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**Ethics and Spectatorship in debbie tucker green's  
*stoning mary* (2005) and Caryl Churchill's *Seven  
Jewish Children* (2009)**

**Autor: Claudia Maya Prats**  
**Tutor: Dr. Enric Monforte Rabascall**

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## ABSTRACT

This work considers how theatre works with spectators in order to create an ethical response, taking as case studies debbie tucker green's *stoning mary* (2005) and Caryl Churchills' *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* (2009), drawing on Levinas's notion of the Other and Butler's rereading of it, which serve as a tool to examine how both plays pose ethical questions on the audience. The paper also uses Lehmann's notion of 'response-ability' and Rancière's 'emancipated spectator' as theoretical lenses for spectatorship, so as to examine the role of the audience and their ability to respond to the suffering bodies on stage that are normally silenced by the media. In *stoning mary*, through the staging of human suffering embodied by a white casting tucker green makes visible issues that are not normally considered and explores the audience's ability to respond to such suffering. In *Seven Jewish Children*, Churchill allows its audience to perceive different bodies suffering throughout history so as to invite them to reconsider the lack of responsibility that only leads to an ongoing precariousness.

**Keywords:** ethics, spectatorship, debbie tucker green, Caryl Churchill

## RESUM

Aquest treball considera com el teatre, juntament amb els espectadors, pot arribar a crear una resposta ètica, prenent com a cas d'estudi l'obra *stoning mary* de debbie tucker green (2005) i *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* (2009) de Caryl Churchill, fent servir la noció de l'altre de Levinas i la relectura de Butler com a eina per examinar com ambdues obres presenten qüestions ètiques als espectadors. L'estudi també considera la teoria de Lehmann de la 'responsabilitat' de l'espectador i la teoria de 'l'espectador emancipat' de Rancière per tal d'examinar el paper del públic i la seva capacitat de respondre als cossos precaris de l'escenari, els quals són generalment silenciats als mitjans de comunicació. A *stoning mary*, tucker green explora la capacitat de respondre dels espectadors a través d'un càsting blanc per tal de fer més visibles els problemes que normalment no són considerats. A *Seven Jewish Children*, Churchill exposa el patiment de diferents cossos durant la història a fi de convidar al públic a reconsiderar la manca de responsabilitat que només condueix a una continuïtat de la precarietat.

**Paraules clau:** ètica, funció de l'espectador, debbie tucker green, Caryl Churchill

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

*A very expensive hotel room in Leeds – the kind that is so expensive it could be anywhere in the world. (Sarah Kane, *Blasted*)*

*The hotel has been blasted by a mortar bomb. (Sarah Kane, *Blasted*)*

Sarah Kane published *Blasted* in 1995, a play which caused much heated controversy among audiences. *Blasted* presents its action in a hotel in Leeds but in the middle of the play, the stage directions state that a bomb blasts the hotel room. Consequently, it is by placing an explosion in a European hotel, which is something that we normally associate with wars that do not normally occur in Western countries, that audiences are made to consider what they have witnessed on stage, since Kane believed that it is “the audience alone who must take responsibility for what the play offers them” (Saunders 27). It was upon reading Kane’s *Blasted* that I first felt most engaged with a play as a spectator, or in this case, a reader. Therefore, this was probably the starting point for being interested in spectatorship and how the audience can play a role in creating a meaning in the theatre space as well as in how ethics is involved with drama.

This dissertation discusses how the audience participates in theatre making and how ethics and drama are connected in order to allow the spectators to respond to realities or issues that may be unknown to them. The plays analysed are Debbie Tucker Green’s *Stoning Mary* (2005) and Caryl Churchill’s *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* (2009) two contemporary plays with Postdramatic characteristics that present different Others and their vulnerability so as to raise awareness among spectators and hopefully obtain an ethical response. Thus, what these two plays feature, as Taylor-Batty argues, is “a concern to explore human experience through a focus on the vulnerabilities of the body” (61) which is something that became “central motif in much 1990s theatre and performance” (Taylor-Batty 61) but continued to do so in the 2000s. Moreover, both plays not only try to raise awareness but at the same time they also denounce the lack of responsibility in Western societies, who under the influence of neoliberalism, reinforce notions such as “precarity, the precariat, and precariousness” (Shim 215).

Thus, in order to analyse *Stoning Mary* and *Seven Jewish Children*, the relationship between theatre and ethics as well as the spectator’s engagement in the creation of ethics has to be considered. The main theoretical framework employed to discuss the relationship between theatre studies and ethics is Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the Other, a being that one must bear responsibility to in order to fulfil a favourable ethical

relationship. Moreover, Judith Butler's rereading of Levinas's theory, where she further examines his notion of the Other and explores the different representational approaches of its vulnerability. In the case of theories on spectatorship, this paper makes use of Jacques Rancière's notion of the 'emancipated spectator', according to which audiences are regarded as active and thus capable of responding to any ethical demand and notice what plays are trying to bring attention to, since Rancière believes that the theatre can disrupt the 'distribution of the sensible', which are the conventions that decide what can be said or seen. Furthermore, the paper draws on Hans-Thies Lehmann discussion on how Postdramatic theatre infers the audience's ability to respond to the issues that are being staged, which he denominates 'response-ability'.

## 2. ETHICS

Literature studies experienced an 'ethical turn' in the 1980s but it was not until the late 2000s, with the publication of books such as Nicholas Ridout's *Theatre & Ethics* (2009) and Helena Grehan's *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (2009) among others, that theatre started to be regarded as a place for ethics (Aragay 3). Throughout the twentieth century the word 'ethics' "had been absent from intellectual discussion" (Critchley 2) but after the Nazi genocide, the world experienced a "reorientation of ethics" (Ridout 49). In fact, after the Holocaust, humanity thought that instead of progress, what the world was witnessing were acts of depravity which led many thinkers and artists into thinking that this event had been due to the processes of enlightenment and modernisation, which were thought to bring peace to a liberated humanity but instead made the world fall into destruction (Ridout 50).

In *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1947) Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer define the enlightenment as "the advance of thought, which has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters" (1). In *Theatre & Ethics* (2009) Nicholas Ridout explains what these two thinkers discuss in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* about the aftermath of the enlightenment practices, where they argue how through "the development of technologies, the organisation of people and the exploitation of human and natural resources in the name of progress and prosperity, Western humanity turned its own rationality into an irrational drive to power" in an attempt to secure the domination of the world (Ridout 50). However, this development of technologies led to inhuman processes of mechanisation in the shape of factories of death that served as a

tool for the National Socialist government of Germany to mass murder the European Jews (Ridout 51). Thus, after the experience of the Holocaust, Europe felt the need to replace the enlightenment ideas and rethink the concept of ethics in the West, which is what the work of the thinker Emmanuel Levinas consisted of, and which would later be regarded in relation to theatre studies.

## **2.1 The Levinasian Other**

Emmanuel Levinas, the French philosopher of Jewish ancestry, reintroduced the concept of ethics in the West through a reconfiguration on how the Holocaust could have happened, meaning that his “work contributed substantially to the re-evaluation of enlightenment modernity” (Ridout 51). Throughout his career, Levinas’s work was based on the rethinking of “those relationships (between self and world) in terms radically different from those we have seen initiated by Aristotle and continued through the traditions of ‘Western philosophy’ by philosophers such as Kant” (Ridout 51).

In ‘Ethics as First Philosophy’ (1984), as Ridout best summarises, Levinas replaced a philosophical emphasis on ‘being’ with a dedication to an ethics based on the existence of the ‘other’ (52). Levinas states that “knowledge is a relation to an other of consciousness and almost the aim or the will of that other which is an object” (78). This means that by “thinking through knowing, of seizing something and making one’s own” as well as “representing the difference of being” one “appropriates and grasps the otherness of the known” (76), meaning that it would result in a colonisation because the self does not respect the difference of the Other. Therefore, for Levinas “the responsibility *for* the Other pre-exists any self-consciousness” and is pre-ontological (75 emphasis added).

