, is made manifest on several other occasions, such as when the passage of a train – which is carrying prisoners to a death camp – bears no meaning to him, while all the others “*freeze and follow it with their ears*” (Wincelberg 57) or when he wonders about old clothes (used to make carpets) having blood stains on them (Wincelberg 58). The clothes are heavily implied (and later confirmed) to have been taken off of death camp inmates, and since even Blaustain, who is well-acquainted with the harshness and uncertainty of their life in the ghetto, preferred to think of the clothes as belonging to air raid victims (Wincelberg 86), it is hard to expect that Krause could have discerned the truth.

Other instances of Krause’s blindness, however, rest entirely on his prejudiced view of the Jewish people as materialistic and only caring about their self-interest. When Krause takes out his homemade meal, he is utterly oblivious to the fact that the “greedy eyes” of the denizens of the Resort are due to them being systematically starved out, rather than profit-oriented, leading to this brief exchange:

HUPERT (*to KRAUSE, with the manner of a man making a lewd proposition*): You wouldn’t consider selling a piece of that, would you? (The eyes seem ready to fall out of his head with greed.)

KRAUSE: Sell something my wife made for me with her own hands? She’d never forgive me. If you don’t mind my saying so, that is exactly the trouble with you people. Reckon everything in terms of money. (Wincelberg 65)

The state propaganda had dehumanized the Jewish people to such an extent that Krause is incapable of interpreting their actions and thoughts as caused by severe deprivation and isolation. In such an environment, even the prospect of catching a cat may drastically improve one’s position, but only if one is prepared to make unethical choices.

In *Resort 76*, the fate of one stray cat bears significance of both thematic and formal level. It is central to all three acts: Act I ends with Madame Hershkovitch managing to capture the cat and making a proposal to Blaustain, who is to keep the cat safe in the factory, so that

they could exchange it for a stable job and a decent amount of bread; in Act II, the news of the cat's capture causes unrest in the Resort as everyone approaches Blaustain with the goal of persuading him to trade the cat in the way that suits their best interests. The theft of the cat by an unknown assailant serves as the climax of the play; the cat reappears in and is eventually allowed to go free in Act III, but not before the group's sense of cohesion (and morality) is almost destroyed. In his "Introduction", Robert Skloot identifies five distinct storylines in *Resort 76*, all of which are progressing simultaneously and, as he stresses, focus on the difficulty and responsibility of making a moral choice:

Each story contains a description of characters caught in a moment when an action must be taken which has enormous ethical implications. Should the cat be exchanged, eaten, or set free? Should the expected child be allowed birth? Should Blaustain abandon his wife and join his sister Anya and the partisans? Should Krause be accepted or rejected? Should Beryl continue to believe in God? (Skloot 23)

Skloot is right in pointing out the existence of different threads that focus on the single overarching theme of choosing humanity in the face of evil, but I find that the story of the cat should be examined separately as it directly creates such situations – the most notable example is Blaustain's quandary.

When Madame Hershkovitch entrusts the captured cat to Blaustain, a whole range of increasingly questionable choices appears before him since the cat is believed to be a valuable commodity: he can trick Madame Hershkovitch and strike a deal with someone else; he can flee the ghetto with his sister, thereby leaving his pregnant wife behind; he can secure a safe abortion for his wife, but not without deceiving the nurse who believes that the cat can be exchanged for a decent (given the circumstances) amount of food. Even the choice of bringing the cat to the Ration Board, in exchange for a job and some bread, has dark implications, although it appears to bring considerable benefits to Blaustain (and even the cat who would be well-fed and looked after) without harming anyone:

BLAUSTAIN: Listen to me. If I get that job at the Ration Board . . .

YABLONKA: Don't talk. You haven't got it yet.

BLAUSTAIN: . . . what will become of the rest of you? They might send another engineer. Or they might close down the factory. (Wincelberg 78)

The only reason the occupants of Resort 76 are kept alive is their usefulness – without an engineer like Blaustain, the manufacturing process comes to a halt and leads to either

starvation or a deportation to one of the death camps. The (moral) issue of trading a living being in order to improve one's own situation is introduced as early as the play's opening scene when Yablonka is trying to "befriend" a stray cat (Wincelberg 44), but it is only addressed, and perhaps resolved, once the question of faith, explored most prominently through Schnur and Beryl's story, is brought into focus.

The Resort's harmony and survival rest on two human pillars, engineer Blaustain and religious tutor Schnur. While Blaustain's contribution is more practical and material, Schnur takes on the task of teaching the fifteen-year-old Beryl about Jewish religion and tradition, but primarily moral values. The usefulness of his teaching endeavors are questioned by Blaustain who suggests that it would be more sensible to teach Beryl skills "a normal boy can use – like smuggling, or forgery, or how to cut a policeman's throat" (Wincelberg 51), but the meaning of keeping faith and believing in God in the world of hatred and horrors, is also brought into question throughout the play, particularly by characters such as Yablonka who comments that "[God] must have nerves like iron!" (Wincelberg 78) when he hears Schnur telling Beryl that suffering of each and every human touches the almighty one. The more serious challenge to faith only arises near the end of the play when both Beryl and Blaustain seem to have reached a breaking point.

When Beryl attempts to dig out the Talmud¹², whose possession, together with other Jewish texts, was proclaimed illegal in the ghetto, he is caught and interrogated by the members of the police. The physical and mental torture leaves Beryl in a state of severe emotional distress, but also rage:

BERYL: Yes. I am finished with God! You have lied to me. He is not our father. If this is how a father loves his children . . . then let me be an orphan!

SCHNUR: (*gently shakes his head*): Remember what they said last year when they put up the barbed wire? They said, "Hunger will turn them into mad dogs. They will eat each other alive."

BERYL: I want to be a mad dog! I want to eat, I want to be warm, I want to kill, I want to be like them! (Wincelberg 105–106)

In this exchange, Beryl, who has gradually built up hatred equally towards Jewish mentality and the Nazi oppressors, feels safer to direct his anger towards God, who allows suffering to continue, and to the idea of (moral) perseverance in the face of such harsh treatment. The

¹² The Talmud is one of the central religious texts in Judaism, with focus on Jewish law that is relevant for both religious and non-religious life Jews (source?).

knowledge that the members of the police will be coming for Schnur triggers feelings of guilt that are then transferred to the nearest possible source: the teaching that leaves one exposed to such contempt and allows no way of countering it, since one is meant to take the “moral high road”. Quite similarly, the theft of the cat – clearly perpetrated by one of his own workers – causes Blaustain to lose faith in humanity and question the way he has survived up until now:

BLAUSTAIN (*ignores* [ESTHER]): I should have gone away with my sister, and left you all to die like dogs. What good are you?

ESTHER (*frightened*): David . . . ?

BLAUSTAIN (*instinctively*): You, too! (ESTHER *starts weeping quietly into her pillow*, BLAUSTAIN *pointedly turns his back on her*. He addresses the men, but ESTHER *keenly feels it is all meant for her alone*.) Ten times I had a chance to get out of this place. To go join the partisans, or hide in the mountains. But no. Not David Blaustain. He felt responsible for his workers. And this is how you pay me back, hah? (Wincelberg 98)

For a moment, it seems that Blaustain is quite close to adopting a more “beastly” mentality, even more so because his crisis coincides with the arrival of the policemen ready to take Schnur, but is ultimately dissuaded by the very man who is about to be taken away and killed.

In the play’s final act, Schnur emerges as the community’s moral compass, exercising great influence over both Beryl and Blaustain, but also the Resort community as a whole. Schnur’s message to Beryl that he cannot become like “them” because he is a “man, not an animal” (Wincelberg 106) is reinforced and expanded when he tells Blaustain that one has no choice but to carry the burden of responsibility and urges him to let his child be born (Wincelberg 107). The Blaustains’ choice to allow life to continue also influences the decision to let go of the cat after it was established that it has no bargaining worth, since the Food Ration has “a dozen two-legged cats” (Wincelberg 100) chasing after mice. Despite the cat’s sudden decrease in worth, the denizens of the carpet factory still have the alternative to eat the cat, but none of them are ultimately willing to make that decision, including Madame Hershkovitch who initially captured the cat in hopes of feeding her children with the bread she would have received:

BLAUSTAIN: Here. Three pounds of meat. Want me to twist her neck for you?

(BERYL *looks up, sharply*. Even HAUPTMANN *rises, takes a step into the room, looks at* MME. HERSHKOVITCH *suspensefully* [sic!]. MME. HERSHKOVITCH

stares at the sack, terrified at the responsibility. The cat meows pathetically, BLAUSTAIN opens the sack, looks inside.)

MME. HERSHKOVITCH (*abruptly*): I'm late for work.

(She retreats toward the door, afraid to make such a decision. BLAUSTAIN looks at her, then opens the window, takes the cat, and places it where it can escape along the outside gallery. For a long moment, the cat remains on the window sill, purring happily in the golden morning sun. Its shadow looms immense on the opposite wall, BERYL has put aside his book, and is watching it with all the excitement of a little boy once more. The cat abruptly streaks away. ESTHER manages a smile at its happy cry of escape.) (Wincelberg 112)

The preparedness to make the “right” decision has made an otherwise bleak ending (in which Schnur is picked up by the police after his pupil’s beating and interrogation and Krause kills himself¹³) more uplifting. As Robert Skloot points out, “the audience departs the theatre appreciative of the small—if temporary—victory of the forces which affirm life over the horrors of meaningless death” (“Introduction” 56). The play’s final line in which Yablonka tasks the cat with carrying a message of “what it was like to be a Jew” (Wincelberg 112) underlines the humanity and dignity of the victims and indicates the importance of telling their story to the world.

