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**Research article**

# Trauma, Silence, and the Reconstruction of Meaning in Contemporary British Drama: A Comparative Study of Debbie Tucker Green's *Random* and Simon Stephens's *Sea Wall*

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**ABSTRACT**

This article focuses on trauma, silence and the reconstruction of meaning in Debbie Tucker Green's *Random* and Simon Stephens's *Sea Wall*. Silence is an effect that captures language's failure before traumatic experience and is a stage for witnessing grief. The study uses a six-stage comparative close reading, inspired by Cathy Caruth's theory of belatedness and Judith Herman's relational recovery model. It tells of traumatic impact rather than traumatic return: *Random*, a collapse of an unfolding present; *Sea Wall*, a persistence of a past within it. Reconstruction is not healing, but a different relationship between memory, language, death and others. A communal reconstruction, based on witnessing and responsibility, was attempted in a random manner, while an existential reconstruction, based on narration and continued attachment, was attempted towards *Sea Wall*. What was once unspeakable now becomes speakable without being falsely resolved.

# الصدمة والصمت وإعادة بناء المعنى في المسرح البريطاني المعاصر: دراسة مقارنة لمسرحيتي "عشوائي" لديبي تاكر غرين و"جدار البحر" لسايمون ستيفنز

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**المُستخلص**

يتناول هذا المقال الصدمة والصمت وإعادة بناء المعنى في مسرحية *Random* لدبي تاكر غرين ومسرحية *Sea Wall* لسايمون ستيفنز.ويؤدي الصمت وظيفة مزدوجة: فهو يسجّل عجز اللغة أمام التجربة الصادمة، ويغدو وسيطاً مسرحياً يُشهَد من خلاله على الحزن.واستناداً إلى مفهوم التأخّر عند كاثي كاروث والنموذج العلائقي للتعافي عند جوديث هيرمان، تطبّق الدراسة قراءة مقارنة متأنية من ست مراحل.وتميّز بين أثر الصدمة وعودتها: في *Random* تجسّد انهيار حاضرٍ يتشكّل، بينما تجسّد *Sea Wall* استمرار ماضٍ داخله.وإعادة بناء المعنى ليست شفاءً ولا استعادةً لذات ما قبل الصدمة، بل علاقة متغيّرة بالذاكرة واللغة والموتى والآخرين.تتجه *Random* نحو إعادة بناء جماعية أخلاقية قائمة على الشهادة والمسؤولية، وتتجه *Sea Wall* نحو إعادة بناء وجودية ناقصة قائمة على السرد والتعلّق المستمر.وفي كلتيهما يصبح ما لا يُقال قابلاً للمشاركة دون حلٍّ زائف.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الصدمة والصمت؛ إعادة بناء المعنى؛ المسرح البريطاني المعاصر؛ التأخر؛ الشهادة المسرحية

## 1. Introduction

Contemporary literature and performance are read through the concept of trauma, which has become one of the most productive concepts, as it names an experience that is at once intensely present and yet cannot be read via the common sense of everyday constructions (Luckhurst, 2008; Balaev, 2014). A traumatic event can be recalled in vivid detail but not in chronological order; it can generate obsessive recollection, but also be hard to make sense of in terms of a coherent self-narrative. Trauma thus impacts not only pain, but also time, language, memory, embodiment, identity and even the prospect of meaning following catastrophe. Suffering, like in medicine, has been a problem of representation, not of biography, in literary scholarship (Saad, 2021).

These questions are especially well suited for Drama. Theatre is not a place where you experience something with your words. It can express sounds when there are no words, rhythm when there is hesitation, and meaning when there is no body language. A pause can gain ethical power when the audience has to bear the pause; in trauma/t testimony research, listening and witnessing are themselves relational and ethical (Felman & Laub, 1992, P. 27). A body can reach out to say something's the matter, but without calling it by name, and a broken monologue can involve the viewer in a problem instead of just telling them that it's a problem. As such, trauma in drama can be an element of a formal principle, and not just a topic.

This article deals with two works of contemporary British drama that are, at first sight, very different: Debbie Tucker Green's Random (2008) and Simon Stephens' Sea Wall (2008), which were later

published in collected and standalone editions. A Black British family, whose day is suddenly disrupted by the murder of their brother, Brother, is the subject of Random. The play is a solo monologue, and Alex is recalling his wife Helen, his father-in-law Arthur, his daughter Lucy and a holiday with the family in France which ends in Lucy's death. The social significance of both the deaths is entirely different – one is a murder that is caught up in an urban milieu of violence and communal witness, and the other is an accident that throws an intimate and metaphysical crisis into the spotlight. However, both plays pose the same question: What do language and meaning do when an ordinary life is disturbed by something that doesn't make sense right away?

The comparison is particularly interesting in light of the different approaches to a dramaturgical solution that the plays take. In *Random*, Tucker Green employs compressed speech, repetition, vernacular rhythm, role multiplication, abrupt shifts and strategically charged silence. It was first produced at the Muirghealè Theatre by one actor, Nadine Marshall, who played multiple family members and other characters, directed by Sacha Wares (Goddard, 2009). The formal consequence is significant: the family is addressed through voice, but it is also contained in a single performing body and thus becomes at the same time plural and shared. Stephens, on the other hand, builds up a long, direct-address monologue. Before the traumatic focus of the story fully emerges, Alex speaks with natural ease, sort of digresses, remembers, jokes, and describes ordinary life. He speaks a lot and doesn't defy trauma; he goes around it; he avoids it.