Levinas states that the self should “not grasp the other in order to dominate”, but instead they should “respond to the face’s epiphany” (75), a face that is the manifestation of the Other. Levinas comments on how “the face before me summons me, calls for me, begs for me, as if the invisible death that must be faced by the Other, pure otherness, separated, in some way, from any whole, were my business” (83), meaning that “one has to respond to one’s right to be, [...] because of one’s fear for the Other” (82) a fear “for all the violence and murder my existing might generate, in spite of its conscious and intentional innocence” (82). This refers to the notion of how it is our responsibility to care for the well-being of the Other and fear for any violence that our existence may generate even though it being non-intentional (Levinas 82) to the point where one must be

“devoted to the other man before being devoted” to oneself (Levinas 83). Levinas states that the face of the Other is always regarding (96) which reinforces the notion that the Self is “responsible for its very presence” (81) and comments on how being a human requires “the return to the interiority of non-intentional consciousness, to its capacity to fear injustice more than death, to prefer to suffer than to commit injustice” (85). Hence, in order to fulfil an ethical relationship, the Self must regard the wellbeing of the Other, even if the Self suffers when doing so.

## **2.2. Judith Butler reconsiders Emmanuel Levinas**

Judith Butler published *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2004) where she draws on Levinas’s notion of the face. Butler suggests that “we are addressed by others in ways that we cannot avert or avoid” (130) and that if we think that responding only occurs when the Other is explicitly calling us, then we “miss the situation of being addressed, the demand that comes from elsewhere, sometimes a nameless elsewhere by which our obligations are articulated and pressed upon us” (130). Butler then takes as a point of departure Levinas’s notion of the face which is a face that does not speak but produces sounds of suffering through a wordless vocalization (133-4) and “is not exclusively a human face” (Levinas qtd. in Butler 133) to explain how “others make moral claims upon us” (131). She then suggests that “to respond to the face, to understand its meaning, means to be awake to what is precarious in another life or, rather, the precariousness of life itself” (134). Moreover, she comments on the non-violence that Levinas promotes, which comes from a tension between “the fear of undergoing violence and the fear of inflecting violence” (137) and she argues that this poses a dilemma which she calls ‘ethical anxiety’ (136), which refers to the “fear for one’s own survival, and the anxiety about hurting the Other” (137). In relation to this fear of hurting the other, Butler poses questions on the Levinasian ethical frame and states that while “I may decide not to invoke my own desire to preserve my life as a justification for violence [...] what if violence is done to someone I love? What if there is an Other who does violence to another Other? To which Other do I respond ethically?” (139-140).

Butler then comments on the different possibilities on representing the face’s vulnerability and reconsiders the problems of humanisation. She states that those “who gain representation [...] have better chance of being humanised” (141) and so she argues that the use of the face in the media “effects a dehumanization” (141) since the realities of the Other’s vulnerability are represented through a strategy of “shock and awe” in order

to produce an aesthetic representation and therefore turn it into a consumable object (148). This results in aesthetic images that do not convey the pain or the difference of the Other since the images “work precisely through providing no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death” (146). Moreover, Butler argues how the face can be dehumanised through ‘occlusion’, where “appearance is itself constituted on the basis of the exclusion of that image” (147), meaning that society may choose not to represent and silence an image that may be far away or close to us asking to be represented. Therefore, Butler argues that in order to humanise the Other, one must show the failure of representation since for Levinas “personification sometimes performs its own dehumanisation” (141). In order to do so, art should portray the difficulty in representing the Other because the “human is not identified with what is represented but neither is it identified with the unrepresentable” since “the face is not ‘effaced’ in this failure of representation, but is constituted in that very possibility” (144). Thus, as Butler states “for representation to convey the human, then, representation must not only fail, but it must show its failure” (144) and proposes that “the task at hand is to establish modes of public seeing and hearing that might well respond to the cry of the human within the sphere of appearance” (147).

Butler suggests that maybe the prohibition on the public grievability of these ungrievable lives is a continuation of violence (148) which is perpetuated through the media. She comments on how war suffering was “photos of children maimed and killed by US bombs, were refused by mainstream media” and “supplanted with footage that always took the aerial view”, “whose perspective is established and maintained by state power” (149) but the “bodies executed by the Hussein regime” were “front page of the New York Times, since those bodies must be grieved” (149). Unfortunately, Butler explains how populations are managed in an “unequal distribution of precarity” (“Precarious Life” 148) that decides “whose life is grievable and worth protecting and whose life is ungrievable [...] and thus less worthy of protection and sustenance” (“Precarious Life” 148) since it is “framed as being already lost or forfeited” (*Frames* 31). She argues on how the media works against our ethical capacity and claims that “if those lives remain unnameable and ungrievable, if they do not appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we will not be moved” (*Precarious Life* 150), meaning that an ethical response will never occur because “under contemporary conditions of representation” where we cannot “hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face” (*Precarious Life* 150) of the Other. Therefore, it should be our



responsibility to “create a sense of the public in which oppositional voices are not feared, or dismissed, but valued for the instigation to a sensate democracy they occasionally perform” (*Precarious Life* 151) and thus “minimize precariousness and its unequal distribution” (*Frames* 22).

Moreover, in “Precarious Life, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Cohabitation” (2012) Butler addresses “the ethical obligations that are global in character and emerge both at distance and within relations of proximity” (134). Levinas held “the notion that only within a Judeo-Christian tradition were ethical relations possible” (Butler 139) while Butler advocates that one must have “obligations to those who are far away as well as to those who are proximate” (137). She then suggests “that images and accounts of war suffering are a particular form of ethical sollicitation” (135) where even though we may choose not to see the images of war suffering we still “find ourselves in the midst of a responsive action of some kind, since we are usually responding to what we have not chosen to see” (137). When arguing how the situations that happen ‘there’ also happen ‘here’ Butler states that “if what is happening ‘there’ depends on the event being registered in several ‘elsewheres’, then it would seem that the ethical claim of the event takes place always in a ‘here’ and ‘there’ that are in some ways reversible” (138). This differs with Levinas’s notion that “reciprocity cannot be the basis of ethics” (140) since Butler believes that we should advocate for “mixed communities” (146) since she believes that “even in situations of [...] unchosen modes of cohabitation [...] ethical obligations emerge” (150). This is due to the fact that “everyone is precarious” (148) since we are “bodily beings who depend upon one another for shelter and sustenance” (148) and it is this shared precarity that “exposes our sociality, the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency” (148) where “those forms of cohabitation characterized by equality and minimized precarity become the goal to be achieved” (150).

### **3. SPECTATORSHIP**

The theatre serves as a place for ethics to occur due to the presence of the audience, and as a consequence, spectatorship plays a big role in the creation of ethics. As Helena Grehan argues in *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age* (2009) “theatre has the potential to provide subjects with a space in which to engage in complex and often contradictory ways with key issues of our time” (4) and explains how “spectatorship must be understood as including the responses of individual citizens or subjects who go to the

theatre to be challenged and who keep going back because of theatre's capacity to awaken and stimulate reflection on important topics and themes" (4). For Grehan, some plays "ask for active spectatorship, [...] in the sense that audiences can become intrigued, engaged and involved in a process of consideration about the important issues of response and responsibility and what these might mean both within and beyond the performance space" (5). Therefore, the audience is capable of creating an ethical response through their own considerations of what they have witnessed on stage.