George Tabori’s *The Cannibals* delves into remarkably similar themes as Wincelberg but comes to decidedly more cynical conclusions, as discussed in the following sub-chapter.

3.2. George Tabori’s *The Cannibals*

In his 1974 drama titled *The Cannibals*, George Tabori examines issues which resemble those highlighted by Wincelberg in *Resort 76*. Remembrance of victims and affirmation of their humanity, however, has a significantly darker undertone since the play’s main premise is that the characters’ survival depends on their readiness to break the ultimate taboo of eating human flesh. Naturally, the theme of cannibalism cannot be taken literally (although it is not difficult to imagine that the practice was at least considered), but is meant to evoke extreme deprivation that forces victims to make choices that threaten to strip them of their humanity. Tabori introduced *The Cannibals* as an “extraordinary tale of a dinner party as told by the sons of those who attended the feast and the two survivors by whose courtesy the

¹³ Although not expounded on in this section, Krause’s suicide is discussed in the paper’s penultimate section.

facts are known” (Tabori 19). The epigraph coupled with the dedication written to “Cornelius Tabori, perished in Auschwitz, a small eater” (Tabori 19) alludes to both the meta-theatrical elements of the play and its personal significance for the author – the dinner party that the audience witnesses is reenacted by the real-life victims’ sons who assume their fathers’ roles. As the play’s author, Tabori controls the reenactment by writing the primary text, but maintains control within the play as well, by, in the fashion described above, assuming the role of Uncle Tabori who invites the other inmates to dinner and serves the meal. In fifteen scenes that are presented in a decidedly non-realist fashion, the audience becomes acquainted with twelve bunkmates of Block Six and witnesses their attempts at surviving; the individual fates of Jewish, gay, Roma, Greek and German prisoners converge during one evening which invites a philosophical inquiry about responsibility and humanity.

The action of *The Cannibals* takes place in a somewhat bare white room whose only furniture is a long table, a three-tiered bunk, and a stove – its most noticeable feature is a “mountain of clothes, shoes, hair, teeth” (Tabori 199), a grim reminder of the past that looms over the present. The reminder is both collective and individual, however, as the figures scaling the mountain are the victims’ descendants who are trying “to pick out pieces of clothing that might have belonged to their fathers or uncles” (Tabori 201). The enormity of the task is mental and physical, and the “dinner guests” are “soon [...] like inmates of a death camp” (Tabori 201). The two survivors, Heltai and Hirschler, are dressed in business suits and make small-talk full of seemingly vapid statements about their food preferences and tastes, until the mood abruptly shifts and Hirschler addresses the audience directly, saying that “there were twelve of [them] left in Block Six after Christmas” (Tabori 202). Only the two of them survived and are now living the middle-class dream. They serve as the play’s narrators, since the events that unfold in the following thirteen scenes would not be known without them.

The Scene Two sets the tone for the rest of the play and for the crucial question about the connection between self-perseverance and humanity when one of the inmates, Puffi, attempts to covertly eat a piece of bread, but is caught by the others:

PUFFI: Crunch. (*The others sit up one by one.*) Crunch. (*The others listen incredulously.*)

KLAUB: Somebody is eating!

(KLAUB, GHOULOS, and THE GYPSY begin to hunt for the one who eats. They stop, they look, they listen. They force HAAS’ mouth open to see if there are crumbs inside.)

PUFFI: C-r-r-runch. (*They turn. They watch him. They dribble like dogs, LANG faints.*) Crunch. (*He becomes aware of them. He tries to get out of the room.*)

KLAUB: Get him!

(*They pounce on PUFFI. Only UNCLE stays out of the fight. PUFFI lets out a squeak.*)

(Tabori 203)

The scuffle over the morsel of bread results in Puffi's death, but the inmates are too engrossed in their spoils to notice immediately. Even Uncle, who rebukes the others' actions, is initially too focused on enjoying the taste of stale bread to realize what has happened. Through his character, Tabori highlights the difficulty of balancing the morality and survival instinct:

UNCLE: Only man endures. Excuse me while I relieve myself.

THE OTHERS: BZZZZ

UNCLE (at the pisspot): There is no way of enduring except through courtesy, by saying even to the guards, "After you, sir." But if, God forbid, you ever become like them, that is the time to hang yourselves. There isn't by any chance another small piece left? (Tabori 204)

Both of Uncle's statements on moral, human endurance are followed up by him satisfying or wanting to satisfy one physiological need, namely need for sustenance and the need to urinate. I argue that with such juxtaposition Tabori counters the idea that morality is the defining human trait, as opposed to the basic needs which are inherently animalistic; he asserts that both are human traits instead and this premise drives (and complicates) the entire plot as the idea of eating Puffi dawns on the inmates.

Although the Second World War saw the rise of countless sites of human suffering and misery, the greatest number of deaths, and the efficiency and brutality with which they occurred, turned Auschwitz into "the emblematic site of the 'final solution,' a virtual synonym for the Holocaust" (Berenbaum "Auschwitz"). While the horrifying atmosphere within the extermination camp is not suggested via stage directions or horrible accounts of abuse and torture, the inmates' exchanges reveal the effects of living in such conditions – callous cynicism and dark humor abound in *The Cannibals*, and are made plain on occasions such as Puffi's eulogy:

UNCLE (*over PUFFI's body, a blanket around his shoulders, chanting a kaddish²*): Here cracks a noble heart, with some assistance from his friends. Puffi Pinkus, rest in peace. He was the second fattest man in Europe, a glandular freak, no mean

achievement. The guards liked to take pictures of him, to prove to posterity how well they fed us Jewdogs. He loved his children and prospered by raising geese, and exporting their liver all over the civilized world, sic transit gloria mundi. (Tabori 306)

The passage appears disrespectful and even accusatory, since Uncle implies that Puffi's obesity aided in concealing the treatment they suffered. The fact that the other inmates focus on the goose liver also adds to the general impression of disrespectfulness, but they do so because of their hunger which is so great that mere mention of food brings rapture.¹⁴ The absence of food, however, brings other, more violent emotions to the surface.

Once everyone seems set to start preparing Puffi, Uncle fiercely protests and warns them that they will find the food they have consumed loathsome, "because [they] rejected the Lord who is among [them]" (Tabori 210). Uncle, however, does not stay in the role of the preacher for too long, since he turns to the audience and explains his movements and state of mind:

(Steps forward, takes his beard off, bows to the audience.) Raising maledictions!
Cursing their heathen heads! Like a prophet whirling out of the wilderness! Waving his arms like so! His eyes starting out of his head! His throat bursting AOOOOOAI!
Or words to that effect. (Tabori 210)

This Brechtian theatre technique¹⁵ is employed by actors in order to achieve the alienating effect and highlight the artificiality of the play so as to encourage critical thinking. In this case, the distancing is twofold, since Uncle's son is playing the role of his father, and an actor is playing the role of Uncle's son. Moreover, I argue that the distancing is also a reflection of Uncle's (or at least his son's) skepticism towards religion, particularly in such moments of crisis. Ghoulous voices not only skepticism, but distaste of religion when he says

[e]xcuse me, we respect your beard, we are impressed by your white gloves, but I'm hungry. D'you understand what I'm saying? I . . . am . . . hungry. You are beautiful, but if you open your stinking mouth once more, I'll spill your brains! (Tabori 211)

The fighting indeed erupts when Uncle "denounces [the] meal" (Tabori 212) and other inmates try to secure the knife in order to cut up Puffi. This action is not, however, shown on

¹⁴ In Scene Seven, Ghoulous masturbates while others list their favorite delicacies out loud (Tabori 220).

¹⁵ "Examples of such techniques include explanatory captions or illustrations projected on a screen; actors stepping out of character to lecture, summarize, or sing songs; and stage designs that [...] keep the spectators aware of being in a theatre." (The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica "Alienation Effect").

stage, but rather recalled by Hirschler and Heltai. Their discussion over the part they played in the fight foreshadows the more prominent theme of responsibility and feelings of guilt experienced by survivors. The scene as a whole announces a subtle shift in the play's focus as philosophical issues and individual stories take precedence.