The first part of the conceptual framework comes from Cathy Caruth's theory of trauma. Caruth (1996) suggests trauma is characterised by a temporal and epistemological rupture; that is, the event is not totally accessible to consciousness at the time that it happens; the event is reexperienced in the future through repetition (also Caruth, 1995). Her account is especially helpful if you want to get an idea of why traumatic narratives can be late, disjointed, circular, or oblique. The second part of the framework is provided by the work of Judith Herman. For Herman (1992, 1998), trauma is an attack on systems of connection and meaning, and he sees recovery as happening through safety, traumatisation reconstruction and reconnection with others. Caruth helps to explain why trauma can cause a disruption in narrative, while Herman helps to explain how narration and witnessing can become a part of the means of reconstructing a life after trauma.

The article is not a clinical diagnosis of literary characters from the plays, nor does it provide an analysis of plays as case studies for the application of psychological theory. Rather, the plays' experience of "belated knowledge," "fractured temporality," "silence", "testimony", and "continuing attachment to the dead" are examined using a framework of "critical vocabulary" offered by trauma theory. Both texts seek to make the seemingly impossible “traumatized language” a “theatrical issue” – how to communicate exactly what cannot be communicated in everyday language?

The central thesis is that the two plays are examples of trauma as a crisis of meaning in dramatic form. In *Random*, trauma experiences a communal and ethical dimension since the family is reeling from the loss of their son, who was murdered, but they are not allowed to express their sorrow. In the play, the

trauma is existential; Alex's idea of the possibilities of the family, God, happiness, and the intelligibility of the world all disappear in the face of Lucy's death. Both plays, though, end with ruptures followed by limited reconstruction. This reconstruction is not a healing of the wound, but rather the creation of a new relation to the wound: through memory, telling, witnessing and sustaining relation.

**1.1 Review of Related Literature**

The perspective of trauma in literary studies is supported by current criticism, and it shows where it might be extended. The study of *Random* by Lynette Goddard is a foundational study since it focuses on grief, rather than on the show of crime. Goddard (2009) interprets the work in the context of the much-publicised issue of teenage knife murders in London in 2007 and 2008, and highlights tucker green's focus on the grieving Black family. This focus moves away from sensational portrayals of perpetrators/violence to the consequences suffered by those who survive. Goddard also emphasises a female point of view, and introduces a broader implication of collective social responsibility. The loss of the family is especially relevant to the present study as an example of how family loss is not separable from the social context where the death takes place.

The discussion on Tucker Green continues in Nicola Abram's article (2014), " Staging the unsayable: Debbie Tucker Green's political theatre", which explores the playwright's political theatre as an art of staging what is difficult, or even impossible, to say directly. Abram's account is important in so far as it makes silence and representational indirections not manifest as a lack, but rather as political and aesthetic choices. In tucker green's drama, the unsayable isn't just a lack of content; it's created by the organisation of bodies, gaps, incomplete speech, and the viewer's awareness of what isn't being said.

An especially important connection between the theory of trauma and Tucker Green's dramaturgy is made by Hélène Lecossois (2012), "L'écriture du traumatisme de Debbie Tucker Green ou la mise en jeu de la répétition". Her study of repetition in the playwright's trauma writing draws attention to repeated words, interrupted syntax, and verbal recurrence as formal techniques of staging trauma. Repetition is not just repetition of content. It breaks the linear sequence, creates a "logical" sense in the dramatic text, in which the unresolved past continually intrudes into the present. The insight is directly applicable to Caruth's account of traumatic return, and is especially useful for the analysis of the fractured verbal rhythms in *Random*.

Lisa Mullen (2024) draws up a complex mapping of silence in tucker green's dramatic and cinematic works. It is especially relevant that she mentions that at a certain moment, Sister remembers that there were many witnesses to Brother's murder, and no one speaks. Mullen suggests that the silences of tucker green take on semantic and political power. The stage direction "Silence" is not just some kind of "no one is talking" but an invitation to the spectator to take an uneasy position of non-response. This theatrical pause, therefore, can be an accusation, a refusal or a demand.

Tucker Green also places itself in a field in which questions of race, representation, gender and national belonging have intersected, as Deirdre Osborne (2010) explored in her work about Black British women playwrights. This criticism is essential as trauma in the context of *Random* should not be

universalised, meaning there should be no loss of the specificity of the Black British family. The play's grief is humanly recognisable, while the social conditions are historically and racially placed, and trauma theory has been critiqued, for precisely this reason, for taking Euro-American models beyond their original contexts (Visser, 2014, 2015; Andermahr, 2015).

Two additional studies refine the moral issues of this critique. Riedelsheimer and Stöckl (2017) suggest that Tucker Green makes for a remote suffering that is made affectively available through structures that her audiences already inhabit, most importantly the family. This is directly relevant to *Random*, where the public violence is witnessed from within a domestic interior. Grief staged in Tucker Green is not only an expression of feeling but also a world-making rather than a merely expressive operation, an important point here because the anger is not the death, but rather that it occurred in such a way. (Reid 2018) These studies demonstrate that formal difficulty, which is the subject of the present analysis, is an ethical tool, and not a stylistic hurdle.