Moreover, ethics and theatre are connected through Emmanuel Levinas's notion of 'the face' which serves as a connection between spectators and the Other that calls upon them. Ridout argues in *Theatre & Ethics* that "this account of what looks like a 'face-to-face encounter' has encouraged a consideration of the relationship between spectator and actor, audience and performance, in terms of this ethical situation" (54) and for Ridout it is through this that the theatre "can recover its cultural value as 'a moral institution'" (54). The ethical encounter can occur because in theatre the performance can allow us to come "face to face with the other, in a recognition of our mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and a respect for difference" (54). Nonetheless, applying Levinas to theories of spectatorship is problematic because "it removes the unknowability and anonymity of the face" (55) which for Levinas was "never any particular face but rather the otherness of the other as it appears to us in the encounter" (53). Moreover, Levinas thought that art was suspicious since it is "the very event of obscuring, a descent of the night, an invasion of shadow'. It seduces its viewer into evading responsibility for the world" (qtd. in Ridout 55) and theatre and performance are usually catalogued as an aesthetic practice (55). However, Ridout argues that "the value placed upon efficacy is most usually expressed in terms of the production of social or political change" (56) since for him "the closer it seems to approach the condition of the aesthetic [...] the more likely it is that talk of efficacy will become talk of ethics" (56).

### **3.1. Emancipating the Spectator and the Distribution of the Sensible**

In 2009 Jacques Rancière published *The Emancipated Spectator*, where he discusses the ability of the spectator in the creation of meaning of a play. For Rancière emancipation means to blur the boundary between actors and spectators which at the same time implies blurring the boundaries between individuals and members of a collective (19). Rancière comments on how theatre has been often thought to be a place "where the passive audience of spectators must be transformed into its opposite" (5), which is what

theatre makers such as Bertolt Brecht have come to assume and thus created techniques which consisted on transforming the audience into active participants in a shared world (11). However, for Rancière, “being a spectator is not some passive condition that we should transform into activity” but “it is our normal situation” (17), meaning that “emancipation begins when we challenge the opposition between viewing and acting” (13) since for him the spectator observes, interprets and is able to link what they see on stage with what they have seen on other places which means that the spectator is capable of rewriting what they have seen into a story of their own (13). Thus, for Rancière, “theatre is in and of itself communitarian” (16) where each spectator has the power to “translate what she perceives in her own way, to link it to the unique intellectual adventure that makes her similar to all the rest in as much as this adventure is not like any other” (16-17). It is this capacity that allows the spectator to “exchange their intellectual adventures” and thus translate or pass the information that they have obtained at the theatre space to others, which would result in an emancipated community “of narrators and translators” (22). Moreover, he claims that by blurring the differences between acting and viewing, we mirror the “reality of contemporary art, in which all specific artistic skills tend to leave their particular domain and swap places and powers” such as “theatre without speech, and spoken dance” (21). Rancière then argues that performances link “what one knows with what one does not know; being at once a performer deploying her skills and a spectator observing what these skills might produce in a new context among other spectators” (22), meaning that they both actors and spectators are responsible for the creation of meaning in the performance.

Rancière discusses how there are certain topics that are more visible to the spectator’s gaze while others remain less obvious, which he refers to as “the distribution of the sensible” (*Politics* 12). In *The Politics of Aesthetics* (2004) he defines ‘the distribution of the sensible’ as a system that establishes a “division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable” (3). Rancière claims that “politics revolves around what is seen and what can be said about it, around who has the ability to see and the talent to speak, around the properties of spaces and the possibilities of time” (13). In that sense, he believes that “a sensible politiccity exists that is immediately attributed to the major forms of aesthetic distribution such as the theatre” (14) since for him, theatre or choruses are ‘politics’ that “obey their own proper logic, and they offer their services in very different contexts and time period” (15). Rancière argues that due to the power that theatre holds, plays should make visible what

is normally invisible since he believed that the ethico-political potential of the theatre is related to its capacity to interrupt the distribution of the sensible or reconfigure “the sensible delimitation of what is common to the community, the forms of its visibility and of its organization” (18).

The interruption of the sensible, which he denominates ‘dissensus’ is defined as “an organization of the sensible where there is neither a reality concealed behind appearances nor a single regime of presentation and interpretation of the given imposing its obviousness on all” (*Emancipated* 48-9). Therefore, he argues that ‘political subjectivation’ “consists in the action of uncounted capacities that crack open the unity of the given and the obviousness of the visible in order to sketch a new topography of the possible” (*Emancipated* 49). Moreover, Rancière states that assuming that listening or seeing are passive actions, contributes to “a distribution of the sensible” (*Politics* 12) and in order to interrupt it we must assume that spectators are “active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them” (*Emancipated* 13). Hence, it is the emancipated spectator the one responsible for noticing what the plays are attempting to make visible since we must not assume that “to view means to take pleasure in images and appearances while ignoring the truth behind the image and the reality outside the theatre” (*Emancipated* 12). Therefore, it is necessary to assume the emancipation of the spectator in order to “help us arrive at a better understanding of how words and images, stories and performances, can change something of the world we live in” (*Emancipated* 23).

### **3.2. Postdramatic Theatre and the Audience’s Response-ability**

Hans-Thies Lehmann published *Postdramatic Theatre* in 1999, where he defines a type of theatre that he denominates Postdramatic. He states that Postdramatic theatre occurs after the “spread and then omnipresence of the *media* in everyday life since the 1970s” (22) and describes it as a text that is “no longer dramatic” (17). He then comments that Postdramatic theatre occurs when the theatre action no longer follows a naturalistic form or a “mimetic staging of a fable” (3), which means that “the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre” (26). Thus, Postdramatic theatre does not follow a linear structure that reaches a traditional closure, does not have “definable characters” (18) and language does not appear “as the speech of character” (18) since there may not even be traditional characters at all. Lehmann argues that the theatre is a place where “the aesthetic act itself (the performing) as well as the act of reception (the theatre going) take place as a real doing in the here and now” (17). Lehmann further

considers the relationship between spectators and theatre in “Word and Stage in Postdramatic Theatre” (2007). In this essay, he argues that theatre is a “form of art which has its *raison d’être* in the capacity to problematize or even renew our perception and understanding of reality” (“Word” 40) and he comments on how not only the action on a stage but also the “text in postdramatic theatre becomes part of an artistic strategy which transforms the spectator into a witness and calls up an experience of [...] awareness and responsibility” (“Word” 53).

Lehmann then draws on the relationship between ethics and spectatorship. He argues that “the theatre performance turns the behaviour onstage and in the auditorium into a joint text [...] between actors and audience” (*Postdramatic* 17), which means that it consists of mutual communication since it invites spectators to respond to what they are seeing on stage. For Lehmann then, “the task of the spectators is no longer the neutral reconstruction, the re-creation and patient retracing of the fixed image but rather the mobilization of their own ability to react and experience in order to realize their participation in the process that is offered to them” (134-5). He comments that the media “occults the viewer’s perception of the fact that participation in language also makes them [...] responsible for the message” (185), meaning that it hampers their ability to respond to those images and only “imprints indifference onto everything shown” (185) since “the media perpetually dramatize all political conflicts” (185) and in its perception “there is no experience of a connection [...] between the receiving and sending of signs; there is no experience of a relation between address and answer” (185). Thus, he argues that theatre stands in opposition to the media since it “can respond with a politics of perception, which could at the same time be called an aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)” (185). This occurs because performance is “real, emotionally compulsory, and happening in the here and now” (138) and it can consequently “move the mutual implication of actors and spectators in the theatrical production of images into the centre and thus make visible the broken thread between personal experience and perception” (186). Moreover, Ridout comments on how for Lehmann, spectators become responsible through the “re-situating of the images-of suffering humanity theatre [that] can awaken in its audience a feeling of ethical responsibility to the people suffering in the images” (58) since for him “the situation and the event of theatre becomes a dominant concern because it is here that the specific qualities of ‘live art’ in the widest sense [...] can be brought into play” (Ridout 43). Therefore, if the audience is implicated with what they are seeing on stage and feeling responsible for it, Lehmann believes that this

experience “would be not only aesthetic but [...] at the same time ethico-political” (186) since audiences are able to recognise vulnerability being represented on stage, “engage in a relationship of care or support” and “accept an ethical responsibility for the other” (Ridout 64).