In Scene Six, Uncle abandons the role of God's prophet and instead engages in a religious argument with the gargantuan figure of the Old Testament God made up of the bodies of other inmates. The discussion concerns the act of eating human meat, and both Uncle and Klaub – who is on top of the God-figure – refer to Deuteronomy chapter of the Bible¹⁶. They quote different passages and the discussion becomes darkly humorous when Klaub argues that the God has never “forbidden [them] the fat man, the freak, the selfish gut [...] waiting for a chance to eat [the bread] unobserved” (Tabori 217). The argumentation itself, however, is not the most intriguing part of this scene – Uncle's initial address to God is meant to evoke powerful images of victims who are left to wonder at and question God's decision to let them suffer:

We shall die soon. Two more days?
[...]
Some will stay still in the dignity of their silence,
Some will squeal like scalded cats
As they scramble for the exit, scratching
Their little farewells into concrete: I WAS HERE!
Until their fingers break. I'm not complaining.
I'm sick of my lamentations. Our privies
Are already monuments, our bones are world-famous.
So damn your pity, your justice, even your love.
I want none of it. I still have my pride
In this mud, this wilderness, this city of murder, this Auschwitz.
All I want is a little information, no, I insist on it.
I want to know why this ending. (Tabori 214–215)

Although Uncle directly addresses God in this excerpt, his speech is almost a monologue that serves to affirm the very existence of the Jewish and all other persecuted people – their will to

¹⁶According to Flora Richards-Gustafson: “Deuteronomy is the fifth book of the Torah and of the Bible's Old Testament [that focuses on] the renewal of God's covenant and Moses' call to obedience.” (“What Is the Dominant Theme of the Book of Deuteronomy?”)

live on, even if only as monuments in the mental landscapes of those who did not experience their suffering, is hailed as indomitable, no matter how they carried themselves in their last moments. The excerpt's main aim, however, is to indicate the imminent change that the people's relationship with the higher power underwent while and after their time in an extermination camp; the change is mainly reflected not in the loss of faith, but the need to find out why such a destiny and injustice had to befall them in particular. There are no definitive answers, but by introducing such a universal, yet personal inquiry, Tabori set the ground for shedding light on particular characters' life stories. The first are The Gypsy and Silent Haas who are Roma and gay man, respectively.

During Scene Seven, the Gypsy recalls a dispute which erupted over the price of liverwurst and ended in the murder of the Grocer of one store. The memory is reenacted by the camp's inmates and the scene's importance is twofold. The focus on the prejudice that the Gypsy experienced even prior to his imprisonment in Auschwitz – exemplified by the Grocer's "no begging" statement (Tabori 221) – is meant to foreground the treatment of non-Jewish groups that experienced persecution, as well as the callousness and indifference of those who see but refuse to acknowledge it: in the middle of winter, the Gypsy had sold his yellow shoes, emblematic of his personality and uniqueness, in order to secure food. The selling of the shoes had the consequence of stripping away one layer of the Gypsy's humanity and the fact that this was immediately followed by him committing murder is reminiscent of the extreme deprivation that led the inmates to accidentally kill Puffi. Similarly to the Gypsy's story, Scene Eight focuses on Haas, a gay Jewish man. Although Haas's sexuality is highlighted throughout the scene, beginning with the statement that "[v]iolets, sparrows and young boys made his eyes water" (Tabori 225), his Jewish identity is not left unexplored; the fact that Haas is Jewish is what "inspires" the Gestapo officers to torture and rape him. The inclusion of this theme is meant to highlight the existence of other groups persecuted by the Nazis and the difficult legacy that the victims' descendants are left to try to cope with. In accordance with the Brechtian theater's aim of encouraging the audience's intellectual rather than emotional investment, an actor impersonating Haas should deliver his lines in the third person. However, the main reason behind such delivery might stem from the fact that the actor is actually portraying Haas's son embodying (and thus remembering) his father. Much like the audience, the son had to piece together who his father was – homosexuality is simply singled out as one of the more challenging and shocking elements. The underlying theme of remembrance and absences may not be immediately evident to the audience watching the play – as performance offers no textual signs, such as didascalies – but the final preparations for

the dinner that are led by “Uncle Tabori” (Tabori 244), as Glatz calls him at one point, help reveal this layer completely.

The rising action of Scene Eleven greatly depends on what Uncle refers to as “the usual dream of inmates” (Tabori 241), namely that they have safely returned home. The dream sequence incorporates vignettes of the past lives of the inmates and their imagined reunions with family members – who are impersonated by Uncle – making them more rounded. These miniature reenactments lead up to the most significant one: the dinner party. The dinner is hosted by Uncle who leads everyone to their seats and announces the meals that will be served. Uncle’s role as the host, his prominence in the previous scenes, and the mention of surname “Tabori”, encourage an autobiographical reading – keeping in line with the concept of sons taking on the role of their fathers, it can be argued that George Tabori also makes an appearance in *The Cannibals* and that he is the primary “host” of the dinner party. In line with this reading, the dinner is a setting that forces confrontation with the enormous (inherited) trauma. Its full impact can only be felt once Uncle announces the main course:

And here, on a great silver platter, the roast itself, swimming in a bloody gravy, a number tattooed on his back.

(GLATZ *covers his mouth*, WEISS *turns away, retching*, LANG *collapses*, HAAS *croaks and runs, leans against the wall*, THE GYPSY *bends in double*, HELTAI *takes deep breaths*, HIRSCHLER *starts out, slumps down by the door.*) (Tabori 247)

Up until this moment in the play, the dark humor and apparent gleeful insanity of the inmates had prevented a direct confrontation with the suffered trauma. Perhaps even more importantly, the inmates’ demeanor suggested that the major ethical question of the play – presented in the form of choice between cannibalism and dying – is not really a question for the majority of the inmates. Their reaction to Puffi’s body in the excerpt above suggests otherwise, and the tension only grows with the appearance of Puffi’s son who asks a simple, yet piercing question that all of the sons want to get the answer to: “Where is my father?” (Tabori 247). The answer to this question is delayed for a moment, however, as the inmates grapple with the question of who is to blame for their imprisonment in Auschwitz and whether there was any “other place to go” (Tabori 248).

Tabori examines the question of responsibility through a confrontation between the characters of Klaub and Uncle. Klaub is determined to survive by any means necessary, including murder, declaring that he “won’t let [Uncle] spoil [his] appetite or give [him] heartburn for all eternity” (Tabori 248). In addition to refusing feelings of guilt, Klaub refuses

victimhood and stresses the importance of being “a witness, a walking exhibition of wounds” (Tabori 248). Similarly to how Uncle draws in all of his fellow inmates into the dream sequence, Klaub forces them to remember and reenact the moment when they were being transported to the extermination camp in a cattle car that could fit “forty men or six cows” (Tabori 248), but on that particular occasion transported one hundred and eighty of them. The last stop before Auschwitz, and the last chance for freedom was Sopron, but the future inmates failed to execute the plan of killing the guards and escaping. As the one who argued against the killing and hid the Swiss knife¹⁷ provided by Weiss that would have made the deed possible, Uncle is interrogated by Klaus and assaulted by fellow inmates who hurl all the insults that they were collectively subjected to immediately after they decided not to attempt escape. Klaub scorns Uncle’s passivity and meekness and considers him directly responsible for what had happened to them:

GHOULOS: So they put us back on the train.

KLAUB (*pointing at UNCLE*): HE PUT US BACK ON THE TRAIN!

PUFFI: They stripped us naked!

KLAUB: HE STRIPPED US NAKED!

THE GYPSY: They will lead us into the shower room.

KLAUB: HE WILL LEAD US INTO THE SHOWER ROOM!

(*All the others let out a grunt.*)

With a prayer, without a knife! (Tabori 253)

In the last line, Klaub’s mention of a prayer delivers overt criticism of the concept of perseverance that is usually exalted by organized religions – alongside the knife which represents the willingness to act, “prayer” connotes passivity. Uncle’s passivity is deemed the reason why everyone on that train eventually found themselves underneath the “showers” of the gas chamber and thus the group proceeds to seek retribution by singling out his son for that same fate. This is the moment when he tries to come to terms with what had happened to his father whom he does not understand, even though twenty-five years have passed. He muses on what was done to his father on an individual and collective level by saying the following:

¹⁷ The motif of the knife is used most prominently on two occasions: during the potential escape and during the scene when Puffi’s body is dismembered. As a tool, the knife reflects the two opposing views on what is considered human and life-affirming which is the central question of the play.

He feels the mighty hand and the great terror; he joins the fraternity of those whose teeth are broken with gravel. In other words: he becomes a Jew. No, you don't become a Jew. You are merely reminded that you are one.—I'm cold, I'm so cold. (Tabori 254)

The others carefully dress Uncle's son after his last line and with this act – namely the recognition of their shared identity and acceptance of what awaits them – the group's cohesion is reestablished. When Klaub instructs others to pour out the pot and prepare Puffi for a decent burial (Tabori 254), it seems that the dinner will not continue, but the appearance of S.S. officer Schrekinger forces both the dinner and the final moral dilemma.

The presence of Schrekinger, otherwise known as “The Angel of Death”, has an immediate and profound effect on the inmates as he is the one who decides who lives and who dies. Once Schrekinger orders everyone to form a line, he soon realizes that Puffi is missing and what happened to him. He presents the final choice: to eat or to die in the showers. By introducing a Nazi character, Tabori asserts that the victims' passivity plays only a small role in their demise and further complicates the main dilemma. Scene Fourteen is a grotesque banquet accompanied by jolly music that concludes once everyone, except for Hirschler nad Heltai, refuses to obey Schrekinger's order. In the final scene, many questions are left open – the main one concerns the morality of the actions of both the survivors and the ones who had perished. Is it truly immoral to choose to survive and tell the world what had happened if the alternative is death and the risk of being forgotten? Tabori leaves this question open for the audience.