If specialist trauma scholarship is less developed in Critical writing on *Sea Wall*, it is always viewed as central to the reception. In Critical writing on the play, the extent of the specialist trauma scholarship is not as developed, but there is always a focus on the centrality of grief, storytelling, absence, and the destabilisation of ordinary happiness. About the paratext of the standalone 2019 edition, the one that was not criticism and which is presented here as evidence of reception rather than as scholarship, one might say that it highlights the proximity of Alex to the reader, the lightness and ordinariness of his early memories, and the failure of that contentment to turn to grief (Stephens, 2019). Criticism, however, that is sustained, and devoted specifically to *Sea Wall*, is rare; the play is typically reviewed, or the published editions' paratexts include production notices, but rarely the article-length scholarship necessary for sustained criticism. This is the asymmetry that is part of the reason for the comparison, and, at the same time, limits the comparison. The reading about play presented below is more dependent on the primary text than the reading about the play is and is presented on that understanding.

This is also corroborated by Stephens's gestalt dramaturgy. In all of his plays, violence, death, disappearance and damaged intimacy intrude into seemingly normal social settings. With *Sea Wall*, however, the scale is turned more drastically. No ensemble to share the sorrow, nor a subplot to balance the sorrow. All is directed by one speaking body and one audience. The monologue is then a very pure exploration of a kind of story that is more than a description of experience.

The current scholarship thus has solid bases and also demonstrates its shortcomings. Theory of literary trauma has increasingly suggested the need for theoretical pluralism instead of any universal model of traumatic representation (Balaev, 2014). In studies of *Random*, the focus has been upon grief, trauma, silence, race, repetition and politics, while in discussions of *Sea Wall*, the focus has been upon grief, intimacy, narration and loss. This has not been matched in systematic, comparative ways of depicting trauma formalised and then subsequently, without resolution, towards reconstructed meaning in the two plays. This is backed up by two results of the literature search. No study, to the best knowledge of the researcher, considers *Random* and *Sea Wall* in any single analytical framework. Almost nothing about

Stephens and his monologue has attracted an adequate specialist literature, while Tucker Green has produced quite a bit: the trauma scholarship on Stephens concerns Motown, not *Sea Wall*. The pairing and the object of the comparison proposed here is therefore new. The present study tackles that lacuna, as it brings together the theory of belatedness by Caruth and the relational model by Herman, to then apply the same analytical process to both texts. Secondly, there is the disciplinary gap. Although literary trauma criticism has tended to focus on reading plays as texts, not as events unfolding in common time, Duggan and Wallis (2011) note that there is a structural logic of repetition, delay, and a presence that points to what it cannot show in trauma and performance. This study will be a work of silence instead of being typography; for the same reason, this study will address the above gap as well.

**2. Problem, Aims, and Questions of the Study**

The central critical problem is a paradox. Trauma appears to require narration: the person needs to be able to put it into words, to make it a story, but trauma also resists narration: the event is bigger than the ways in which experience is usually understood. How can it become a story if it cannot be assimilated at first? When silence is a sign of language failure, can silence speak? In the absence of such a reframe of traumatic loss, what might reasonably be meant by the term "reconstruction of meaning" without being reduced to sentimental concepts of "closure؟"

This article clears up that paradox by separating the two terms: reconstruction and restoration. Play doesn't bring back the pre-traumatic world. Brother and Lucy are still dead; there is no way to relive the ordinary life before the tragedy; Grief is still present. Reconstruction, in turn, is concerned with a reconfigured memory/language/other/self/dead relationship. It's about discovering a space in which you can receive what's lost, carry it, and not be able to explain or resolve it.

The study has three questions. There are three questions in the study. The first is formal, asking what dramaturgical techniques — fragmentation, repetition, delayed disclosure and staged silence — the two plays enact rather than describe, and what each technique adds that description doesn't? The first is formal—how do the two plays enact traumatic experience (rather than describe it), and what does each means add that description doesn't? The second is theoretical: what does Caruth's discussion of belatedness and Herman's relational model of recovery collectively account for, and neither account alone; when does each model not adequately describe the plays? The third is comparative and ethical, as the contrasting situations of the two deaths – a murder with no witnesses in the audience, an accident with no one to blame – generate different viewing positions for the audience and different, non-closural forms of reconstructed meaning؟

The article, then, seeks to locate the formal signatures of trauma in each of the plays, to perform a single consistent interpretive procedure with Caruth and Herman, and to signal the boundaries of each. Correspondingly, the article tries to find the formal signatures of trauma in each of the plays, to apply a single interpretive procedure to Caruth and Herman, and to signal the limits of both. The three questions are a condensation of a longer list of subsidiary questions: about the audience, the racialised and

existential aspects of grief, and the condition of the ending, which are taken up in these questions, not as separate ones.

**3. Significance of the Study**

There are three points of significance in the study. In a certain sense, it is an analytically novel way of juxtaposing two plays that are not often read together — a formal experiment to determine if a common analytical language can produce a description of two very different dramaturgies of loss. It is theoretically a narrative about traumatic belatedness and a narrative about recovery, not a relational narrative, but one that is relational, thus obviating two positions that have been taken by literary trauma criticism: on the one hand, the belief that trauma is unspeakable, and on the other, that narration is cure. From a pedagogical or critical perspective, it provides a six-step methodology for reading and understanding traumatic form, not traumatic content, which can be repeated by students and researchers of contemporary drama.