Having discussed the ethical implications of theatre, where audiences play an important role due to their ability to become aware of the situations that plays are trying to bring attention to, as well as to bear responsibility to the vulnerable Others and their precarity, I argue that tucker green’s *stoning mary* and Churchill’s *Seven Jewish Children* are plays with the capacity to change the spectator’s understanding of reality while making visible issues that are normally silenced. Both plays deal with contemporary issues that are often silenced through the media and thus what these plays do is bring attention and addressing them in a sphere where the collective is able to respond to such issues. Hence, the following sections of this dissertation examine the different ways of how both of the plays represent the vulnerable Other and how the audience is invited to re-evaluate their positions when being faced with those Others.

#### **4. DEBBIE TUCKER GREEN’S *STONING MARY* (2005)**

##### **4.1. Introducing *stoning mary***

debbie tucker green wrote *stoning mary* in 2005, which was first staged at the Royal Court Theatre under the direction of Marianne Elliot. The play is structured in sixteen different parts which consist three different stories, called “The AIDS Genocide. The Prescription”, “The Child Soldier” and “Stoning Mary”. However, instead of presenting them in a linear structure, tucker green interlaces the three stories by presenting the titles of each story on screen, as it is stated in the stage directions “*scene titles to be shown*” (2). By doing this, the audience only hears a few minutes of every story at a time and slowly has to gather information as the play advances and develops its story. The protagonists in “The AIDS Genocide” are Wife and Husband and their respective egos, who argue about which of them two deserves to take the HIV medicine in order to continue living. In “The Child Soldier” we find Mum and Dad grieving about their absent child, who has become a soldier. In the last story “Stoning Mary” the protagonists are Older Sister and Younger Sister, called Mary, who has been sentenced to stoning for having killed her parent’s attacker. Even though the three stories may at first seem unconnected, it is only towards the end of the play that the audience realises that they are

in fact related, since the couple in “The Prescription” are the boy’s parents from “The Chid Soldier” as well as the parents of the two sisters in “Stoning Mary”.

*stoning mary* was written as a response to issues mainly occurring in African countries, such as AIDS, stoning and children in militias. In regards to HIV, in *The Guardian*, the critic Lyn Gardner discussed how the charity Action Aid estimated that “90% of HIV positive people live in developing countries” and that “13.2 million children had been orphaned by Aids”. Thousands of children have been recruited in youth militias throughout history, an issue that is still present in African countries, and moreover, death by stoning is still legal in many countries. Nonetheless, even though these issues do not seem to affect Western countries, tucker green explained in the interview with Lyn Gardner’s that when writing the play, she “was interested in questioning what we don’t see and hear” in the media but that “would be in the headlines every day if what was happening to them was happening to white people” (qtd. in Gardner). Thus, as Segal states in her review of the play, the play’s “main point is that First World complacency facilitates the growth of Third World troubles” (426). This is why in *stoning mary*, tucker green states that the characters have to be played by white actors in order to raise awareness among the mostly Western spectators at the Royal Court Theatre. Moreover, the play is also a response to Tony Blair’s speech during the World Economic Forum in 2005, where he stated that “if what was happening in Africa today was happening in any other part of the world, there would be such a scandal and clamour in that governments would be falling over themselves to act in response” (qtd. in Goddard, “Around the World” 127). Hence, it is relevant to consider the play as a call for ethics and explore the different methods through which tucker green is able to expose such issues to an audience that will hopefully reconsider what they have witnessed on stage.

#### **4.2. Ethical relations in *stoning mary***

Emmanuel Levinas’s notion of the Other can bring light in analysing debbie tucker green’s *stoning mary* through the character’s relationships with one another. As Levinas states in “Ethics as First Philosophy”, “the face before me summons me” (83) meaning that in order to fulfil an ethical relationship, one has the duty to respond to the others right to be and fear for its possible death (82). However, the relationships in *stoning mary* appear to be faulty since they do not seem to respond to the call of the Other and it is by depicting these characters that “audiences have to read between the lines to see how [...] avoidance amounts to complicity in global violence” (Goddard, “debbie tucker

green” 203).

One of the relationships where ethical relations are not fulfilled is that of Husband and Wife. As Fragkou and Goddard state, in “The AIDS Genocide. The Prescription” the couple formed by Husband and Wife “are afraid of proximity, reluctant to touch each other during their long exchanges of bickering” (151) and they “often avoid each other’s ‘face’ by averting their gaze to the skies in the hope of divine intervention, which not only highlights the lack of care and affection but also the transformation of the human to ‘human waste’” (151). This can be seen when The Husband Ego describes where the husband is looking: “eyes to the side – she won’t notice” (7) and instead of looking at his wife, his “eyes [are] on the prescription” (9), signalling how his life is “grievable and worth protecting” (Butler, “Precarious Life” 148) while Mum’s life is “less worthy of protection and sustenance” (Butler, “Precarious Life” 148). Moreover, immediately after looking at the prescription his “eyes to the floor like there’s summat there of interest” (9) further negating his wife’s existence. This suggests that by being unable to directly regard their respective lover’s face, they are failing at being “responsible for the very presence” (Levinas, “Ethics” 81) of the Other. Moreover, as Nicola Abram states, “through the Egos, tucker green makes her characters’ body language legible” since the Egos “function to interpret the implied silences between the main characters” (Abram 122) and the couple’s inability to not only look into each other’s eyes but also to speak to one another. Thus, these Egos could be said to function as reminders of the lack of communication between the couple, since by having Egos speak instead of the characters themselves, the silences become more apparent, serving as a reminder of the failed ethical responsibility towards the Other. In regards to the character of Mum from “The Child Soldier”, who as the play advances we learn that is the same character as Wife, is also portrayed as a vulnerable Other who is not regarded as worthy. As Fragkou and Goddard argue, “Dad denigrates Mum as a waste by questioning her human qualities” (151), which can be seen in the following extract:

DAD            You weren’t worth trying over –  
                      y’weren’t worth workin that hard over...  
                      didn’t have to work that hard to work  
                      you over –  
                      did I? (33)



It is by explicitly stating that she was not worth trying over that Dad echoes yet again Butler's discourse on the grievability of some lives and in this case, it is Mum who is regarded as ungrievable, and as a consequence is dehumanised.

This relationship is repeated towards the end of the play, where Older Sister and her boyfriend seem to be re-enacting the fighting habits that Wife and Husband used to have. In this part called "The Prescription", again to point at how these relationships are still present, Boyfriend and Older Sister fight about which of the two should take the prescription. Moreover, the fact that these faulty relationships continue to occur due to our inability to "minimize precariousness" (Butler, *Frames* 22) was highlighted in the Royal Court Production, where both the actors that played the Egos of Husband and Wife, were the same ones for Older Sister and Boyfriend Egos. Older Sister reminds us of the pattern repetition in having characters that do not care about the Other by stating "you remind me of my Dad" (69) while the couple argues about who is better than the other:

OLDER SISTER     I'd care for you better.  
BOYFRIEND EGO    yeh right.  
BOYFRIEND        you can't care as careful as I can.  
                          Can you? (69)

Despite these exchanges which seem to suggest that an ethical relationship is being fulfilled since they talk about caring, the Egos deliver a different message. The boyfriend Ego states: "I'm better'n you [...] I am better" (70) and it is by this statement Boyfriend is suggesting how he believes, just as Husband did, that it is his life the one that needs preservation and is thus more grievable. Moreover, after fighting over which of the two cares about the other more, Older Sister asks Boyfriend if he cares about her "as much as to let [her] have the prescription" (71) but Boyfriend "carefully picks up the prescription" and "throws it on the ground" (72) which signals his refusal to respond to the Other's right to be and fear for its possible death (Levinas, "Ethics" 82).