4. Inquiry into the Nature and Depth of Evil: Filloux's *Silence of God* and Felde's *A Patch of Earth*

Twenty-six years after he published an anthology titled *The Theatre of the Holocaust*, Robert Skloot selected four plays that would be representative of the new dramatic subgenre: Theater of Genocide. The two plays from the given collection selected for the analysis in this paper are Catherine Filloux's *Silence of God* and Kitty Felde's *A Patch of Earth*, both of which were published in 2007. As the former deals with genocide in Cambodia in the late 1970s, and the latter tackles the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the mid 1990s, the two plays indicate the greater scope of the more recent anthology. Similarly to how the Holocaust conditioned the recognition of genocide as the gravest crime against humanity, the production of plays dealing with the Holocaust can be said to have helped raise awareness of the need for an engaged theater that would examine other genocides. Unlike the case with authors of *Resort 76* and *The Cannibals*, however, neither Filloux nor Felde belong to the groups that were singled out for extermination – the two instead drew their knowledge on the subject, as well as their motivation to explore it, from their interest in human rights and similar professional engagements.¹⁸

The outsiders' position is reflected in the structure of the two plays – in Filloux's *Silence of God*, the figure of a journalist who is attempting to “crack the puzzle” (Filloux 80) is crucial for the audience's understanding of the events that had transpired in Cambodia; whereas Felde stages her play in the prison cell and court room of the international war tribunal in order to provide understanding of the scale and nature of the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It can be argued that the audience's role of learning about specific genocides and historical facts is of slightly lesser importance than hearing the personal stories of victims; yet both are necessary for the audience's re-assessment of the role that the international community and they themselves play while such horrifying events unfold. Since the narrative of unceasing human progress was shattered beyond repair after the Holocaust, the question of human capacity for evil gained importance – this has led to the perpetrators of the most inhuman crimes attracting attention that equals, or in some cases surpasses the attention that is given to the victims. In the two “Genocide” plays, the aim of honoring the victims and determining the driving forces that made them targets become inextricably connected, although in a slightly different way.

¹⁸ In 1996, Kitty Felde covered the International War Crimes Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia as a journalist (“Introduction” 13) and Catherine Filloux wrote extensively on the topic of human rights and held the position of a Fulbright senior specialist in Cambodia (“Manoa: A Conversation with Playwright Catherine Filloux”).

3.1. Felde's *A Patch of Earth*

The main character of Kitty Felde's *A Patch of Earth* is Dražen Erdemović, the first person to have been sentenced by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) for crime against humanity (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia "The International Criminal Tribunal hands down its first sentence: 10 years of imprisonment for Drazen Erdemovic"). Since Felde followed the work of the Tribunal as a journalist, her examination of genocide in *A Patch of Earth* relies heavily on the courtroom transcripts, making the play a form of documentary theater¹⁹ but "most of the events take place in the mind and memory of Dražen Erdemović" (Felde 126), indicating that the play's aim is to reveal facts about the genocide while simultaneously attempting to enter a perpetrator's state of mind and paint him as human – the audience is left with the choice to assess his actions and pass (or refrain from passing) their own sentence. Felde's focus on Erdemović made it necessary for her to go beyond the facts of the case and create and fill in the details about "[t]he personal and family life of Erdemović" (Felde 130). The constant spatial and temporal shifts, and blurring of roles, accompanied by a chorus of specters of innocents – both victims and Erdemović's child, Nevin²⁰ – evokes a sense of a memory play, but the otherwise realist setting and detailed production notes hint at the play's aim of providing a "retrospective assessment of [a] specific historical genocide" (Skloot 8). For that assessment to take place, however, awareness of the event should come first – since the international community learned of the Srebrenica genocide due to Erdemović's decision to reveal what he knew about the systematic executions at a farm near village Pilica, Felde structured her play around the motivation for and consequences of this decision, foregrounded in Act 1 and Act 2, respectively.

In Act 1, Felde alternates between scenes taking place in the present, divided between the courtroom and the prison cell and scenes from Erdemović's past life. The audience witnesses the events leading up to the massacre and those immediately afterwards, but is left in the dark about the massacre itself until Erdemović begins to tell his account of it by inquiring whether the reporter he decided to tell his story to knows what amount of blood "a

¹⁹ Documentary theater, also known as verbatim theatre, "relies on historical and/or archival materials such as trial transcripts, written or recorded interviews, newspaper reporting, personal or iconic visual images or video footage, government documents, biographies and autobiographies, even academic papers and scientific research" (Odendahl "A History of U.S. Documentary Theatre in Three Stages").

²⁰ Literal translation of "Nevin" is "the one who is innocent", but it is not a male name. It is possible that Felde was aware of the name "Neven" which has a similar sound, but either made a spelling error or opted for "Nevin" on purpose, due to its more overt connection with the state of innocence that she wanted to foreground.

patch of earth can absorb before it turns into a small lake” (Felde 170). Soon afterwards, Erdemović had to face a court trial. “Three slow taps of a gavel on wood” (Felde 131) announce the shifts between Erdemović’s prison cell and a tribunal courtroom, but neither location makes him immune to flashbacks and nightmares that gradually uncover his family life and how he attempted to survive war.

The first flashback deals with Erdemović’s attempt to surprise his mother with a TV set that he bought, for “a fair price” (Felde 133), from a family that he helped cross the border and flee conflict. The exchanges he has with his mother and father reveal that prior to dabbling in transportation Erdemović served in an army (of Bosnian Croats, although this is only confirmed later), but gave up on it due to horrible conditions and his belief that he has “no stake in [the war]” (Felde 134). In the following flashback, he is a member of a different army – the result of him being caught smuggling people over the border and wanting to avoid prison – and is about to leave home for a new assignment: Srebrenica. Although a Croat, Erdemović enlisted in the Bosnian Serb army and became a member of the Tenth Sabotage Detachment, a unit ordered “to a farm near the village of Pilica [...] and given the task to summarily execute [Muslim] civilian men” (Felde 140). The flashbacks continue chronologically and provide details of Erdemović’s attempts to return to normal life after serving in the army and committing war crimes. In the scene when he comes back to his wife Vesna and son Nevin, Vesna remarks that their son “acts as if he’s seen a ghost” (Felde 142), rather than his father, to which Erdemović replies that that could be the case, thereby dropping the first hint that things are far from alright. Upon seeing his parents, Erdemović asks his father about “grandfather’s war”, wanting to learn about the crimes Erdemović heard about from his Serbian comrades:

ERDEMOVIĆ: Father. Do you remember grandfather’s war?

FATHER: Your grandfather was not a Nazi sympathizer!

ERDEMOVIĆ: I never said he was. But Father. In the army, I heard stories I never heard at home. Stories about grandfather’s war.

FATHER: Rumors. Just rumors.

ERDEMOVIĆ: Perhaps. But such stories, Father. Stories of *čišćenje*—ethnic cleansing they call it now. The Serbs remember a massacre on St. Vitus Day, near Medjugorje. Six hundred women and children thrown off the cliff near the Franciscan monastery. (Felde 144)

The reference to ethnic cleansing during the Second World War and existence of alternative historical narratives about it points at the most recent killings: the ones in which Erdemović played a significant, albeit unwilling role. When he chances upon Stanko Savanović, his comrade from the same unit, Erdemović is clearly uncomfortable, but sees an opportunity to finally talk about what he did on that day with someone, even more so because that someone eagerly followed the orders.

Almost immediately after Erdemović reluctantly joins Stanko, a ghost that is only visible to Erdemović appears at the table. The aforementioned ghost is of one of the many victims executed by the Tenth Sabotage Division and a projection of Erdemović's guilt which is visual and auditory both, as he tells Stanko that he sees the victims' eyes and hears them "[e]very night in [his]dreams" (Felde 146). For Stanko, however, killing the "Turks" (Felde 147) brought only satisfaction (and regret that he did not kill more of them), since the extermination gave him an opportunity to avenge his brother. Although Stanko stresses that his motivation for killing stems from personal loss, Stanko's words reveal deep-seated nationalism:

STANKO: [...] Killing them right there and then meant they couldn't come back and kill another day. Less bad news to deliver to sad Serbian mothers.

ERDEMOVIĆ: Who's delivering the news to sad Muslim mothers?

STANKO: That's the beauty of it. Nobody. Nobody's delivering the bad news. That's because there are no witnesses! No proof. Just another case of troops missing in action. For all those U.N. fellows know, our Turkish friends just left the country. Emigrated to parts unknown. (Felde 147)

This exchange highlights the "us versus them" mentality of nationalism, but also introduces the play's central theme of carrying the word about the slaughter of one group of people and the enormous responsibility that comes with it. Although Erdemović espouses the view that the victims' story matters a great deal at times, his motivation to speak seems primarily from wanting to stop being plagued by the images of what he had done. Soothing his guilty conscience, however, does not come easy since the members of his own family either do not want to listen what he wants and needs to say or judge him. The manner in which they do so, however, is unconvincing at times.

