

## Telling Stories: *Martha Stutz* by Javier Daulte

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One of the primary characteristics of works with a postmodern bent has been to challenge the authority and hegemony of the master narratives and the narratives of mastery. Although we tend to think of theatre as distinct from narrative, in fact theatre in recent years has recognized its dependence on narrative, either the narrative on which the play itself is based or the narrative the audience will almost inevitably construct as a result of its theatre experience. This dependence upon narrative seems to have produced two ostensibly contradictory movements in theatre, both of which might be labeled postmodern in their implicit or explicit mistrust of narrative. Some theatrical works or events have attempted to move away from or reject narrative form, thus endeavoring to turn the theatrical event into a sensory experience, as divorced from narrative as possible, and one that would deny the audience the comforting closure that generally attends narrative. Other works, such as the one I discuss in this paper, have recognized their dependence on narrative and faced it directly by emphasizing the narrativity of the theatrical event in order to reconsider the “master” narratives in specific and the narrative gesture in general.<sup>1</sup> In these cases, as in other postmodern works, whether the focus is on the master narratives of history, politics, religion, or culture, the authoritativeness of those narratives is viewed with skepticism as the plays themselves implicitly ask, says who? How and why did the master(s) impose that particular narrative, at that time, to that audience? What narrative or extra-narrative factors allowed this version to reign supreme?

A recent example of this re-vision of narrative is *Martha Stutz* by Argentine Javier Daulte, written in 1995, which uses the motif of story-telling to question the “authority” behind and the authoritativeness of any “final” version along with the closure implied in that finality.<sup>2</sup> In what must be read as a subversive move, rather than relying on narrative to provide an organizing

structure, the play challenges that structure as it juxtaposes a child's narrative, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, with the juridico-journalistic narrative of a child's disappearance: Martha Stutz in Córdoba in 1938. Thus, the dramatic action of the play is precisely that of telling and performing stories, over and over again, as characters struggle for narrative dominance, the power to impose their version of events.<sup>3</sup> As a result, narratives are converted into spectacle, in a manner that renders suspect both the particular stories and narrative in general. Indeed, oxymoronic as it may seem, the play highlights its own theatricality even as it takes narrativity as its central thematic concern.

From the opening moments the play emphasizes its dual reliance on theatre and narrativity, suggesting that the two are far less neatly separated than we are wont to believe. Set in a courtroom-like ambience, the play re-narrates and reenacts the 1938 disappearance of the nine-year-old girl. The cast of characters consists of El Conductor, who orchestrates all but the final part of the investigation into and dramatization of that disappearance; Ayudante 1 and Ayudante 2, his assistants; González, the journalist who has carefully studied the case and who ultimately uses force to assume narrative control and impose his version of events; Mujer/Niña, who plays the role of the title character, among others; Suárez Zabala 1 and Suárez Zabala 2, two renditions of the prime suspect; Pascuita, his wife, who physically harms herself (makes herself sterile) in order to provide him an alibi; Risler, the local prostitute who may have procured the child for Suárez Zabala; Carmen, the local midwife, curer, to whom the child may have been taken when she was dying; and Juan Barrientos, tortured in the published script, omitted in the 1997 stage production.<sup>4</sup>

The theatricality, self-consciousness of the theatrical act, and repetition are highlighted from the opening moments of the play. Revealingly, the stage directions describe the setting as "Un espacio vacío. Es un **espacio escénico**" (10, my emphasis), thus overtly acknowledging the stage as such and clearly indicating that what follows is theatre, re-presentation. At the start of the performance, the characters enter and sit on benches placed at the edges of that empty space, that is, overtly located between the "stage" and the audience, but not easily distinguishable from that audience. In this way the actors/characters are kinesically positioned as both participants and observers (that is, jury) and thus mirror the role of the veritable audience. Indeed, the play underscores the fact that the theatrical audience is always something of a jury – a group of people charged with validating one narrative over another.<sup>5</sup> The master of ceremonies, El Conductor, functions as a judge

and a theatrical director, thus reminding us that theatre is as complicitous as a court of law in setting sociopolitical dictates and influencing our perspective on and perception of all aspects of life. Each in its own way shapes our perceptions of right and wrong, permissible or not permissible, and imposes its own particular narratives, narratives codified and sanctioned by some judge/director, which we then re-enact and perform, consciously or not, in life outside the theatre. Just as readers of narrative and the audience of theatre tend to seek or impose narrative closure, courts of law are under pressure from the media and public opinion to find or create a narrative with closure, so that the threat is attenuated (or at least encapsulated, isolated and distanced), and we are relieved of any further responsibility or blame, thus allowing us to “live happily ever after.”