Furthermore, the character of the Child Soldier, despite killing his own parents, is portrayed as an Other in the play. The figure of the child is normally regarded as vulnerable by society, and this is specially highlighted in the play, since the child has become a soldier due to the country's allowance of child militias. The child as Other can be seen when Mum recalls the time she spent with her son and states "his voice – his tone and his... his softness and his.... And how he'd call me" (50), which if read with Levinas's notion that the face of the Other "calls for me" ("Ethics" 83) it can be assumed that this child embodies this Other whose precariousness is acknowledged by Mum. The

child's precariousness is further highlighted by the fact that the character barely speaks but instead produces "a wordless vocalization of suffering" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 134) and it is only Mum the one who hears his call:

DAD	He doesn't speak.
MUM	To you.
DAD	he doesn't / speak
MUM	to you (50)

However, shortly after, the moments where she acknowledges the child's precariousness seem to vanish when she confesses that she feels hate and fear toward the child, meaning that she now dehumanises her son (Fragkou and Goddard 151) as she states "...If we're bein honest.... I can't sleep... [...] I can't sleep with him in the house [...] He scares me." (52-3). This problematizes Levinas's ethics since for him, one has to live for the other, and even claims that maternity means to be "a complete being 'for the other'" (*Otherwise than Being* 108) and thus it is by rejecting her son, that Mum is unable to fulfil this ethical relationship.

Another relationship where ethical relationships are not fulfilled is the one of Older and Younger Sister. Younger Sister, whose name is Mary, has been condemned to stoning for having murdered her parent's attacker, that is, the Child Soldier. Fragkou comments on how by having killed a member of the community, "*stoning mary* further perplexes the ethics of ambivalence in relation to response-ability and challenges Levinasian ethics" (34) since Mary kills the child soldier that assassinated her parents, meaning that this Other, has done "violence to another Other" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 140). Yet, Mary is "condemned by her community" (Fragkou 34) that negates her precariousness and condemns her to death, which signals the failure of being "devoted to the other man before being devoted" to oneself (Levinas, "Ethics" 83) and moreover, Mary's status as an Other is further emphasised by her sister's inability to care for her. While Mary is arrested, Older Sister tells her that she would ask for a home cooked meal if she was her but Mary states: "what if I ever got your when-you-rangs to say what cooking up you wanted... Never picked up. Never answered. Swear down I never got the message" (55). Upon hearing this statement, it could be said that Mary embodies the Levinasian face that calls for her sister and begs for her, but instead of fearing for the death of this Other and seeing this death as her business (Levinas, "Ethics" 83), Older Sister simply negates her call and shows no answerability. Moreover, Older Sister promises Mary that she will come to her stoning, as it was requested by Mary, but at the

end of the play we learn that her “life is further negated by her older sister who fails to show up at the stoning in spite of Mary’s request” (Fragkou 34):

CORR. OFFICER	It’s your sister. Bein stoned.
OLDER SISTER	
CORR. OFFICER	And you promised / her.
[...]	
OLDER SISTER	
OLDER SISTER	Take my ticket. ... I – don’t wannit. (73)

Moreover, As Fragkou and Goddard argue, “Mary’s body is [further] dehumanized by her own community” (152) since they do not support her and do not sign the petition against her stoning. It could thus be argued that Mary’s life is “framed as being already lost or forfeited” (Butler, *Frames* 31) since “she will not be grieved” (Fragkou and Goddard 152) by her own community. After learning that only twelve people have signed her petition, Mary delivers an enraged speech:

YOUNGER SISTER	So what happened to the womanist bitches? ... the feminist bitches? ... The professional bitches? [...] The black bitches The rootsical bitches The white the brown bitches (61-62)
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Throughout the speech, it can be seen how she addresses many types of women, which Elaine Aston reads as “a condemnation of feminism for creating the false impression of a genuine care and responsibility for women” (590) yet it also seems a way of denouncing the lack of responsibility within the community. Therefore, it could be argued that through these faulty relationships, and Mary’s speech, tucker green is able to raise awareness and allow its audience to realise “the fragile and necessary dimensions of our interdependency” (Butler, “Precarious Life” 148).

#### 4.3. The Role of The Audience

In *stoning mary* the role of the audience is crucial in order to allow different ethical responses. As previously mentioned, the character’s relationships with others do not fulfil Levinas’s ethics or complicate them while at the same time, the play denounces the “Western failure to care for others” (Aston 588). One of the techniques that tucker green employs in order raise awareness among the audience is the use of an all-white casting that has to bear difficult situations that that are normally associated with underdeveloped countries and thus, as Keith Peacock comments, tucker green “employs racial difference

not to make a point about identity or racism, but for its theatrical and political impact on a white British audience” (60). The play indicates that “*all characters are white*” (2) and “*the play is set in the country it is performed in*” (2) which in the case of the premiere, was the Royal Court Theatre in London. Thus, it is through this technique that the play “shocks us into new awareness by transposing three putative third world stories into a white culture” (Billington, *stoning* 426) so as to raise awareness among audiences, which certainly proved to be successful since even some reviewers that did not enjoy the play argued that it was “a jolt to hear such issues debated by white actors” (Spencer 424). Moreover, in the Royal Court production, the characters were speaking in “estuary English” (Spencer 424), which along with the race of the characters creates a “Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* through which the audience experience the characters and their concerns from a viewpoint other than that prescribed by the British media” (Goddard, “Around the World” 128).

In relation to the role of the media, Butler argues how it does not allow for an ethical response since it only represents the vulnerability of the Other through strategies of “shock and awe” which do not convey the pain of the Other (*Precarious Life* 148). Moreover, Butler states that by presenting the vulnerable Others on the media, they remain ungrievable and anonymous and claims that it should be our responsibility to represent them in order to “minimise precariousness and its unequal distribution” (*Frames* 22). Moreover, it is worth noting a commentary by reviewer de Jongh, who stated that “just when newspapers are making their sad adieus to the dear, departed Pope, there arrives with macabre good timing an hour-long play that offers a savage corrective to those hymns of praise to his fierce Holiness” (424). Thus, what tucker green does by staging issues such as stoning, child militias and AIDS is attempting to represent the suffering of the Other and attempt to minimise the “unequal distribution” (Butler, *Frames* 22) of precariousness by representing their suffering in front of an audience while at the same time denouncing the lack of responsibility in the West. Moreover, since the vulnerable Others on stage are white, which clearly contrasts with what Western audiences are used to hearing on the news, the shocked spectators will hopefully notice the precariousness and vulnerability of these Others. In that sense, the play has the potential to disrupt the ‘distribution of the sensible’ since it is “re-situating of the images-of suffering humanity” into a Western stage and is thus showing “what is [not] common to the community” (Rancière, *Politics* 18). Therefore, instead of allowing those problems

to only be covered on television, tucker green attempts to represent the suffering of Others in front of an audience in order to allow for an ethical response.

Furthermore, the names of the characters also allow the audience to feel identified with what they are seeing on stage and allows tucker green to attack “our sense of detachment from these distant problems” (Johns 424). The character list consists of familiar names such as Sister, Husband, Wife, Mum or Dad, meaning that all spectators will be familiar with the names and will feel connected to such stories since they will “imagine their own “Mum” or “Junior Sister” involved in the horrors onstage” (Abram 117). Moreover, as the play advances, we learn that Junior Sister’s name is Mary, which as Goddard states, it is a “Christian name [that] underlines a ‘universalising’ characteristic that implicates us all” (“Around the World” 127), which especially effective when staging the play in Western countries where the name Mary is widely spread. However, through the use of familiar names and a white casting, tucker green “is not trying to prove that this could happen to anyone – but that it shouldn’t happen to anyone” (Segal 426), which hopefully leads to the audience’s recognition to the suffering of distant Others while at the same time, they come into a “recognition of our mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and a respect for difference” (Ridout 54), which is created through the act of being face to face with an Other in the theatre space.

Furthermore, *stoning mary* holds ethical potential through the use of non-naturalistic techniques, which highlights the play’s status as a post-dramatic text. As mentioned, the characters do not have proper names but rather, their names are members of the family, meaning that they do not consist of naturalistic characters’ names. Moreover, these characters are accompanied by their Egos who normally speak what is on the characters’ minds which highlights the play’s category as Postdramatic:

HUSBAND

WIFE

WIFE EGO Like some higher bein’s gonna bother bein here (11)

In addition, the play does attempt to create a “mimetic staging of a fable” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 3) where a linear structure is followed nor creates a cause and effect plot, since we learn that a “child killed [Mary’s] parents” (63), that is, Mum and Dad, but at the end of the play “*MUM picks up her first stone*” (73) and moreover, the stage design does not attempt to mimic real life but instead features a “bare set, with only

a couple of chairs for props” (Sierz 428). Thus, it is through the Postdramatic elements in the play that *stoning mary* “transforms the spectator into a witness and calls up an experience of [...] awareness and responsibility” (Lehmann, “Word” 53).