One of the play's flaws lies in the characterization inconsistencies that arise from Felde's attempts to recreate the isolation that Erdemović must have felt as he was struggling with his conscience, but also her focus on shedding light on the complexity of the forces that

led to the series of conflicts on the territory of Former Yugoslavia. Erdemović's father in particular is purposefully used to provide understanding of historical events – such as the St. Vitus Day Massacre and Battle of Kosovo – that Felde mentions in her production notes in order to provide the context about the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Erdemović's father expresses several contested views about his son's involvement in the army²¹, but since these shifts are rushed, they do not convey the father's (more subtle) nationalism, as Felde most likely intended, but come off as an artificially created pressure on Erdemović that culminates in his father renouncing him for his role in the massacre. Vesna's character has similar inconsistencies, but the views she expresses are more closely connected to Erdemović's feelings of guilt, and thus have a greater effect on him, as well as the overall play). Nevertheless, it is the thought of his son believing him to be a monster that terrifies Erdemović the most:

NEVIN: Papa?

ERDEMOVIĆ: Yes, little one. It's your Papa.

NEVIN: Monster.

ERDEMOVIĆ: All gone. Papa killed the monster. All gone.

NEVIN: All gone?

ERDEMOVIĆ: That's right.

NEVIN: Papa monster.

(ERDEMOVIĆ *nearly sobs.*)

ERDEMOVIĆ: No. Not a monster. Your Papa was a soldier, Nevin. Just a plain soldier. (Felde 149)

The exchange is part of the nightmare-within-a-nightmare that Erdemović is having about his own role in the genocide, but also the impact that it has on the next generation – its implications, however, go beyond just one individual fate and tackle the more general issue of complicity. The position of the common foot soldier, and particularly the morality of the decision to obey orders, is examined further through the juxtaposition of the character of Erdemović and Willem Van der Kellen, a Dutch Peacekeeper stationed in Srebrenica enclave.

²¹ The elder Erdemović criticizes his son's decision to smuggle people rather than serving in the army, since he believes it makes him a coward (Felde 134), but has no problem with his son's choice of an army. Furthermore, his focus on the fact that the country is collapsing and not on the warring sides, also speaks in favor of this neutrality. Once his son mentions the crimes committed by Ustashe during the Second World War, however, the elder Erdemović describes his Ustasha father as "a true crusader for [the Croat people] and [their] Holy Church" (Felde 144).

Moreover, by adding this dimension, Felde examines the role of the international community in preserving the peace and addresses its failures.

For the duration of the trial, Erdemović is detained in a cell and mostly left to his own demons; he is, however, approached by a Dutch guard, Elsbeth Van der Kellen. Elsbeth does not treat Erdemović with contempt and reveals that she requested the duty of guarding him, stating that she did it because she is curious about what “[she] would have done if [she] were in [Erdemović’s] shoes” (Felde 165). Both her curiosity and treatment of Erdemović as a human being are largely motivated by the fact that her brother Willem was one of the Peacekeepers who were tasked with protecting the U.N. safe area. Upon hearing this, Erdemović immediately comments on Willem’s complicity in the war crimes by saying that Willem was virtually “[h]elping to separate men from women, helping to load the buses that brought the men to the killing field” (Felde 165). Erdemović is critical of what he believes to be U.N.’s failure to protect the civilians, but he does not emphasize the ineptitude of its forces as much as the entire body’s commitment to keep peace. By including this view, Felde foregrounds the international community’s (lack of) ability to respond to crises such as the one in Srebrenica, but although she addresses an important point, I would argue that it falls short of a genuine critique. In addition to the irony of having a war criminal being critical of the U.N.’s failure to protect the people he helped killed, Felde fails to at least hint at the reasons behind the international community’s passivity and inadequate response. This is understandable, however, since Felde primarily examines the consequences that the governing structures’ decisions had on the individuals, such as Elsbeth’s brother Willem, who had to follow its orders:

GUARD (pause): When Willem came home, he and the rest of the Dutch peacekeepers were considered heroes [...] Until the truth leaked out. Suddenly the Dutch heroes were labeled collaborators and cowards and criminals.

ERDEMOVIĆ: And what did Willem say about what happened?

GUARD: He never said anything. He never talked about Srebrenica. After a while, he stopped talking at all. He hung around with his mates, mostly. Drinking. He was drunk that night [...] Willem slipped on the ice and fell off his bicycle. They found his body in the Mauritskade canal. They say he killed himself. I don’t believe it. (Felde 166)

Elsbeth’s feelings on the matter are not expounded on further, but the sense of loss is followed by the anger over the fact that Erdemović is the only one who is facing the trial, while his commanding officer and others who acted as executioners are nowhere to be found. The other

members of the Tenth Sabotage Division pose an additional challenge to Erdemović's need to break the silence about his role in the genocide.

Over the course of the play, Erdemović sees more and more ghosts of his victims, and in the flashback that concludes Act I comes to the decision to seek out *Le Figaro* reporter who has been investigating claims of war crimes in Srebrenica (Felde 157). In Act II, the motivation and consequences of his decision are explored in detail; the first, very physical consequence for Erdemović is the wounding he suffers at the hands of his former comrades. Sensing that Erdemović is the weak link of their division, Brano, Stanko, and Aleksandar wait for Erdemović at a bar where he is supposed to meet with the French reporter. Although skeptical of Erdemović's loyalty, the Division's Commander, Brano Gojković first attempts to justify the rightness of their deeds by referring to a history of conflict that he believes cannot be forgotten:

BRANO: [...] How can you forget St. Vitus Day? The Battle of Kosovo? 1389 may sound like a hundred million years ago, but it's just yesterday for a Yugoslav. This is a country with a memory. A true Christian nation. God's country. Until the Turks marched in and slaughtered everyone in their wake. And that's just what the Muslims of Srebrenica were going to do to us if we had let them live.

ERDEMOVIĆ: You sound like all the propaganda that's spewed out over the radio. Propaganda from that mafia that led us into war. This was their war, not mine.

BRANO: Dangerous talk, comrade. (Felde 160–161)

Brano seldom appears in the play which, coupled with his calm demeanor indicated by Felde in the stage directions, gives him an air of enigma that turns insidious in the aforementioned excerpt when the commanding officer appears as an embodiment of nationalism that made the war and war crimes possible. By having Erdemović mention "the mafia", Felde suggests that the war would not have been possible without either the prejudiced masses or those ready to exploit them for their own purposes. The confrontation ends with Erdemović being shot three times by Stanko and left to bleed out (Felde 162).

Right after the shooting, in a state of stupor, Erdemović sees a ghost extending a hand to him, but recoils in terror, suggesting both his guilt and the fact that the victims' voices cannot be heard yet. The first time they are truly heard is in the courtroom where Erdemović details how they were treated and the manner in which they were executed:

ERDEMOVIĆ: [...] Busloads and busloads. Maybe twelve hundred men. Some of them were very young. Seventeen to eighteen years old. The soldiers from the other

unit cursed them. Called them Turks and worse. Beat them with metal bars. They didn't say a word. But when the second bus arrived, the men saw the bodies. Some cried out to us.

(STANKO and ALEKSANDAR appear at one side of the stage. The ghosts line up.)

(Felde 170)

Erdemović's account of the events does not remain textual – the act of execution is recreated on stage and thus made real and difficult to ignore. Moreover, during his testimony, Erdemović states that “[e]ven the bus drivers were forced to kill someone” (Felde 170), thereby clarifying the group's method of ensuring everyone was complicit, as well as reaffirming the fact that he, and most likely his family, would have been killed had he refused the order. Although the prosecutor refers to several pieces of evidence of this crime – namely the photographs depicting traces of blood and human remains – and shows them to the courtroom via a projector, the slides that are projected on the wall appear blank (Felde 171). The omission allows for easier staging, but primarily evokes a sense of horror arising from the unknown and conveys the idea that no one can truly know what happened on that or any other killing field, except for the victims. The play ends with the ghosts no longer haunting Erdemović and both the victims and the perpetrator seemingly at peace now that the crime is no longer in danger of remaining unknown:

ERDEMOVIĆ: It is finished. (*He turns to the ghosts.*) And you. Are you satisfied? I told them your story. I told the world. Is it enough? (*The ghosts bow in unison. One by one they turn their “faces” away from ERDEMOVIĆ. He is truly alone.*)

Free. I'm free.

(*The lights slowly fade to black.*) (Felde 177)

Erdemović is sentenced to ten years in prison – a sentence that would later be cut in half – and renounced by his family, but manages to find some comfort and sense of absolution in the act of speaking out on behalf of those killed. Although one may be tempted to criticize Felde for ending *A Patch of Earth* in a way suggesting that the victims tasked one of their executioners to help them and are now at peace due to him having some conscience, it should be noted that Erdemović is never excused for his deeds, but rather presented as a complex human being with whom one can sympathize. The play's rendition of Erdemović displays no traits of nationalism – only cowardice and fear which he openly admits to (Felde 156) and which seems justifiable – and expresses genuine sorrow over the fact that the war ever happened and

took so many lives. Moreover, it can be argued that by linking Erdemović and the ghosts in this manner, Felde points out that such events cause the formation of an unwanted, but impossible to ignore connection between the victim and a perpetrator.