**4. Delimitations and Definition of Terms**

The texts studied are two primary texts, *Random* (Tucker Green, 2008) and *Sea Wall* (Stephens, 2014, 2019), along with the performance history of the texts and some critical reception. It doesn't canvass the entire oeuvre of either playwright, doesn't conduct audience response research, and doesn't make a clinical or diagnostic verdict on fictional characters. Critical sources only include materials that are available in English and French. Quotations from *Random* are taken from the initial Nick Hern Books edition (2008, 64 pp.),

There are four terms used in particular meanings. Trauma refers to an event that is not completely processed when it happens, and is subsequently repeated and interrupts the experience of the person's time, self and world (Caruth, 1996, p. 4). Belatedness is the time delay between the event and its meaning. In theatre, silence is a (performed) time period that can represent both a failure of language and a refusal of the social witness and can be the means of communication between speaker and listener. Reconstruction of meaning refers specifically to the process in which a survivor establishes a new relationship to the event that has led to the loss or mutilation of previous assumptions, as opposed to cure, forgetting or restoration of the pre-traumatic self.

**5. Procedures of the Study**

**5.1 Method**

The article is a qualitative comparative close reading. It is composed of tucker green's *Random* and Stephens's *Sea Wall*, along with performance history and selected critical reception that highlight the form of the text. The method is literary and theatrical, not clinical. Psychological concepts are not used to diagnose characters, but to make characters representational structures through which plays make traumatic experience legible.

The analysis is a standardised six-stage process. First, it discovers the traumatic event and the pre-traumatic assumptions that the event has shattered. Second, it recognises the distinction between the event and its delayed cognitive and emotional effects. Third, it describes formal signs of disruption: repetition,

broken syntax, pauses, silence, temporal shifts, digression, bodily metaphors and changes in the narrative point of view. Fourth, these features are understood through the lens of Caruth's ideas of belatedness, latency, repetition and the crisis of knowing. Fifth, from the experience to the narration to the witnessing, it is read via the ideas and concepts of Herman, namely of remembrance, testimony, reconnection and empowerment. Sixth, the outcomes are compared so that the similarities and differences in their social and existential meanings can be highlighted.

This method is intentionally repeated in both texts to ensure that the conclusions drawn from the comparison are not ones of impressionistic similarity, but analytical ones. The following are the main categories: traumatic event; disruptions of ordinary time; linguistic fragmentation; silence; embodiment; repetition and return; testimony; audience witnessing; social or metaphysical meaning; and the form of reconstruction which is possible at the end of the dramatic episode.

Close reading focuses on moments rather than on quoting passages from the two major works, since they are short. Often direct quotations are limited and surrounding scenes are paraphrased and interpreted. This method keeps analysis in focus: quotation is a tool to support argument, not a stand-in for argument. Formal detail is used in an argument and is specific to an event in the text and not general to an impression of the whole. A passage of broken or repeated syntax after the news arrives, and Sister's account of the witnesses culminating in a stage direction “Silence”, are six such anchors that carry the analysis in *Random*, and a passage of digression that delays the disclosure in *Sea Wall*.

### 5.2 Theoretical Framework

#### 5.2.1 Caruth: Trauma as Belated Knowledge

The *Unclaimed Experience* is one of the defining characteristics of literary trauma studies, as it constructs trauma as an experience (and a non-experience). A traumatic event occurs, but it is not completely understood at the time of the event. Psychic trauma, for Caruth, is a "wound of the mind," which interferes with the subject's sense of time, self and world (1996, p. 4). The key is the timing: trauma is experienced in a sudden moment that is so rapid that it cannot be assimilated and can become available in the future through a return of the trauma.

This model is used to look past the question of how bad the event was, and look at how it was received, or not received, by consciousness. The literary impact is profound. An experience that is not understood at the time of its occurrence may be repeated, be broken up, have gaps in it, be presented out of order, or seem to be presented for more than its worth, and all these things can be formal equivalents.

This reading is also to be read with caution. Other trauma theorists have questioned methods that render unspeakability, fragmentation or belatedness a universal condition of all trauma narratives. Balaev (2014) advocates a pluralistic literary trauma theory that is concerned with the range of cultural and historical contexts by which traumatic experience is manifested. Pederson (2014) extends this argument further on the basis of contemporary memory research, which suggests that traumatic amnesia has little empirical support, and that survivors are more likely to be able to remember what has happened to them, rather than not. The effect of this article is not just decorative, but methodological. Presuming that a

silence on stage is a sign of traumatic structure is not a valid approach if unspeakability is not intrinsic to some trauma narratives. It must be demonstrated in the context of the play in which it appears to be engaged in some sort of dramaturgical activity, which is the responsibility of the analysis to come. The present study will then take a formalised approach to belatedness as provided by Caruth, while not arguing that Brother's death and Lucy's accidental death can be equated psychologically, socially or politically.

Caruth's account also poses a challenge to the connection between representation and truth. A disjointed traumatic story doesn't necessarily lack in verisimilitude simply because it is not chronologically linear. In contrast, fragmentation can be the shape that best suits one of the events whose characteristic was the failure of the ordinary cognitive and temporal structures. Trauma drama is thus not a reconstruction of an idealised factual order, but a form that is capable of capturing the missing link between the event and the knowledge.

### 5.2.2 Herman: Trauma as Disconnection and Recovery as Relation

Herman brings a relational component which is critical. Trauma undermines the care, protection, connection and meaning systems in which human beings live. The "core experiences" of trauma are the conditions of "disempowerment and disconnection" (Herman, 1998, p. S145) from others and from oneself (Herman, 1992, p. 133). Therefore, recovery cannot simply be a mental adjustment on the inside. It's about the restoration of agency and relationship.