In regards to responsibility, spectators may regard the call of the Other through their status of witnesses in the theatre sphere since *stoning mary* asks its mostly Western audiences to engage with the issues staged. As Riedelsheimer and Stöckl argue, the play “uncompromisingly denounces indifference to remote suffering and in particular to the suffering of others who are not in a position of social or economic privilege” (119) which can be seen through tucker green’s comment on the play: “there are certain things that are happening in the world and I’m intrigued by what isn’t being talked about, what falls out of the news, what isn’t in the news” (qtd. in Goddard, “debbie tucker green” 201). Moreover, there are various instances where through the character’s utterances the audience is invited to see the differences between the First World and Third World. While the couple composed by Wife and Husband fight over which of the two should take the prescription, Husband states “this is about us [...] “us not being them. Cos we’re not them” (40) which could be said to be a reference to the Western’s inability to be responsible for Third World countries but also as an invitation for audience, as emancipated spectators, to disrupt the ‘distribution of the sensible’ and notice what the play is trying to make visible. Similar to Husband’s claim, Marys speech towards the women who did not sign the petition against her stoning could be said to refer to Western audiences:

YOUNGER SISTER Where’s all the bitches that’ll support a bitch, huh?  
[...]  
Protestin for other bitches – bitches that aint me.  
Bitches that can read.  
Bitches that can count.  
Pretty bitches. (63)

Mary states that ‘feminist’ women will only march and sign petitions for women who can read and count, which can be seen as denouncement of the Western’s inability to care for people who are not within their own community, which as Aston argues, is due to a terror that “fosters a love of the ‘selfsame’ and a hatred of the ‘other’” (590). By having Mary deliver this speech to Western audiences, it could be said that tucker green echoes Butler’s claim that in order to fulfil a satisfactory ethical relationship, one should have “obligations to those who are far away as well as to those who are proximate”

("Precarious Life" 137). Moreover, the fact that this speech was intended to allude Western people was highlighted by the fact that in the Royal Court production "the stage extended far into the stalls, with audience members downstairs standing round its perimeters" (Macaulay 427). Fragkou comments on this design choice and argues that "this technique works as a way of framing the audience as eye-witnesses to Mary's imminent stoning, but also as the target of Mary's enraged speech quoted above, which invites them to consider their own ethical stance and responsibility for what will follow" (35). The design choice implied that the audience status as emancipated spectators was emphasised since the boundary between actors and spectators was blurred (Rancière, *Emancipated* 19) which means that spectators were in total capacity to notice what the play was trying to make visible and thus act responsibly. Hence, it is by the "re-situating of the images of suffering humanity" (Ridout 58) and showing "what is [not] common to the community" (Rancière, *Politics* 18) that *stoning mary* has the ability to make its audience feel responsible for the suffering Others on stage which would hopefully lead to an ethico-political response.

## **5. CARYL CHURCHILL'S *SEVEN JEWISH CHILDREN: A PLAY FOR GAZA* (2009)**

### **5.1. Introducing *Seven Jewish Children***

Caryl Churchill wrote and published *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* (2009) as an immediate response to the Israeli's army bombings and invasion of Gaza in January 2009, a conflict which resulted in the deaths of hundreds of Palestinians, among them children, which clearly outnumbered those of the Israelis'. The play, which only lasted about ten minutes, was first staged at the Royal Court Theatre by nine actors under the direction of Dominic Cooke and it offered a free entrance, with Churchill explicitly demanding a collection for Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP). Moreover, the play could be downloaded for free in different websites such as Nick Hern Books or the Royal Court Theatre and if a printed copy was desired, it could be obtained with proceeds going to Medical Aid for Palestinians.

The play is divided into seven different parts, each of them referring to different key times in Jewish history. Even though the play only states that "*the time and child are different*" (2), Churchill herself commented the different use of time in a letter to Ari Roth. In the first scene the action seems to be set during the Holocaust: "Tell her she can

make them go away if she keeps still” (1) while the second scene is set “some time after the Holocaust in England” (Churchill, “Correspondence”): “Tell her her grandmother was clever / Don’t tell her what they did” (2). Consequently, the third scene is “a few years later, (and) has people from England (or America) deciding to go to Israel” (Churchill, “Correspondence) and the fourth scene shows “a [different] family [that] has just arrived in Israel” (Churchill, “Correspondence”), which infers that the two first scenes were not set in Israel. Scene five seems shows the aftermath of a conflict “Tell her we’ve got new land” (5) and scene six emphasizes Israel’s appropriation of the land and their power over others: “Tell her we’re stronger / Tell her we’re entitled (6). Lastly, scene seven is set in the days of the conflict in Gaza, and depicts the atrocities during Operation Cast Lead “tell her there’s dead babies, did she see babies? tell her she’s got nothing to be ashamed of” (7). Thus, the play stages over fifty years of violence in under ten minutes, which certainly unsettles the audience while at the same time, by staging the suffering of Others and their vulnerability, attempts to call for an ethical response from the spectators as well as to raise awareness about a conflict that for Western audiences seemed quite far away.

## **5.2. Vulnerability and the Other in *Seven Jewish Children***

*Seven Jewish Children* presents different vulnerable Others throughout the play, one of them being the absent child. The play is written in a form that resembles a poem, where all of the utterances are spoken by “adults” (1) who play the role of “*the parents*” (1) of an absent child, more specifically, a girl. As Geraldine Cousin argues, children “represent our fears for, and of, the future, or our anxieties about an inability to protect the vulnerable, given the precarious state of the world” (qtd. in Clements 360) which suggests the vulnerable status of this child, treated as the Other. Moreover, Abrams argues that “the child is central as the carrier of meaning, as the one who demands responsibility from the (adult) other before her” (201) which clearly echoes Levinas’s notion that one has to be “devoted to the other man before being devoted” to oneself (“Ethics” 83). Consequently, the adults continuously attempt to protect the child by deciding what to tell her or not to tell her: “Tell her we’ll be here all the time” (2), “Don’t tell her there’s any question of danger” (3) or “Tell her we love her” (7). It is through these utterances that the status of the child is seen as that of a vulnerable Other, since it is society’s responsibility to behave as a “carer for [them] in the hopes of the production of a future” (Abrams 203). Moreover, the figure of the child is absent throughout the play, which highlights their status as an Other but also serves as a humanisation device. As Butler



argues when commenting on the Levinasian face, “personification sometimes performs its own dehumanisation” (*Precarious Life* 141) meaning that by not showing the child’s figure but instead making her present through the pronouns ‘her’, Churchill represents the child in a failure of representation where the face is not directly effaced, but is constituted in that very possibility (Butler, *Precarious Life* 144), effecting her humanisation. Moreover, the child not only represents the vulnerable Other in *Seven Jewish Children* but it is also, as Kritzer argues, functions as a “poignant reminder of a vulnerable and uncertain future” (612), which is a recurrent technique in many of Churchill’s plays such as *Top Girls* (1982) or *Far Away* (2000), where she includes the presence of children to remind us of a catastrophic future but also to suggest that “girls suffer greater oppression than boys” (Luckhurst 23).