4.2. Filloux's *Silence of God*

In the "Author's Note" to *Silence of God*, Filloux writes that she had "placed fictional characters in a fact-based story" (Filloux 75). The aforementioned story is the 1998 U.S. plan of capturing Pol Pot, previously Saloth Sar, and bringing him to justice for the atrocities committed in Cambodia by the Khmer Rouge regime of which he was the face of. The play's primary protagonist, Sarah Holtzman, uses the uproar to secure an interview with Pol Pot and through it perhaps find answers to the question of why evil flourished in Cambodia in the 70s and whether and for what reasons it will continue to flourish. Her quest is both personal and professional: Sarah, a journalist by profession, wants to share the story with the wider public, but the reason why her focus lies on this story is her connection with Cambodia – her father Evan Holtzman led the U.N. peacekeeping mission in Cambodia and her lover Heng Chhay lived through the deaths of nearly all members of his family before befriending Holtzman and moving to the U.S.

The *Silence of God* consists of sixteen scenes that are evenly distributed across the two acts: eight in Act I and another eight in Act II. In the course of these two acts, Filloux deftly switches between several spatial settings (Cambodia, Nantucket, Washington, Bangkok, Phnom Penh) and, through the character of Sarah and Heng, revisits certain events and memories that occurred during the temporal framework which includes the years 1985 and 1998. What this framework immediately indicates is that the audience's access to the period of most brutal violence and deprivation in Cambodia²² depends on the mind's eye of one of its survivors, Heng Chhay, who is in a unique position to try and convey the horror which is otherwise kept off the stage.

The first major temporal and spatial shift takes place as early as Scene Two, when Sarah remembers the time she spent with Heng in Nantucket in the summer of 1985. In the opening scene's, Heng is teaching Sarah how to say "I want to be a writer" in the Khmer language (Filloux 78). Their relationship seems to have reached a stable phase, but Sarah needs to know about Heng's experience as a genocide survivor, while he does not feel

²² In the published version of *Silence of God*, a timeline of events that preceded and followed the Cambodian genocide is included. The entry for 1975 reads: "The fall of Saigon; the Vietnam War ends. The Khmer Rouge's reign of terror begins under Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge leadership, including Ieng Sary, Brother Number Three, and lasts until 1979." (Filloux 125)

comfortable talking about it. The Scene Two dialogue indicates that this was not the first time Sarah asked Heng to tell her his story, but this is the first time her persistence bears fruit. Heng first mentions the sudden change in his vocation, namely his being a literature student at Phnom Penh one moment, and becoming a farmer the other, and then recounts witnessing a man brutally murdered because of a piece of jewelry which Heng had traded for some food:

HENG (*to SARAH*): I sold my wife's gold bracelet for food. My gold, my mistake, found on this man's person. Me, in the shadows—a witness.

Watching.

MAN 1: POL POT HATES LIARS! Give it over or your feet will be cut off for following the path of Western thought!

MAN 2: My child is sick, I need medicine.

(MAN 1 *begins to hit* MAN 2 *with the butt of his rifle.*) (Filloux 81)

In addition to the deprecation and brutality that characterize the scene, Filloux highlights Heng's status as a witness and since he is the one telling the story to Sarah and to the audience, they also become witnesses, albeit once and twice removed, respectively. The formulation that he is "in the shadows", similarly to how the theater auditorium is in the dark during the performance, further supports this argument. In the remainder of the scene, the member of Khmer Rouge exclaims that bullets cannot be wasted on traitors, cracking open the other man's skull and proceeding to rip out his heart. The graphic scene is ingrained in Heng's memory, but is not a realistic rendition of events necessarily.

The ripped-out heart, in particular, becomes imbued with additional layers of meaning that enhance the very real consequences this trauma left on Heng:

*He holds the heart in his hand. He wipes some of the blood with his red karma.*⁴

MAN 1 *begins to walk toward* HENG *and* SARAH.)

Let me show you this. (*Laughing.*) THE HEART OF ANGKA!

ANGKA IS ALL POWERFUL: GOD! (*To* HENG.) Look at you holding what you have bought with your wife's jewelry, SUCKING THE LAST DROP OF JUICE FROM YOUR ORANGE.

[...]

HENG: This nameless man's death, Sarah. And then my wife—killed because of her "light" skin.

A chain of action.

(MAN 1 now holds out the heart to HENG and SARAH, laughing, as lights fade on MAN 1. SARAH looks at HENG. They are in Nantucket again.) (Filloux 82)

The most straightforward interpretation is that the heart being ripped out represents Heng's trauma, namely the immense pain which he feels immediately after having witnessed the brutal death and the hollowness that sets in afterwards. The heart, however, is also the core of the Angka or Angkar as the Communist party of the period was often referred to (Filloux 81), and thus the image becomes one of the regime devouring the people it claims to protect in order to stay in power. This interpretation is also supported through the linking of the motifs of the orange and the heart through the act of eating and needing to sustain oneself, the same act which led Heng to make the trade with the man who would lose his life over it. The motifs Filloux uses become more complex as Sarah becomes more determined to crack the puzzle of evil (Filloux 80) and get closer to Pol Pot who, she believes, will provide the crucial missing piece once she interviews him.

Scenes Three and Four revolve around Sarah's interviews of Pol Pot, the former imagined in a dream and the latter actually conducted. During the imagined interview, Sarah is determined to learn about Pol Pot's motivation and whether he considers himself responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million people (Filloux 84). Sarah meets all of Pol Pot's attempts at evasion with *hait ay* – “why” in Khmer – and eventually compels him to say that “[his] goal was to save [his] country” (Filloux 85) and even to ask his victims for forgiveness (Filloux 86). The interview Sarah imagined, however, takes on a predictable form ripe with expected answers that can be easily devoured by the public; the real interview is drastically different. The stage directions describe Pol Pot's overall demeanor as “gentle, wise in appearance, [...] almost [like he is] in a halo of sunlight” (Filloux 86), yet he controls the interview fully and makes seemingly inane comments about his health:

POL POT: A few years ago, I had headaches, I was working too hard, I had some problems with this eye. (He points to his left eye.) And something with my . . . my . . .
(*Groping for the word.*)

(*He motions to his chest.*)

SARAH: Yes, your heart . . .

POL POT: Yes, you are right. Exactly. My left eye stopped seeing. It was because of my heart.

(*He makes a halving motion with his hand, as if to cut his body in half.*)

The left side of my body . . .

SARAH: Please . . .

TRANSLATOR: Paralyzed. (Filloux 87)

This exchange introduces three major interrelated themes that underline the whole play: the difficulty of grasping the true state of things from the outside; the difficulty and/or impossibility of explaining evil; existence of good and evil in all of us, as indicated by Pol Pot's splitting motion.

In the exchange above, the outsider perspective is only hinted at with the inclusion of the character of Translator who is meant to help Sarah cross the language barrier, but even more so bridge the cultural chasm, since she embodies the "allegedly detached and presumably objective 'white Western gaze'" (Čirić-Fazlija, in press). As Skloot concludes, the fact that Sarah is a journalist does not lessen her status as a Westerner:

[...] the plot of the play is moved along in large part because of [Sarah's] professional commitment to the Western press and to Cambodia's cultural mysteries that she tries to penetrate as an outsider living and working, no matter how sympathetically, in the "Far East." ("Review Essay: Old Concerns and New Plays in the Theater of Genocide" 115–116)

Although drawn to Cambodia and more aware of its history and the effects of the genocide than an average journalist, Sarah's motivation to interview Pol Pot indicates that while her focus is on Cambodia, her aim is to satiate her own curiosity and the curiosity of people all over the world – she would fit the pieces of Cambodia's puzzle in an accessible, sensationalist format which is robbed of its original meaning:

SARAH: "Everyone there has their Sophie's choice." That's what I wrote. It was in the context of an American movie.

(Angry, he stops what he is doing. He examines her for a moment.)

HENG: Yes, I know. I know the movie. I am more aware than you think.

SARAH: Heng.

HENG: You can reduce it down to a movie concept, Sarah, and then to a phrase. A movie title. From another holocaust, another war. Rob us of our very war. But for you, it is just "writing," the kind of writing you do for your newspaper, for your big salary, without realizing that these words may take more away than they give. This is not the kind of writer I thought you would become. (Filloux 97)

Despite Heng's criticism of Sarah's writing, he concedes that she does manage to grasp the most important fact: everyone has a story like his in Cambodia and all these people are survivors left to cope with their trauma and survivor's guilt in whatever way they know. In *Silence of God*, Filloux is determined not to neglect the outsiders' role in creating this trauma and thus goes beyond the analysis of media and into the government policies.

After her interview with Pol Pot is abruptly over, Sarah finds herself making contact with and interviewing Ta Mok, the former Brother Number Five and the new leader of Khmer Rouge who is making plans to deliver Pol Pot into the U.S. government's hands. Ta Mok's uncouthness provides a stark contrast to Pol Pot's soft spoken manner, but more interesting is his nonchalance while talking about the democratic direction that Khmer Rouge is taking now that its leader is to face a tribunal. The following exchange hints at the reason why the deal is appealing to both Ta Mok and the U.S.:

TA MOK: I do not have my new cell phone with me . . . I can do it for you when my cell phone is returned . . . There will be grave consequences for the thief.