By setting the play in a courtroom ambience, Daulte also foregrounds the repeatable nature of the “crime” as he emphasizes the theme of narrative. Indeed, early in the play *Ayudante 2* closes his folder and states, “Ante la total falta de pistas, el caso de la desaparición de la menor Martha Ofelia Stutz, queda, hasta nuevo aviso, cerrado” (13). Darkness follows, and those words are immediately belied, in a gesture that encourages us to question every statement articulated in the work, when the case is “re-opened,” theatrically at least, with the words and presence of one of the witnesses, Risler. Under the direction of *El Conductor*, who presumably seeks the truth via the narratives of the various characters, each character overtly reenacts the events, or rather someone’s version of the events, what someone said happened, in a gesture that emphasizes the layers of narrative and theatre,<sup>6</sup> layers that clearly frustrate any hope for discovering truth or origins. Thus, in the opening moments of the play *El Conductor* insists that *Ayudante 2* “perform” (in the theatrical sense of the word) by signaling the referents of the words of *Ayudante 1*, while *Mujer/Niña* literally refuses to “play the game” and reenact the male narratives until she is paid.<sup>7</sup> And, she is paid, not irrelevantly, in what are specifically labelled *billetes de utilería*, thus highlighting the theatricality of it all. Soon however, *Ayudante 1* and *2* switch roles, as the “teller” becomes the “shower” and vice versa, in a gesture that underlines the interdependence of telling and showing, narrative and theatre, and emphasizes the reliance of the latter on the former. Later, *Ayudante 1* has to remind González of his lines, and soon *Ayudante 2* insists on not having his role and narrative position usurped: “¿Va a dejar que lo diga todo él? . . . Si no me deja hablar” (12). But, revealingly, like *Mujer/Niña*, characters sometimes refuse to perform the narrative. For example, Carmen twice says

no and attempts to change the course of the story, but as El Conductor notes, “Entiendo su... ‘expresión de deseo’, Carmen. Pero como hipótesis, en tanto detendría el curso del relato, es inaceptable” (24). Not allowed to alter the narrative he has privileged, she is forced to go on. Throughout the play we go back over the same information, even the same speeches, all to end up circularly where we began – not knowing, trapped in a labyrinth of narrative that leads nowhere except back to itself. Nonetheless, that labyrinth still aims to buttress the narrative the “master” has privileged.

In many ways the play models itself on the detective story genre. First, the control that El Conductor exercises in the “courtroom” over the narratives that are dramatized there clearly parallels the control the detective exercises over his narrative as he re-plots or reenacts the crime. In the play, however, El Conductor’s authority is overtly undermined twice: first, early in the play by the entrance of a figure in a rabbit’s mask that frightens Martha and causes the other characters to giggle, suggesting that the “master’s” narrative is still occasionally threatened by unexpected, outside agencies; and then late in the play when he is killed, and his authority is usurped by another master (11).<sup>8</sup> Second, the main action of the play as in the detective story genre is predicated on an investigation into the question of “who done it.” This detective story, however, never answers the question and thus undermines the *novela policial*’s narrative of mastery and closure where the detective inevitably solves the crime, finds a logical explanation for everything, performs closure, and thereby attenuates the threat of the unknown, of not knowing.

Here, however, the play’s insistence on repetition precludes that closure. Although the final narrative is imposed and orchestrated by the reporter, González, who has had to kill El Conductor in order to assume his position of authority, so many versions have been put forth that there seems no reason to grant any special privilege to his final one. Indeed, contrary to the last words of the play, spoken to Martha by Suárez Zabala 2, “No vas a volver” (39), the audience has no doubt that this “ending” is as arbitrary as any other, that our sense of closure is artificial (here and elsewhere dependent on someone’s arbitrary designation of this moment rather than some other one as the “end”), and that all will indeed be repeated. In the words of El Conductor, “Quizá todo sea repetible” (30). Martha will return, if only as a narrative creation of the “masters.” And, not only will she return via their narratives, but, as “creation” she will also be disappeared anew.