Herman's way of understanding recovery comprises three general processes of establishing safety, reconstructing the traumatic story, and reconnecting with others (1992, 1998). These are not steps that can be forced into literary texts; these are not therapeutic case histories, either, in the plays. But the model is useful because both plays are based on the transition from trauma knowledge to speaking in front of others.

Caruth and Herman are not at odds but complementary. Every trauma is remembered in a fragmented or indirect way, and retelling can change the survivor's relationship to what is remembered, Caruth and Herman explain. Assimilation crisis, Possibility of relational reconstruction are features of Caruth and Herman. The theories are used in tandem to prevent two extremes from happening when analysing the trauma: one being completely unspeakable and the other being narration as a simple cure.

### 5.2.3 Silence as Symptom, Refusal, and Theatrical Language

Silence is in the middle of these theories. It may indicate a boundary of assimilation – a point at which the speaker has not yet acquired language to refer to the experience. It can also indicate refusal – a witness or community may not wish to speak. Lastly, in theatre silence can be a communication itself. The written blank does not have duration until it is read, while the performed pause has duration; it gives direction and, in a certain sense, puts the audience in a relation to the absence. According to Duggan and Wallis (2011) this is one of the moments at which trauma and performance intersect: both are about repetition, deferral, and a claim that refers to what they lack.

This is important for the comparison. In *Random*, the ethics and politics of silence often become the only ones that remain. In *Sea Wall*, silence is epistemological and existential, since Alex' ability to speak falters in the face of an experience that throws his conceptions of the world into disarray. However, both kinds of "silence" turn into a theatrical address, which "listens" to what it can't say or what it refuses to say. Meaning can be reconstructed on several levels. Narratively, the event can be placed into a story without being fully explained. Relationally, isolated memory can become testimony received by another person. Ethically, the loss can generate questions of responsibility and witnessing. Existentially, the survivor can continue to live while acknowledging that certainty has been destroyed. These forms of reconstruction are partial, fragile, and open-ended, and that incompleteness is central to both plays.

## 6. Results and Analysis

### 6.1 *Random*: Ordinary Time, Broken Syntax, and Social Silence

*Random* starts with a conventional family time. Superficial routines, irritation, movement, school, work and domestic exchange generate the expectation that the day will continue following familiar patterns. The play's own formulation: "you get up. *You go about your business. You expect to come back*" (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 37) , captures the temporal assumption that the play will destroy. While Brother's death violently disrupts the implicit promise of return that is found in Leaving Home, the implicit promise of return is still there.

This first phrase is not just a contrast. Retrospectively, the meaning of what preceded trauma is altered. It is the last morning of an ordinary morning. A couple leaves their last words in the form of a traditional goodbye. Small annoyances turn into memories that are laden with guilt or yearning. The family is not aware, and it is happening in the morning, of the last days of a whole family. Knowledge is thus delayed.

This is the belated metamorphosis that sets Caruth apart. The traumatic event does not just end when the murder occurs. It goes back to memory and forward to the family's future. The death reclassifies earlier moments in new ways, giving them new meanings. The family's temporal world is divided into before and after, but the innocent before is no longer innocent, as it is always reinterpreted through the after.

This disturbance is amplified by the title *Random*. It implies an event that is inadequately narrated or has insufficient moral causality. In classical tragedy, catastrophe is frequently associated with a series of actions, mistakes, inherited conflicts, or identifiable needfulness. The death here is a sinister accident. The family is not only faced with death, but with the lack of a story that explains the death. The term "random" hence serves as a designation of a crisis of causality as well as social reality.

Explanation is the first step in trauma. When the Brothers' murder doesn't fit into a coherent order, the family endures the results – and no satisfactory "why. That does not cancel out social causation, however. Rather, the setting of young people's violence, the vulnerability of racial people, and communal silence should never be overlooked. But the subjective experience of the family is one that cannot be

made proportional between cause and consequence. A young person is alive in the morning and dead later, and no story can make such a transition look reasonable.

When Brother dies, language becomes different. Trauma adds to the cadence of interruption, repetition, unfinished utterances, and pauses, which is already quite compressed in the writing before the catastrophe. It is not just a realistic simulation of a stressed-out voice. The form is placed within syntax and makes cognitive disruption a part of it. In this regard, Lecossois's (2012) concept of repetition is helpful, since she defines it as a core technique in tucker green's trauma-based writing. The repetition of words and phrases creates reverberations that detract from simple progression and create an affective logic. A term returns because the experience that it is related to has not been completed. Repetition, then, performs the structure Caruth describes: the past is not definitely past. The family's speech often is delayed or circles back on itself. This is important because the flow of events is taken for granted in the process of narration – this happened, that happened, so the story could be told. That confidence is jeopardised by traumatic narration. A repeated word might have more truth than a finished explanation, since it uncovers the place at which consciousness is blocked.

The characteristic "folk beat" of the play also helps preserve the particularity of the family. No trauma can take away social voice. The characters are not abstracted into universal symbols of trauma; rather, they still speak in culturally and relationally specific ways. This is because trauma theory can easily turn into a universalising phenomenon if it assumes and equates the formal features of all catastrophic experiences. The formal language of trauma cannot be divorced from the Black British voice(s) that enact it.