SARAH (*very matter-of-fact*): Well, Ta Mok, they do call you "The Butcher" . . .

(*He glances at her watch.*)

TA MOK: Ah . . .

(*She takes off her watch and gives it to him. Lots of laughter from MOK.*)

Rolex, gold.

SARAH: Yes.

(*He puts it in his pocket, pleased.*) (Filloux 91)

Mention of a cell phone and an expensive watch suggests Ta Mok's materialism and eagerness to listen to the benefactor who would shower him with such gifts, and the U.S. is pleased to win over a brutal, but loyal henchman for themselves by sacrificing an insignificant sum money to pamper him. Being (an American) journalist, Sarah exploits Ta Mok's weakness to find out more about the U.S. government's plan to capture Pol Pot and write about it.

Several big-nation governments have joined their efforts to capture Pol Pot and put him on trial, but the plan is spearheaded by the U.S. and its "war crimes" diplomat Christopher who dreams of capturing the person responsible for the deaths of 1.7 million people – making him the biggest evil since Hitler – and is thus prepared to dissuade Sarah from publishing the article on the plan:

CHRISTOPHER: [...] I thought you might have an allegiance.

SARAH: To what?

CHRISTOPHER: Cambodia. To the 1.7 million dead you always write about.

SARAH: Sorry, I'm not in the business of keeping government secrets.

[...]

CHRISTOPHER: This is Hitler.

SARAH: We could have captured Pol Pot in the early eighties. But you were too busy signing treaties with the Khmer Rouge.

CHRISTOPHER: That wasn't my administration. (Filloux103)

The exchange foregrounds what Filloux finds to be the hypocrisy and false morals of the U.S. that waited for the most opportune moment to capture Pol Pot and install an even more brutal successor in stead. Although Sarah struggles with the thought that “[w]riting moralistic op-eds is the best [journalists have] ever been able to do” (Filloux 104), she is very aware that although her writing may reflect Cambodia’s reality to a lesser or greater extent, it does not have the power to shape it in the way decision makers or war crime diplomats do. In the course of the play, the power struggle to control the global scene is linked with a simplified view of good and evil, used as a justification for any actions, and with the erasure of individual stories, such as Heng’s.

Thirteen years after their time in Nantucket, Sarah meets with Heng and learns that he wishes to return to Cambodia although he vowed he never would. Heng’s home country carries the collective memory of genocide and his personal trauma – his decision to return is connected with a specific trauma and triggered by the dream he had of his brother, a member of Khmer Rouge. Heng is intent on travelling to Cambodia, since the dream left him with a feeling that his “life could only truly exist if he could see his brother. And see Cambodia” (Filloux 99). Upon his arrival, Heng first visits his destroyed family home together with Sarah. They pay tribute to Heng’s dead family members and soon after they have lit incense sticks the rain begins to fall:

(We hear the sound of rain.)

HENG: Plee-ing hai . . .

SARAH: The rain . . .

HENG: Sadáp, somlaing yum.

SARAH: Listen to the sound of crying. Souls.

(SARAH closes her eyes, feeling the rain.)

Water all the way to the horizon . . .

HENG: Sweet water.

SARAH: A world of water. (Filloux 115)

The presence of water brings to mind the moments shared by the two in Nantucket, evoking a sense of healing and closure that allows Heng to begin closing a painful chapter in his past and to propose to Sarah. Although the two of them begin planning their wedding immediately, Heng feels the need to first inform his brother about it. The reunion takes place at a government function at Phnom Penh where Heng is shocked to see Ieng Sary who was once Brother Number Three of Pol Pot; now, he is an influential businessman and government official for whom Heng's brother works indirectly:

(HENG *stares aghast at his brother.*)

HENG: Do you not remember?

BROTHER: What?

HENG: He was Pol Pot's right-hand man. *Do you not remember?*

BROTHER: I don't know what you are talking about.

HENG: *His* children? What about *my* children?

(HENG *walks away.*) (Filloux 119)

In the scene Ieng was showing the two of them pictures of his grandchildren, but Heng, visibly shaken by the encounter was paying them no mind, prompting Heng's brother to talk to him in private and remind him the man is. Heng, however, is the only one who understands who this "shadowy figure", as the secondary text indicates, really is – his facelessness in the eyes of the world allowed Ieng Sary to not only escape justice, but carve himself a prominent position in the new government.²³ Soon after the meeting, Heng commits suicide, stating in his farewell letter to Sarah that he did not deserve to feel happiness and that living every day was difficult.

The theme of facelessness and anonymity is echoed by Pol Pot in Scene Nine when he is preparing to commit suicide before he can be captured:

²³ In 2007, the same year that *Silence of God* was published, Ieng Sary was charged with crimes against humanity and arrested. He would die before the Cambodia Tribunal reached a verdict. As of 2018, only two senior figures of Khmer Rouge, Nuon Chea and Khieu Samphan, were sentenced to life imprisonment on charges of genocide and the future of the Tribunal "remains uncertain, mainly due to resistance from [Prime Minister] Hun Sen who has long opposed the trials and said that any more cases risked pushing Cambodia into civil war." (Ellis-Petersen "Khmer Rouge leaders found guilty of genocide in Cambodia's 'Nuremberg' moment").

POL POT: You see, I will face *any* court. But to give *Mok* this victory — *never*. A man whose mind has never been in the least connected to his mouth — who would kill to keep a wristwatch. A thief. This I despise.

[...]

One, single mistake I made. The *photograph* of the assassination of my former defense minister. Mok used this photo to name me a TRAITOR. You see there must *never be a face to the act*.

Never a face to the act. (Filloux 106)

The above mentioned assassination of the defense minister came after the defection of Ieng Sary who had joined the “puppet government” (Filloux 106); although Pol Pot did not target Ieng himself, the betrayal made him more wary of his comrades and prone to extreme measures. The brutality of the act itself does not matter, however, as long as the one responsible for it stays in the shadows and far from the public eye – two of Pol Pot’s senior comrades were left undisturbed, while Pol Pot became the face of evil. The *Silence of God* firmly establishes the complicity of both Ta Mok and Ieng Sary, but also prompts the audience to wonder about the complicity of the international community, governments of different nations, and individual bystanders. The blurring of the lines between absolute evil and ultimate good is examined through characters of Pol Pot and Heng Chhay, but also Sarah Holtzman.

In the play’s sixteen scenes, Filloux repeatedly stresses the connection between Pol Pot and Heng Chhay: the secondary text indicates that the same actor should portray both characters; both Pol Pot and Heng commit suicide in the same manner, by mixing valium and malaria pills and suffering a heart attack; Sarah’s dream sequence in Scene Nine features Heng burning the effigy of Pol Pot – implying a reversal of the roles of the perpetrator and the victim. Nevertheless, several key themes resurface while Sarah is interviewing the faceless man, a victim of an acid attack; the interview takes place during Scene One and Sixteen, framing the action of the play. During it Heng appears before Sarah, one side of his body dressed in black pajamas of Khmer Rouge and the other in monk’s robes, and transforms between Pol Pot and himself:

HENG: I am the devil . . .

(*She looks to the faceless man.*)

FACELESS MAN: When I first became blind I became a masseur.

(*She looks at POL POT.*)

POL POT: And a poet, a killer angel.

(*She sees HENG.*). (Filloux 112)

The two apparitions admit and deny guilt, question complicity and motivation behind the actions that resulted in genocide – Heng bearing all the blame and Pol Pot refusing to shoulder it. As a bystander “from a country that many believe helped destroy [Cambodia]” (Filloux 120), Sarah is exposed to all these accumulated feelings and made to reconsider what she knows about Cambodia and its genocide and human nature, which is both good and evil, ultimately concluding that “we are human, but we don’t always do human things, and that is all I can tell you, for there was so much I did not let myself know, and so much I will never know.” (Filloux 123)

5. Comparing the Theater of the Holocaust and the Theater of Genocide

I find it oddly fitting to introduce the prospect of comparing the Theater of the Holocaust and the Theater of Genocide by referring to the recent statement of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in which this institution “unequivocally rejects efforts to create analogies between the Holocaust and other events, whether historical or contemporary” (“Statement Regarding the Museum’s Position on Holocaust Analogies”). Regardless if one agrees with the statement or not, it is true that the Holocaust is an event that has had an enormous impact on the collective psyche and helped set the model for remembering the victims, establishing a legal framework for the perpetrators, and preventing mass atrocities in the future. Perhaps most significantly, it fundamentally changed the way we see human nature. In his 2005 paper, Kenneth Kidd writes that the favoring of greater openness and exposure to potentially overwhelming facts may have originated due to the implications of the Holocaust, as “we no longer [had] the luxury of denying the existence of or postponing the child’s confrontation with evil” (120–121). Although Kidd’s argument concerns children and children’s literature, I find it applicable to the representation of the Holocaust and other genocides²⁴ to more diverse audiences.