At the same time, the play insists on any number of levels that the question posed (who committed the crime?) cannot be legitimately answered

for a number of reasons. First, the lack of a body (Martha's body was never found, it "disappeared") leaves open the question of whether or not a crime has even been committed. Without *el cuerpo del delito* (in all senses of the term), how can we be sure there has been a crime? What does that expression mean without a body; what is the significance of any word or name once it is disembodied, distanced from the corporeal, tangible reality (if such exists)? And, of course, as Judith Butler and others have convincingly argued, even that body is already bounded and inscribed by previous discourse – always already narrative creation to some degree. And, as we shall see below, the question of body becomes crucial in a number of ways. Second, as Daulte states in the program, Martha's story is told by others, by strangers who never knew or even saw her, including, not irrelevantly, the journalist, González. He has carefully studied the case, but he has no first-hand knowledge. Thus, in spite of all pretenses to the contrary, his narrative is not definitive, for it is based exclusively on the words, narratives, of others. González, perhaps recognizing himself in El Conductor whom he eventually supplants, accuses him of being a charlatan, to which the latter responds, "Claro. ¿Qué otra cosa somos? De vez en cuando, sólo de vez en cuando, sucede 'verdaderamente' algo. Todo lo demás son palabras, palabras que giran alrededor de ese algo" (22). *Ese algo* in this case is a *nada*, an absence, a blank space. Nonetheless, it is this same journalist who threatens the other characters with a gun as he attempts to impose his version of the truth, or perhaps simply gives vent to his terror that there may not be a "truth," that is, a comforting, logical explanation, that closure performed by the master narratives. It is also this same character who visually incarnates the violence inherent in imposing a sense of closure, for he can do so only by killing El Conductor – thus providing a substitute *cuerpo del delito* – and subsequently assuming his narrative authority. The similarities between El Conductor's position and the one González assumes at the end of the play are emphasized in the use of lighting and other scenic elements. Twice, El Conductor's "investigation" begins with a change of light: the darkness mentioned above (13) and earlier when, "*hace una seña. Las luces se apagan bruscamente*" (10). He also demands silence (11). When González takes over, after killing El Conductor, he shouts, "¡Todo el mundo quieto!" and the stage directions specify, "*Hace una seña y la luz cambia*" (35) as we go "back" to Carmen's house. Later, he shouts to everyone, "¡Fuera! ¡Fuera de aquí! . . . Piérdanse. Desvanézcense. Y no vuelvan. No vuelvan" (37), and they obey. They perform as they are ordered much as the characters do earlier at El Conductor's

command. Then, González physically usurps El Conductor's position at his desk/podium.

Obviously, González's usurpation of El Conductor's role is anything but innocent. As indicated, he uses that control to impose his own narrative, and, significantly, his concluding narrative elides his personal relationship with the accused child molester/murderer and thus is necessarily a "vested" reading. Although González is a journalist, presumably objective, his investigation into the case and the resulting narrative have led him to empathize and/or identify with Suárez Zabala, an empathy that would necessarily weaken his objectivity. Indeed, there are a number of indications in the play that underscore his investment in his narrative. For example, after Carmen vigorously refuses to accept his version of events that she killed or knows who killed the child, shouting "Mentira" (37), he suddenly fires a gun at Martha. At Carmen's warning, the child races off stage and falls directly into the hands of Suárez Zabala 2. In this manner, González seems to have literally occasioned the ending, just as he does metaphorically via his narrative. This forced encounter between Martha and Suárez Zabala 2 leads directly to the conversation between them with which the play concludes.

Revealingly, this final conversation recalls the earlier "Receso" where Mujer/Niña talked about names, words and their meanings, as part of what seemed to be her role as Alice in Wonderland. At the end, Mujer/Niña plays the role of Martha, but the conversation still centers on names and meanings as well as on silent letters, letters that are there but not pronounced, such as the *h* in Martha. And, in that final conversation, Suárez Zabala 2 repeatedly alludes to the disappearing cat – the Cheshire cat of the Alice narrative – in a way that underscores the links between this conversation and the earlier one. Obviously, both topics – disappearing cats and silent letters – evoke what may well be the most important aspects of all narratives: what they do not say, what they cover over or elide – those silenced, "disappeared" elements of any narrative, such as, for example, the motives or complicity of the master in the narrative he produces. Significantly, while the final conversation occurs between Mujer/Niña and Suárez Zabala 2, the conversation of the "Receso" was between Mujer/Niña and González, precisely the character who is now imposing his version of events, and thus again subtly evokes his investment in and self-projection onto this final rendition.