Another layer is added to the original structure of the solo performance. Multiple voices of family members are used, meaning grief is split into individual experiences, but kept in one acting voice. The device makes them harder to be "themselves". Mother, Father, Sister, Brother and others are not homogenized; rather, they are presented through a common body. The theatrical form implies that the trauma of the family is both individual and collective, as each family member will be affected in their own unique way, while the trauma itself is on a journey, moving through the entire family system.

The most intellectually stimulating use of silence is in Sister's thinking about the witnesses who seemingly witnessed Brother's killing. She says the police said there was "a whole heap a witness" and faces what can't be heard from them (Tucker Green 2008, pp. 44–45). Her speech finishes with the comment "an' still I hear ..." with the stage direction "(Silence.)" (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 44–45)

Pause is not just a downfall of the emotions. It carries out a nonappearance of a witness. The tone of the sentence is toward an object – the audience is waiting to hear what she says, but the theatre does not provide anything. The only answer is silence.

Mullen (2024) states that the strategic silences of Tucker Green can gain semantic weight and can put the audience in an uncomfortable relationship with what is not said. It's the insight that is true here. Sister waits for the voices of witnesses; the spectators hear themselves sitting in a silent theatre. The

dramatic structure thus brings the gap between the missing witnesses to the fictional world and the current witnesses to the auditorium together.

The family suffers from the brother's murder; the silence is social. The inability of the family to obtain testimony is a reproduction of Herman's concept of disconnection at a communal level. When structures that are supposed to validate reality fail – when others, public speech, shared acknowledgement fail – the impact of trauma is magnified. The moment also raises the ethical question about witnessing. Just being there at an event isn't sufficient to be an ethical witness. Witnessing is meaningful when there is a connection and a sense of responsibility, and not simply perception. The people on the street may have seen, but their taciturness takes away the family's chance for a public account. So, in Theatre, the audience cannot intervene in the past event but can't deny that they have heard Sister's testimony.

In this regard, *Random* forms a politics of listening. The play doesn't ask the spectators to imagine, as if they are the bereaved family. It empowers them to be the receivers. The ethical requirement is not an exact identity, but a listening, a kind of witnessing as a relationship between the speaker and the listener, as trauma scholarship does with testimony as a relationship between speaker and listener rather than a transfer of identical experience (Felman & Laub, 1992). The audience must remain in the moment when the play hits its limits of what can be said. The unique aspect of the intervention of *Random*, as Goddard (2009) notes, is its emphasis on the grieving family, not on the dramatic moment of murder. The decision has significant implications for trauma analysis. In public discussion of youth violence, death is made into numbers, categories, patterns, headlines or criminological explanation – but the family's experience is not easily abstracted. Brother does not matter to the family, but he's a social problem. He is meaningful because he is Brother, a person who is in the midst of trivial irritation, affection, household memory, and expectation. Trauma is partially the result of the violent contrast between public categorisation and private singularity. When a death occurs and can be reported as one more death, it is a devastating loss to the family who experienced it as a loss of an irreplaceable world.

This is a structure in which "race" plays a role. The play has been about a Black British family, and there have been good critical discussions that have placed tucker green's work in the context of Black British theatrical traditions and debates about representation (Osborne, 2010). But the play doesn't make its characters a symbol for race. Their loss is never expected to be a teaching moment for a “spectator” who would make black feeling invisible to him or her. Such consumption is resisted by the formal fragmentation, vernacular specificity, and silence.

This resistance is significant for trauma reasons. Reproducing power is a result of a demand that a traumatised subject should produce a perfectly coherent and publicly useful account. Herman places emphasis on empowerment, which implies that testimony should be the survivor's and not the listeners'. *Random* stages grief, on the family's terms, where anger, incompletion, repetition, and silence all continue to be a part of the representation. The reconstruction of meaning in the play is thus a political process. It's not about making a tidy moral. It is the reintegration of singularity and relation into the abstractions,

which are socially acceptable means of death. The audience is invited to recall not a victim but a family member who will remain missing from the people who are left behind.

### 6.2 *Sea Wall*: Delayed Revelation, Embodied Absence, and Existential Crisis

In *Sea Wall*, the structure is very different. Knowing what has happened (from the start) vs. does not know what has happened (from the start) by the audience. The monologue then becomes a game of "slow reveal" (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 83). He talks of photography, of Helen and Arthur and Lucy and France and swimming and the belief and the jokes and the domestic anecdotes and, perhaps, the incidental memories. The catastrophe has already entered the story but has yet to be named.

This does not have to be confused with Suspense. The delay has a psychological impact. Alex has a lot to say, but there's a major problem with the amount of talk: He can't start with the traumatic event. He takes it with circles of everyday memory.

That's why the initial physical metaphor works so well. There's a hole in the middle of my tummy" (Stephens, 2019, p. 1). The image does not deliver the cause but instead delivers the effect to the audience. The body is aware of something that the story hasn't told.

From Caruth's model, once again, the form is clarified. Traumatic knowledge is not organised in the normal chronological order. The first thing that is seen is the wound; the history is seen later. The order of explanations in the monologue is thus inverted. What would normally be a cause-and-effect story, turns into an audience that is given a symptom and slowly learns about the event that has disrupted Alex's life.

This is enhanced by the apparent casualness of his voice. Alex often seems to be trying to make normal social contact. The tone also serves a longer purpose: ordinary language is a protective surface that covers and protects an experience that ordinary language cannot contain, and makes the later catastrophe more devastating.