In addition to just representation, the aim of the Theater of the Holocaust is to “pay homage to the victims, educate audiences, induce an empathetic response from the audience, raise moral and ethical questions for discussion/debate, and draw lessons from history” (Plunka qtd. in Heinrich 1). The aforementioned statement found in Plunka’s *Holocaust Drama: The Theatre of Atrocity* can be equally applied to the Theater of Genocide, rather than only to those plays dramatizing the Holocaust. In that same manner, Skloot’s conclusion that the Theater of Genocide playwrights do not focus on providing ways to stop mass murders, but “are interested in psychological, philosophical, and cultural inquiries into the phenomenon of genocide” (“Introduction: “The Light of Dead Stars”” 20), appears to be shared by the Theater of the Holocaust playwrights. The parallel between the two theatres also seems evident if we focus on the following excerpt:

Like all engaged art, [the Theater of Genocide] seeks to comment on and influence public discourse through various strategies: by the description of the victims’ suffering and the assertion of their essential worthiness, the discussion of the perpetrators’ motivation, the presentation of images of healing and compassion, the evocation of

²⁴ A quick Google search reveals that the terms „the Holocaust“ and „genocide“ are commonly differentiated and that the above mentioned phrasing is adopted by governing bodies such as the UN. This is the main reason why I opted for this phrasing, despite my personal views.

empathy, the questioning of the proper use of historical knowledge. (Skloot “Introduction: ‘The Light of Dead Stars’”)

Indeed, the Theater of the Holocaust employs all of the strategies that Skloot lists, except for the focus on the perpetrators’ motivation. The presence (or absence) of perpetrators in the Holocaust plays²⁵ as opposed to their centrality in the Theater of Genocide is a notable point of departure, although it can be argued that the manner in which the two theaters wish to influence public discourse is also different.

In Wincelberg’s *Resort 76*, the Nazi presence is felt in the oppressive atmosphere of the ghetto itself, the existence of the Jewish Blue Police and most notably in the character of Krause. Krause, who is greatly influenced by the Nazi propaganda, is blind to the conditions in the ghetto and barely registers other occupants of the Resort as human beings. Moreover, he is fully supportive of his “Motherland [that] is fighting a crusade, single-handedly, to preserve European civilization from the black barbarians of the Western world” (Wincelberg 56–57), in spite of the fact that that same “Motherland” ordered his separation from his wife and daughter and banished him to a ghetto because of his, previously unknown, Jewish ancestry. In the play’s final act, Krause is notified that he can return home because his family managed to procure proof that he is “a pure-blooded Aryan” (Wincelberg 104). Haunted by what he has seen, Krause decides to commit suicide by taking arsenic, instead – the moment is appropriately foreshadowed with the piece of dangling rope (Wincelberg 59), but comes off as highly implausible, especially considering Krause’s deliberately exaggerated blindness and obstinacy. The play’s emphasis on the victims’ humanity and remembrance does help explain the other occupants’ calmness while dealing with Krause, but his sudden impulse to take his own life does little to honor the victims and is thus merely perplexing.

Although *The Cannibals* share the central issue of “the nature and possibility of individual choice in extreme situations” (“Introduction” 22) with *Resort 76*, there is nothing perplexing about the climactic appearance of Schrekinger, an SS officer who forces the inmates of Block Six to choose between feasting on their friend and being escorted to the deadly showers. In line with the other characters taking on the roles of their fathers, Schrekinger is also portrayed as both the son and the father. Although he is initially told the evasive answer of “I was obeying orders” (Tabori 262), the son is persistent in asking his father what he did during the war:

²⁵ The “plays” refers to all four Holocaust plays included in Skloot’s anthology, although the argumentation relies primarily on *Resort 76* and *The Cannibals*.

(As the SON; with some impatience.) Daddy, you haven't answered my question.

(As the FATHER.) Oh, it's not that they were kindly or brave, no, they stole, they cheated, they betrayed one another, they stank, they hungered, they murdered, that's easy, anyone can do that, but there was always this otherness with which they let themselves be butchered so that they can define the nature of butchery. They did not suffer evil, they pointed at it, you know that rather vulgar way of theirs of pointing a finger at you and you and you. (Tabori 263)

Schrekinger's presence as the perpetrator is of crucial importance for the play, in spite of him appearing in only three out of *The Cannibals*' fifteen scenes. Nevertheless, his presence on stage is not required in order for the audience to draw conclusions about his motivation or more universal concept of evil, but reiterate and reaffirm the victims' endurance:

In his last long monologue with himself—acting as his father and son—Schrekinger reveals his own fear, anger, confusion, and hate in the presence of that reviled race which resists humiliation and despair with a persistence he cannot explain and with a grace he cannot comprehend. (“Introduction” 31)

I concur with Skloot's analysis of Schrekinger's tirade, but I would add that Tabori is ultimately skeptical of whether the persistence and morality is ultimately more important than surviving. While assessing this question and its prominence in the Theater of the Holocaust – as opposed to the Theater of Genocide plays that do not endeavor to examine it – one should bear in mind that all four Holocaust plays (as well as the others that are not included in Skloot's anthology) were written by authors who either directly suffered the Holocaust or whose family legacy is steeped in it.

Although they successfully invite the audience to experience the devastating effects of genocide from the inside, as witnesses, all authors of the Theater of Genocide plays, with the exception of Lorne Shirinian, who is of Armenian descent, can be said to have approached the mass murder(s) from an outside. Even in Shirinian's writing, there is a significant temporal distance between the occurrence of genocide and its dramatization – the implication is that of greater objectivity, but also potentially lesser emotional impact, due to the playwright's decision not to favor one theme over the other. *Silence of God* is a good example of careful interweaving of several themes. Filloux incorporates and transcends historical facts by forging a link between Pol Pot and Heng through which she explores the relation of the perpetrator and the victim, the perpetrator's denial of guilt and victim's shouldering of it, and the position

and moral culpability of bystanders and/or accomplices in the crime. Even the smallest imbalance of themes and elements may cause the play to become relevant only to certain audiences.

Similarly to Catherine Filloux, Kitty Felde attempts to incorporate several themes and examine the genocide in Bosnia and Herzegovina from different angles. While she carefully balances the attention given to the victims and to the perpetrator Erdemović, Felde attempts to include too much context in order to give the play an authentic feeling, leading to the characters' viewpoints clashing in often illogical ways – the audience seeing Felde's play, however, can find its combination of documentary theater with non-realist elements of spectres and nightmares a compelling way to examine the position of a perpetrator while “pay[ing] homage to the dead [...] through an obligation to bear witness” (Plunka qtd. in Heinrich 1).

Bearing witness to the traumatic events and recollections is as close as one can reach the survivors, and if their “trauma is represented in theater and performance art, the viewers almost gain the position of witnesses” (Pewny 12), which is the aim of all four plays selected for the analysis. The court records of *A Patch of Earth*, Sarah's writings in *Silence of God*, the survivors Hirschler and Heltai in *The Cannibals*, and the feline left to wander the ghetto in *Resort 76* are all means of ensuring that the truth of the past is recorded and that the audience is drawn in to experience the atrocities for themselves. As direct representation may be overwhelming, “[i]n its place are poetic images that move us emotionally to respond to the violence and death at the center of the plays” (“Introduction: “The Light of Dead Stars”” 19).

The focus on violence and dramatizing the horrors of genocide may lead one to impose a “Literature of Atrocity” label on both theaters, but due to its engaged approach in tackling sensitive topics and raising awareness, the Theaters of the Holocaust and Genocide have the potential to aid the process of reconciliation or even overcoming trauma, thus making them perfect examples of political theater.

Conclusion

In his introduction to *The Theatre of Genocide*, Robert Skloot states that the representative plays of the aforementioned theater “prepare the ground for changes in policy and thinking and, on a level of emotional engagement, give theatrical life to those whose voices have been silenced” (“Introduction: “The Light of the Dead Stars”” 6). In my view, the definition includes the Theater of the Holocaust too. Moreover, it is remarkably similar to those definitions used when referring to the political theater in general. The concern about their potential limits, namely whether they merely fulfill the “[t]ask of bearing witness or actually [facilitate] empathy that proves transformative” (“Review Essay: Old Concerns and New Plays in the Theatre of Genocide” 114), also echoes the concerns surrounding the impact of the political theater and its society-changing effects. The general concerns of the political theater aside, the two dramatic subgenres face additional limitations. The included plays are Anglophone and thus hold considerable potential to reach a large audience while simultaneously being somewhat removed from the contexts where genocides were perpetrated, due to not being written in the local language(s). Moreover, the potential controversy and heaviness of the overarching theme of genocide may create difficulties with the staging, ensuring that the play is seen only by audiences belonging to certain circles. Regardless of the plays’ reach and potential to catalyze change, I believe that their fact-presenting, awareness-raising and empathy-inducing model is necessary in times marred by historical revisionism and denial of genocide. That is the main reason why I felt compelled to write of these two largely unexplored theaters that have potential to facilitate peacebuilding and reconciliation, and present their most salient features. In light of my aim to balance closer examination of four plays with introducing their respective theaters, I decided against providing an overview that would have featured a larger number of plays and undoubtedly made drawing conclusions a less daunting task.

It is possible to reach two different conclusions on the relationship between the Theater of the Holocaust and the Theater of Genocide: they may be viewed as separate genres or see one as the basis for the evolution of the other, but, in Skloot’s words, “they [both] create a world which is more intense and more real than the world most of us know; through their plays we can have contact with times and places it is good never to have experienced but terrible never to understand” (“Introduction” 37).

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