Thus the play confronts us with the question of truth as proffered by narrative, reminding us that narrative is always and inevitably someone's vested narrative, always and inevitably structured around an absence, an

elision. For example, although González labels Suárez Zabala an “intachable padre y esposo” (13) and his wife Pascuita uses the terms “amantísimo esposo y padre ejemplar” (17), some of the other narratives proffered throughout the play suggest that he has a mistress in Buenos Aires, perhaps a homosexual relationship with González, and more important for the case at hand, a predilection for young girls, not unlike Lewis Carroll himself.<sup>9</sup> Obviously, we are not privy to the “truth” of any of these allegations, but they all point to the potential (perhaps inevitable) unreliability of any narrative, with its “disappeared,” unpronounced investments.

The inability of the word or narrative to capture a single unequivocal truth is quite literally embodied in the characters of Suárez Zabala 1 and 2. Suárez Zabala, the prime suspect, is doubled and played by more than one actor, thereby dramatically underscoring the distance between various versions of events, various perspectives. As noted above, those perspectives are so diverse that they evoke non-identical referents. The same name or signifier seems to refer to different “people” or bodies, as it were, and thus flies in the face of our traditional concept of a character (narrative or theatrical) as a composite of consistent traits.<sup>10</sup> Further emphasizing the multiple subjectivities of all the characters, Pascuita, the stern, matronly wife of Suárez Zabala, dons the wig and clothing of Risler, the prostitute, to assist in one narrative version of the crime, and Suárez Zabala 2 disguises himself as Suárez Zabala 1 and then further dons a rabbit’s mask (thus, again connecting him and the entire Martha narrative to the Alice narrative).<sup>11</sup> These layers of disguise function as visual images of the layers of narrative that are superimposed one on the other. The point, of course, is that the bottom layer – the core – if we can ever presume to have discovered it, is not necessarily any more valid than any other, for it is probably tainted by those other layers, which tend to fuse with it rather than remaining neatly separated and distinguishable.

Yet, although, Suárez Zabala as prime suspect has “too many” bodies as it were, other characters do not have enough. For example, Mujer/Niña’s performance of more than one character not only underlines the links between what might appear to be very different narratives, it also suggests that one body can pretend to be several others. Along the same lines, if indeed in a more extreme case of “bodily” lack, the victim, Martha, in some sense has none. Because her body has disappeared and been replaced by that of Mujer/Niña, she cannot be called upon for her narrative version of events, a fact that is one of the primary sources of the characters’ discomfort or “dis-ease” (as well as our own). Although the play does imply that there would probably be

no more reason to accept her version of events than anyone else's, her disappearance has resulted in her narrative and her "body" being supplanted by the males and their narratives. As El Conductor notes, "Por lo menos ya sé quién la tapa. . . . Quién ocupó su lugar. Quién se puso en el centro de la cuestión" (22), in reference to the fact that Suárez Zabala has replaced her as victim, much as El Conductor himself will later replace her as *el cuerpo del delito*.<sup>12</sup> Thus, in one way or another, each of the masters (El Conductor, Suárez Zabala, and González) has replaced her at the center of the narrative. And she has then been projected by them as Mujer/Niña.

But, is/was Martha a *mujer* or a *niña*? The play suggests that any answer to that question would depend upon the role that she was playing at a given moment – that of innocent child or young seductress. And, clearly, her role at any given moment is contingent on the demands or projections (desires in either case) of her audience – another frequently elided factor. She and the other characters (and by implication all of us) to a large degree perform the role that the audience expects or demands (pays for, literally or figuratively), a role that is again the product of some narrative and the concurrent power to impose that narrative. In this regard, the perception of Martha as a seductress may well be little more than a projection of her audience, a narrative created by the audience (be it Suárez Zabala, his wife, or even González and El Conductor as they identify with him) that allows the audience to "discover" what it wants to find (its own desires somewhere else) and thereby metonymically displace the guilt and blame from the victimizer to the victim. The fact that even when Martha is corporeally present on the stage (in the "body" of Mujer/Niña), her presence is not necessarily noticed by the other characters emphasizes her absence, her lack of body as it were, as well as her status as pure narrative creation and projection. As the text states, "*La Mujer/Niña continúa sobre la camilla, sentada, atendiendo al curso de la conversación, pero nadie parece notar su presencia*" (emphasis added, 26).