The digressions of the monologue are not superfluous matter that needs to be cut out. They're the structure of avoidance and approach. Every detail creates a world trauma has torn apart. When Lucy dies, the viewer has already experienced, through the characters, the taste of what will be lost.

The scene of Lucy's fall is important because it depicts the contrast between an event seen and a cognised event. The accident is described in a very visual way with intense visual clarity, but perception seems to become somewhat separated from the normal sensory integration. It takes him ‘a while to register' before he acts (2014, p. 304, Stephens).

That's a little time on the clock, but a huge time in trauma theory. According to Caruth, it is the failure of immediate assimilation that signifies the traumatic event. The mind perceives the event, but one moment later, it recognises the threat. It is this very void that is filled with Alex's narration.

Trauma and mediated perception are also connected in the scene. His analysis creates the sense of an image without sound. It's as if the body exists, the eyes are given detail, but what is happening is not synced to the perception. Trauma is an interruption of the registration of the senses and their meaning.

The disjunction makes it difficult to see how certain the witnesses would be. But Alex witnesses Lucy falling, but seeing does not equal understanding. It is literally there yet psychically not there. Subsequent narration is hence not just the recollection of information that is already comprehended. It's trying to integrate a recorded event, which has not been fully understood.

The latter telling is of the same scene, but repetition happens under different circumstances. There is no passive seeing in the original event, but there is an audience in the theatrical re-telling. The event remains unchanged; only the relational context is changed. The difference is an integral part of the shift from Caruth to Herman: repetition can be obsessive, but retelling in front of others can be reconstructive.

The image of traumatic embodiment in *Sea Wall* is one of the clearest ones in contemporary British monologue. I don't think grief is being portrayed as an emotion that Alex has, but as a structural lack within his body. The metaphor makes Lucy's death both real and physical, spatial and ontological.

A wound is one that involves damaged tissue which could heal. A hole suggests the presence of a missing material. This is an important distinction because the play refuses to accept the fantasy of "grief being fixed"(Tucker Green, 2008, p, 30). Lucy isn't a broken component of Alex's life which is supposed to be fixed. She is not there, and her lack is part of the ongoing life.

This dramaturgy of removal is echoed in Stephens's larger consideration of grief. In talking about his earlier work, he has spoken of grief as the centre of a life being removed; and he has related this imaginative construct to *Sea Wall*. This monologue thus explores a theme central to his theatre: what happens to identity when an essential connection is lost؟

According to Herman, traumatic loss affects identity due to the fact that identity is relationally constructed. Alex is someone who has lost a loved one and is not just a private person. He's a father who has been radically changed by the loss of his child. Though the person who gave birth to the social role is no longer in the picture, the role is still there. Names the holes in this impossible continuity. Reconstruction can't then be restoring him to being the person he was before Lucy's death. He is no longer, for the relational world of which he was the centre has changed. The challenge is to be someone who is Lucy's dad but doesn't exist in a world without Lucy. The monologue itself is a part of that reconstruction in so far as it keeps the relation alive. There is a lot of discussion of belief and God in the play, because trauma is an instability of emotion and also of the ways in which the world was once intelligible. In the pre-catastrophe phase, the issue of religion can be hypothetical. Once Lucy dies, they become existential issues. A contingency problem arises because of the accident. Lucy is not put to death by a dramatic moral law. Where there is no real exchange, there is no wise teaching that can result from suffering. It is an ordinary event in terms of its physical cause and an absolute event in terms of its emotional impact, which creates a moment of meaning.

Alex's reflections are thus not easily solaced by theology. The play does not make the child's death into a providential design nor does it provide a philosophical certainty as a compensation. Rather, it portrays the survivor's struggle to remain thinking in a world where his or her prior notions of order may no longer apply.

It is a significant differentiation from *Random*. Brother's death prompts questions about social responsibility: People did, people saw, and a community did not say. Lucy is dead, and there's no killer. The meaning crisis is thus not a political but an ontological one. Alex faces the reality that pain could be terrible, and there would be no way to redeem the suffering. Reconstruction in this context cannot be asking the question: why did it have to die? It has to distinguish meaning from explanation. Alex might not be able to talk about it in a way that's acceptable, but he can make it meaningful by remembering who Lucy was, who he was with her, and who he was after her death. The moral of the play is that catastrophe cannot be made meaningful, but continued relation can.

*Sea Wall* is a monologue, but its most important moments rely on other elements than speech. Alex's direct address creates an unprecedented connection with the audience, and pauses, hesitations, changes of subject and moments of stillness are part of the performance. He is not reciting a finished literary work. It seems like he is building up the narrative for them. This results in a "paradoxical productiveness. Trauma is unspeakable, but Alex speaks for most of the play. The actual question is not if there are words but if words can fully coincide with experience. They cannot. The missing moments in his telling reveal the difference between what the story is and what the loss is that he lives in.

The duration of the silence becomes communication, for the listener shares it. If Alex is unable to go further, the spectators will not be given missing information, but will be given the feeling of interruption. Upon the body before them stands language, which still stands when language ceases. Theatre therefore makes the linguistic failure into another sign. This is where Herman's relational model comes in handy. RESTORATION depends upon CONNECTION and TESTIMONY assumes a listener. The viewer can't heal Alex, and the play never implies that it is the 30 minutes of storytelling that will solve catastrophic bereavement. However, spectators are a social condition that makes private memory a testimony. Memory and testimony are key. Memory can stay trapped inside the Survivor. Testimony: memory that speaks to another. Alex becomes a narrative event that the audience can relate to because he is present in front of them and speaks to them. The relation changes, but the content is painful.