Nonetheless, Churchill suggests that not only the absent children are vulnerable but that everyone is through the depiction of violence throughout history. At the beginning of the play, which seems to be set during the Holocaust, Jews are in a precarious position as it can be seen through the adults’ utterances protecting their child: “Don’t tell her they’ll kill her / Tell her it’s important to be quiet” (2), which at the same time shows, as Stevens argues how “the Jewish adults debate whether the child should understand herself and her people as victims” (Stevens 148). Yet, Palestinians seem to suffer dehumanisation since the adults refuse to name them to their children: “Don’t tell her who they are” (4) suggesting the Israeli’s inability to respond to the ethical call of the suffering Other. However, towards the end of the play, which is set during Operation Cast Lead in Gaza, it is the Palestinians the ones who seem to be the victims now, showing how in *Seven Jewish Children* “no single identifier stays fixed in the victim or aggressor position” (Clements 366-7). Moreover, it could be said that adults at the end of the play seem to demonstrate “indifference to Palestinian suffering” (Craps 182), which can be seen through the last scene’s speech:

Tell her they did it to themselves. Tell her they want their children killed to make people sorry for them, tell her I’m not sorry for them, tell her not to be sorry for them, tell her we’re the ones to be sorry for, tell her they can’t talk suffering to us.  
[...]  
tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it’s not her. (7)

In this last speech, the Israelis seem to argue that their lives are the ones that should be grievable. The statement “tell her not to be sorry for them” echoes Butler’s argument that there are lives that are “grievable and worth protecting and [others that are]

ungrievable [...] and thus less worthy of protection and sustenance” (“Precarious Life” 148), which would be those lives of the Palestinian. The play thus represents the vulnerability of those lives which are catalogued as ‘ungrievable’ which if they were not to “appear in their precariousness and their destruction, we [would] not be moved” (*Precarious Life* 150). Moreover, Kritzer argues that the play shows “a transformation from fear for the life and well-being of one's own child to blind insensitivity toward others, and even to hate-fueled aggression under the pretext of protecting one's own children” (614) which can be seen in “I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it's not her” (7). This reinforces the notion that the Palestinians are seen as ‘ungrievable’ even though it is caused by the parents’ need to protect another vulnerable life, which is the one of the child, which would then echo the ethical question that Butler poses “what if violence is done to someone I love? What if there is an Other who does violence to another Other? To which Other do I respond ethically?” (*Precarious Life* 139-140). Moreover, the play not only depicts different victims throughout different times in history but also presents characters that are “obviously uncomfortable with, if not opposed to, violence and aggression against the Palestinian people” (Craps 184). Some Israelis state “Tell her we want peace” (6) but not all Palestinians are portrayed as pacifists (Craps 185) since “they’re attacking with rockets” (6), which suggests, as Wallace argues, that *Seven Jewish Children* keeps “ethical dilemmas in play and open, in a manner that may awaken a sense of precarious life precisely through its confrontational mode” (126). Moreover, it was through this last scene that some reviewers accused *Seven Jewish Children* of being an anti-Semitic play. Critic Howard Jacobson expressed his complete disapproval of the play and stated that it was “simple and one-sided” while Churchill herself stated in a letter titled “My play is not anti-Semitic” (2009) that she did not “recognise the play from that description” and stated that her intention was to portray the “difficulty of explaining violence to children” and show the “defensiveness of [people’s] threatened position” which only leads “to further violence”. Thus, Churchill’s comments reinforce the notion that the play presents multiple vulnerable Others and also that it “does not deny the narrative of Jewish victimization but forces the recognition that it is not the whole story, that Palestinian suffering deserves and demands to be spoken as well” (Craps 186-187).

The play offers no solutions but rather suggests that if the suffering of these Others is not represented, violence will take over future generations. As Clements argues:

In Churchill's early work she was often concerned with giving voice to the voiceless and the oppressed. But in her works since the late 1990s, she has tended to draw attention to injustice, violence and alienation not by giving voice, but by highlighting the ways in which faulty and limiting frameworks of representation (both in terms of visibility and of advocacy) render responsibility towards others impossible. (Clements 366)

This statement makes reference to the notion that those "who gain representation [...] have better chance of being humanised" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 141) and thus by staging these Others' suffering on stage, they have a better chance of being cared for since "images and accounts of war suffering are a particular form of ethical solicitation" (Butler, "Precarious Life" 135). Therefore, "the extent and ferocity of the reaction to this ten-minute work [...] confirms, if nothing else, the acute sensitivity of the territory with which the play precariously engages" (Wallace 125) while at the same time presents characters that have been accustomed to the ongoing violence and simply deliver the final utterance: "Tell her we love her. Don't frighten her" (7). This utterance shows how "the violence of the voices' situation is absolutely – although not straightforwardly – internalised" (Clements 366) which could be said to be written as a way to denounce the lack of responsibility towards the suffering of Others and the lack of "obligations to those who are far away" (Butler, "Precarious Life" 137). Thus, *Seven Jewish Children* offers no solutions to the conflict, but rather, after revising the violence and conflict of the past, suggests that these lives will continue to be vulnerable if they are not represented since we cannot "hear the agonized cry or be compelled or commanded by the face" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 150) of the Other.

### **5.3. The Audience of *Seven Jewish Children***

The role of the audience is crucial in contemporary plays in order to allow for an ethical response, and this is the case in Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children*. According to Lehmann, performance is "real, emotionally compulsory, and happening in the here and now" (*Postdramatic* 138) and offers an "experience of a relation between address and answer" (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 185). This means that, in contrast to the "film [that] can't react quickly" and the "telly [that] mostly doesn't bother" (Clapp 131), *Seven Jewish Children* offers an opportunity to its audience to respond ethically by staging extreme precariousness and ongoing violence on stage. As mentioned, the play represents different Others which are the children, the Jews and Palestinians, meaning that, as Monforte argues, "the spectator becomes a witness of the events on stage and this enables him/her to encounter the Other" (100). The shifting of power relations that include the Jews being

victims in the early scenes to becoming aggressors during the final scenes strikes the audience by showing how “security has become the pretext for indiscriminate slaughter” (Billington, *Seven* 130) and allows them to apperceive a “heartfelt lamentation for the future generations who will themselves become victims” (Billington, *Seven* 130). It is by staging these precarious Others and sharing a commune space, that the spectators come “face to face with the other, in a recognition of our mutual vulnerability which encourages relationships based on openness, dialogue and a respect for difference” (Ridout 54). Therefore, audiences are being invited to rethink the situations they are witnessing on stage and feel responsible for it, which for Lehmann would mean that the experience of the play “would be not only aesthetic but [...] at the same time ethico-political” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 186).

However, the play does not present these Others in a naturalistic way but rather, uses Postdramatic features so that the play “becomes part of an artistic strategy which transforms the spectator into a witness and calls up an experience of [...] awareness and responsibility” (Lehmann, “Word” 53). Some of the Postdramatic elements that the play features are that it does not specify any time period and also that the language does not appear “as the speech of character” (Lehmann 18) but rather “*the lines can be shared out in any way you like among those characters*” (2). Moreover, characters are not defined in the naturalistic sense as they do not have any names nor any characters are listed at all since the play states that the adults “*may be played by any number of actors*” (2), which in the case of the Royal Court Theatre production was nine, but the Guardian’s production features a single actress delivering a monologue. Thus, it is through the use of Postdramatic elements that the play facilitates “the creation of an ethical process with political consequences” (Monforte 100). Moreover, in relation to the use of time, Clements comments on how “Churchill shifts the historical events and violence into an extremely intense present [so that] the play is an overwhelming incursion of conflicting ideas and suggestions, loaded with pain, fear and violence” (364) which is highlighted through the use of an extremely rhythmic language that Michael Billington describes as “condensed poetic form” (*Seven* 130). Thus, the spectator is faced with sentences that strike them due to their rhythmicity and their verbal strength:

Tell her it’s a game  
Tell her it’s serious  
But don’t frighten her  
Don’t tell her they’ll kill her

[...]  
Tell her we kill far more of them  
Don't tell her that  
Tell her that  
Tell her we're stronger (2-6)

The extract shows short but powerful utterances, all beginning with “tell her” and “don't tell her” and it is through this straightforward language that the play employs that Susannah Clapp comments on how it is precisely through this simple style that audiences “seem to respond” (Clapp 131) to the ethical demands.