Paradoxically, it is precisely the intermission that underlines and links the questions of narrative, absence, and repetition – paradoxically, because intermission is usually the moment when we leave the play and its messages behind. Ironically but revealingly, this play's intermission is not an intermission at all: characters and audience remain where they are. Indeed, in spite of our confidence in what an intermission should be, the play goes on, highlighting both the arbitrariness of the signifier and the fact that theatre and what we think of as non-theatre are not easily separated. El Conductor calls for a recess with the command, "Receso" (27), thus employing language



as a performative and pointing to the possibility that much of the narrative we have witnessed up to this point is equally performative, words that would make it so.<sup>13</sup> In response to his command, the characters bring out a tea table, and, until his next performative “¡Fin del receso!” (30), they embark on an Alice-in-Wonderland style tea, in which some of the characters fall asleep while Mujer/Niña talks about the absurdity of language and trying to assign names, and, I would add, of trying to impose a single label, role, or narrative on any person who is necessarily a composite of multiple subjectivities. Meanwhile, El Conductor pours tea into a bottomless cup, in what functions as a visual allusion to Martha’s absence, an absence the narratives try to fill up much as El Conductor tries to fill the cup – all to no avail.

Surely, as the play emphasizes, the most terrifying aspect of Martha’s disappearance is the absence, the lack of both a body and a logical explanation, along with the inverse fear that she might somehow reappear, like the Cheshire cat, as in fact she has via the collective memory and this rendition.<sup>14</sup> Thus, to the extent that the narratives and the play itself are based on, structured around, the hole, the absence of Martha (the empty cup, if you will), one might well argue that the play is not really about Martha at all, in spite of its title. Indeed, as I have been suggesting, the subject of the play is narrative and, more specifically, I would now add, the dynamics of narrative pleasure: the pleasure involved in covering over that absence with words and play, the pleasure produced by telling and re-imag(in)ing the crime, the pleasure of having one’s narrative reign supreme, as the guilt is displaced elsewhere and the victim is marginalized, “disappeared” anew. Significantly, in this play, narrative “pleasure” is distinctly “male” and has to be bought (which brings us back to the notion of *master* narratives).<sup>15</sup> Throughout, the women have to be paid to play the game, to perform the roles assigned them by the males. I have already mentioned Mujer/Niña, who is paid at the start of the performance, but Risler, a prostitute accustomed to being paid to play the men’s games, also threatens to leave the stage and not participate. Hovering at the edge of the scenic space, she agrees to stay and perform only once she is paid. As she stated earlier in the play in reference to her life as a prostitute in which the client “buys” her complicity in role playing, “Momentito, González. Una cosa es dejar que me insultes cuando pagás, y otra aguantarte gratis” (15). Similarly, near the end, Carmen also refuses to “play” and acquiesces only when she is paid with all the *billetes de utilería* that were earlier given to Mujer/Niña and Risler. In each case, the woman has to be paid to “perform,” to allow the male to impose his version of the narrative.

That payment might well be understood, in Teresa de Lauretis's terms, as a certain return for investment, the "reward" received for occupying one discursive (narrative) position rather than another (16), or, in this case, for performing in one "play" rather than another. In this sense, El Conductor is correct when he insists that all are guilty, for acting or for not acting – doubtlessly in both senses of the word – for imposing a vested narrative or for participating in it.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For a functional definition of *narrativity* I shall borrow from Elin Diamond who draws from a number of other scholars to define narrativity as, "the process by which a spectator of any representational medium will construct a narrative, i.e. a causal chain of events moving toward a telos or completion" (94).

<sup>2</sup> *Martha* debuted in Buenos Aires in May 1997 in the Teatro General San Martín (Sala Cunill Cabanellas) under the direction of Diego Kogan. It was then produced in July of 1998 in the Teatro Circular de Montevideo under the direction of Fernando Beramendi and again in the same Montevideo theatre in April 1999. Javier Daulte was born in Buenos Aires in 1963. He is the author of more than a dozen plays, a director, and has received numerous prizes for his theatrical work. It is important to recognize that the play can (indeed must) be read as a commentary on recent Argentine political history – specifically the *proceso* and the *desaparecidos* of the late 1970s and early 1980s. I am totally cognizant of this aspect of the subject matter of the play, although my focus will be elsewhere as I perform what I call a macrocosmic reading. Thus, as I elide the specifics of the Argentine situation (the microcosm), I will analyze the larger issues presented in the play to show how the playwright links power and its abuse (inside Argentina or outside it) to narrative.