*Seven Jewish Children* offers an opportunity to interrupt the ‘distribution of the sensible’ by staging issues that are normally conceived as unsayable in front of active spectators. The play received various responses and while some critics claimed that it the play was “beautifully crafted” (Mountford 130) and “brilliant theatre in bare essence” (Dalley 130), others stated that “Seven Jewish Children isn't art” (Hart 131) and even other critics such as Howard Jacobson accused the play of being anti-Semitic by stating that it was “Jew-hating pure and simple”. Moreover, “supporters of Israel, such as the Zionist Federation, applied pressure on theatres to cancel performances of the play” (Adiseshiah 117) and even the BBC claimed that the play did not remain impartial and thus refused its broadcast due to the controversy during its theatre run, which was similar to their decision to not broadcast the Gaza emergency appeal (Dowell), which as Adiseshiah argues, “demonstrates the degree to which the play as an event created space to articulate what is not permitted to be said” (117). In the case of Gaza, the role that the BBC played suggests that the media distributes the sensible since it established “division between the visible and the invisible, the audible and the inaudible, the sayable and the unsayable” (Rancière, *Politics* 3). Moreover, it could be argued that the media dehumanized the lives of these Others since it provided “no image, no name, no narrative, so that there never was a life, and there never was a death” (Butler, *Precarious Life* 146). Furthermore, in the play the media is also mentioned through the utterances “Tell her she can't watch the news” (6) and “Tell her you can't believe what you see on television” (7) which emphasises the media's inability to represent the suffering of the Other for impartiality reasons. Consequently, as Adiseshiah argues, *Seven Jewish Children* invoked “a more participatory form of political subjectivity” (117) since it offered a free entrance, demanded a collection for Medical Aid for Palestinians and offered post-show discussions. Moreover, Churchill argued that the play was “a way of looking at what's

happened and to raise money for the people who've suffered there” (Churchill qtd. in Brown) which served as a possibility for British citizens to realise the extreme precariousness of the subjects on stage that had been negated by the BBC and thus exemplifies how theatre has the capacity to interrupt the delimitation of what is common to the community and the forms of its visibility (Rancière, *Politics* 18). Therefore, by writing *Seven Jewish Children* as a response to the conflict, Churchill contributed in the redistribution of the sensible and “pushed the boundaries of what was sayable in the public sphere regarding Israel–Palestine relations” (Stevens 162).

Churchill does not provide a solution nor a single truth in the play but instead presents a dystopia that suggests the continuance of violence in the future. As Mary Luckhurst comments, “Churchill has become an increasingly dystopian writer, still interested in exposing many-sided complications to problems, but depicting cultures of denial and violence as enculturated phenomena without solution” (21). Throughout the play the spectator is faced with several historical conflicts, which suggest that violence has continuously occurred throughout history and will continue to do so, as the adults in the last scene tell their daughter, a figure that in Churchill’s writing has been regarded as a mirror for future generations “tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? tell her all I feel is happy it’s not her” (7). The final scene thus suggests that violence has been normalised by the adults, which is emphasised through harsh words that are meant, according to Churchill, “to shock during a shocking situation” (“My Play”). In that sense, since the play does not offer a closure but instead ends with the words “Don’t frighten her” (7), it could be argued that *Seven Jewish Children* allows the spectators to actively engage in the creation of meaning of the play and reconsider the perpetuation of violence, showing the theatre’s capacity to “respond with [...] an aesthetic of responsibility (or response-ability)” (Lehmann, *Postdramatic* 185). Moreover, since the audience is constantly faced with adults trying to decide what to tell to their daughter it mirrors their position as possible candidates to interrupt the distribution of the sensible when they leave the theatre space and comment on what they have witnessed on stage. Adiseshiah comments on this and states “what will they tell their children, family and friends about the play? Will they take up the invitation to be speaking subjects in the post-show discussion?” (119) and comments that it is through these possibilities that the play offers that at the same time “produces new subject positions for its audience and in doing so imagines a new cartography of the possible” (Adiseshiah 119). Hence, if the active spectators of *Seven Jewish Children* do not ignore “the truth behind the image and the

reality outside the theatre” (Rancière, *Emancipated* 12), the play then allows the spectators to experience “political subjectivation” (Rancière, *Emancipated* 49) which demonstrates “the theatre’s power to heighten consciousness and articulate moral outrage” (Billington, *Seven* 130).

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

It cannot be denied that plays, especially those published from the 1990s onwards, have the ability to bring attention to contemporary issues that need to be urgently considered but are often silenced by the media. This paper has attempted to explore the different ways in which tucker green’s *stoning mary* and Churchill’s *Seven Jewish Children* have the potential to raise ethical awareness among its audiences.

In the case of *stoning mary*, debbie tucker green wanted to create a play that particularly shocked its audiences so as to achieve an ethical response from them. *stoning mary* portrays the suffering of different Others while at the same time these Others dehumanise other characters in the play. It is then by showing these faulty relationships where the ethical call of the Other is not answered that the play creates a mirror effect to Western societies, hoping that they realise the ethical potential of the play. In order to emphasise the shocking effect, tucker green makes use of a white cast so that Western audiences could feel identified with their suffering and hopefully respond to their ethical demands. All in all, the play denounces the “unequal distribution” (Butler, *Frames* 22) of precariousness and thus invites audiences to notice the Western’s inability to respond to those who are not from their own community. Furthermore, through the use of Postdramatic techniques, which include, non-naturalistic characters and no proper closure, the play allows its audiences to focus on the text and on what the play is trying to make visible, which could then allow them to feel responsible for the precarious subjects and thus highlight the ethico-political potential of the play. Lastly, the play proves to disrupt the ‘distribution of the sensible’, since it successfully portrays distant suffering by bringing it closer to home which stands in opposition to what the media usually broadcasts, and thus allows spectators to rethink their positions and their capacity to minimize precariousness.

Caryl Churchill’s *Seven Jewish Children: A Play for Gaza* also proves its potential as a play that awakens ethical responses from its audiences. In the play, Churchill compresses several years of Jewish history where she features various suffering Others

whose role of aggressor and victim switches throughout the years. By doing so, Churchill offers several instances of the relations between abusers and abused while exposing our shared precariousness that continues to be unequally distributed in the contemporary world so as to suggest its audiences that if no action of responsibility is taken, such precariousness will not cease. Besides, since the lines of the play are all directed towards an absent child, who is also regarded as a vulnerable Other in the play, Churchill further explores the notion that if no measures are taken, future generations will continue to experience precariousness. Moreover, similarly to *stoning mary*, *Seven Jewish Children* features Postdramatic characteristics such as the lack of a naturalistic treatment of character and the compression of time and a refusal of closure, so as to allow audiences to concentrate on the power of the text, that has the capacity to transform the audience into witnesses and hopefully achieve ethical awareness. Furthermore, the refusal of a closure leaves the audience with unanswered questions so as to invite them to consider for themselves what the play tries to make visible, highlighting the importance of spectators in the creation of meaning and their active role. Finally, by staging the precariousness of the bodies that British media refused to broadcast on television, *Seven Jewish Children* demonstrates its ability to disrupt the 'distribution of the sensible' so that the war in Gaza and the suffering of such Others could be brought into discussion. Moreover, its capacity to redistribute the sensible can be seen by the amount of controversy that the play received, which highlights its capacity to bring into discussion the issues that were not being tackled in Europe while at the same time criticise the lack of responsibility in the West.

To conclude, this paper has explored how both tucker green and Churchill's plays can be considered successful at raising ethical awareness among Western audiences. Both debbie tucker green's *stoning mary* and Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children* make use of non-naturalistic techniques so as to put a focus on the ethical. Moreover, they both manage to denounce the lack of responsibility in the West while at the same time inviting its spectators to reconsider their positions after being in a face-to-face encounter with the vulnerable Others on stage. Therefore, both plays offer its audiences the opportunity of encountering 'the face' of the Other and acknowledging their precariousness, which highlights the ethico-political potential of theatre.



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Barcelona, a 18 de juny, 2018

Signatura:

CLAUDIA MAYA PRATS