<sup>3</sup> Trastoy has noted that in *Martha* there are no "real referents" behind the scenic discourse. Insofar as *Martha* as a human being is but a vague memory, a name, all is based on other words and narrative experiences.

<sup>4</sup> According to Daulte, because director Diego Kogan decided to eliminate Barrientos from the stage production, he rewrote parts of the text so that his lines were articulated by Carmen, his wife. In addition, the program director of the San Martín encouraged Daulte to change the name of Suárez Zabala for the stage production; to this he acceded since legally Suárez Zabala (along with all the other suspects) had been declared innocent (personal correspondence).

<sup>5</sup> At the same time and as a result, the play makes explicit what is implicit in any theatrical work (and perhaps narrative), that the interlocutor is multiple, simultaneously the character to whom the words are ostensibly directed and the audience for whom they are ultimately uttered.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to the works of Judith Butler for my understanding and use of the term "perform" as well as for my notions of "body" later in this paper. In *Bodies That Matter* she defines performativity (from which I take the meaning for my verb "to perform") "not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effects it names" (2). She continues, "Performativity is thus not a singular 'act,' for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical; indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated (and, conversely, its theatricality gains a certain inevitability given the impossibility of a full disclosure of its historicity)" (12-13).

<sup>7</sup> That these are definitely narratives of the master (male) there is never any doubt. The female characters are paid to enact their roles and may provide occasional challenges to his narrative, but they are never in control. Indeed, the center of the narrative, Martha, is not only relatively powerless in her position as both a minor and a female, doubly vulnerable to adult male fantasies, but in the “present” of the theatrical event she is an absence, a hole, a blank space that the (male) narratives would attempt to fill, as I discuss below.

<sup>8</sup> That El Conductor cannot resist the temptation to try on the mask may also reflect how complicitous he is with the very narrative or perhaps even the crime to the extent that his direction of the re-enactment of the crime on the theatrical/judicial level in some sense murders or “disappears” Martha anew, perpetuates the crime.

<sup>9</sup> See the Trastoy article for a discussion of the relationship between the play and Lewis Carroll. What I have labelled a potential “homosexual” relationship between González and Suárez Zabala is very obliquely suggested at one point in the play. After a “scene” between the two, González turns to El Conductor (who has directed, evoked the scene) “*visiblemente dolido*” and states, “Usted está jugando sucio. No tiene ningún derecho. . . . ¡Mi relación personal con Antonio no...!” (31). Clearly, this might well be read in less erotic terms and more in terms of identification. Rather than desiring Suárez Zabala, he may simply identify with him, desiring what he desires.

<sup>10</sup> Although it flies in the face of tradition, such a representation is no doubt a more valid portrayal of today’s human beings whose multiple subjectivities are now being acknowledged.

<sup>11</sup> This particular moment is further tied to the Alice narrative by the fact that Pascuita takes a watch from her pocket, looks at it, and hurries off. This double disguise or multiple role playing might be read as an excellent example of Butler’s notions of performativity.

<sup>12</sup> As he further argues, we all need someone to occupy these spaces (that of victim) so we do not have to occupy them ourselves (22).

<sup>13</sup> A performative is defined as “that discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names” (Butler 13). “Let there be light” and “I declare war” are two examples frequently proffered. Within the representational economy of the play, his words function as a performative; outside of that fiction, they do not: neither the audience nor the actors take a break; only the characters (fictional beings) do. And, to ensure that the audience would not understand this performative as directed towards them and perhaps leave the theatre, the program clearly stated that there would be no intermission.

<sup>14</sup> The audience experiences a similar fear in the production as El Conductor endlessly (or so it seems) pours the tea into the cup and the audience waits for it to spill over, appear somewhere, inundating the floor or the table, or even us.

<sup>15</sup> One might also want to question to what degree the final statement of the play, “No vas a volver” is itself a performative, a reflection of male desire, a desire that makes it so.

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