## 7. Conclusion

The two plays are closest to each other in their treatment of suddenness. Both catastrophes come from normal time. Brother leaves home hoping to come back; Lucy joins in with the family outing. Both deaths are not preordained according to a traditional tragic logic that makes necessity predictable for the audience. The outcome is a break in continuity and catastrophe.

But their causal structures are different. Brother is killed, and Lucy accidentally kills herself. This is the difference in how each play is looking to find meaning. *Random* questions about social relations, silences and responsibilities surrounding violent death. *Sea Wall* poses the question of what happens when one is left without a morally justifiable reason for a death. These differences are reflected in the formal strategies that occur. Tucker's presentation of green fragments in Random is distributed via the various family voices, even though it is being heard by one actor, allowing the trauma to move socially.

Stephens focuses the whole event on one speaker and thus internalises the trauma and then addresses it directly.

There are also differences in the temporal structures. *Random* portrays a day that transforms into a catastrophe, and the family and audience are invaded during the day. Here are *Sea Wall*'s retrospective thoughts. Alex has already survived the event and now pieces it out anew in a sequence of events that is determined by how much he can stomach.

This produces the central analytical statement that the comparison exists to assert: *Random* dramatises traumatic impact; the play dramatises traumatic return. The former stresses the fall or the end of something in the here and now; the latter stresses the continuity of something in the past within the here and now. Both are included in Caruth's theory, as trauma is an absence of assimilation of the original event, as well as its reappearance.

Herman's framework also uncovers various types of disconnection. Disconnection is familial and communal; in *Random*, the family is separated from Brother, separated from a social body that does not truly testify. *Sea Wall* is about disconnection: Alex is alienated from Lucy and from the metaphysical certainty from which ordinary happiness once appeared to emerge. The best way to tell the difference between the plays is by the question each silence poses. In *Random*, a question of silence is posed: why no one will speak. Silence queries itself: How can this be spoken in the play? The question is political and ethical, as it deals with witnesses, community, violence, and responsibility. The second is epistemological and existential because it addresses the boundary of language in the wake of an experience that has thrown the speaker's world into disarray.

But the two silences meet in the theatre, for both need an audience. When there are spectators there and the silence of the sisters becomes accusing. The intimacy of Alex's silence is only made so because there's someone there waiting for him to resume. In each instance, it is a relational form of silence.

This convergence makes an explanation of the power of theatre in trauma representation easier. A novel can tell that a character doesn't say a word; a performance can make other people live in the silence with the character. The time turns out to be common. The time is shared. What is not said is there as theatre time. The audience is not just an information recipient. It will be added to the form itself. The spectator is a witness and makes the choice of what it means to hear. *Sea Wall* is a piece in which the audience becomes the listener, and they are fed a narrative that has already been a private memory. Theatrical witnessing is a type of witnessing that does not try to remove distance between witness and survivor but turns trauma from an isolated experience into an ethical relationship. Repetition is one of the best links that Caruth and Herman have. According to Caruth, repetition represents the persistence of an event that hasn't been assimilated; it comes back because it has not become securely past. However, in Herman's story, reconstruction of the trauma story requires going back to the traumatic event in a safe, consensual, and relational way. Because of the many possible ways to retell history, this same general

action can serve multiple purposes, a dichotomy that is reminiscent of the distinction between acting out and working through made by LaCapra.(٢٠٠١)

This ambiguity is portrayed in the plays. *Random* repetition of words and verbal patterns appears unnatural and emotionally manipulative. Certain terms spread within the family due to the fact that they can't just get rid of them. The repetitions are formally traumatic.

*Sea Wall* repeats not through the repetition of lexical units, but in the narration. Alex builds pictures, locations, imagery and connections. His act of storytelling reconsiders the catastrophe, yet it likewise structures the globe around it. The monologue is a repetition of the encounter with loss as narrative work. It is not suggested that there is a clear-cut difference between compulsive repetition and reconstructive retelling, because the two can occur simultaneously. Through narration, a survivor can make a different relation to the return compulsory, and gradually establish a new relation to it. This is the reason why the plays are not merely a transition from disease to healing.

Instead, they demonstrate repetition of a change of function. What is the event that has the survivor can be the survivor who tries to put the event in language. It is never mastered, but telling can raise limited agency.

The main outcome of this comparison is that neither game support normal closure. Brother doesn't come back. Lucy never comes back. The family can't go back to the morning before the murder, and Alex can't go back to the holidays before the fall. Restoration is not continuation. This is important methodologically because trauma criticism can turn into a reductive approach if it takes all movements of the narrative as proof of repair. Until the concept of recovery is understood as a process of restored agency and connection, rather than the absence of grief, Herman's concept has little value. The plays demand inexorability.

Reconstructed meaning in *Random* is achieved through remembrance, public attention, and ethical responsibility. In its efforts to keep the dead young people from becoming numbers, the family's sorrow breaks a social pattern. Sister's testimony brings Brother relational presence; silent about the murder, the community's failure is left for the audience to see. Reconstructed meaning is more private, existential, in *Sea Wall*. While he cannot explain Lucy's death, he can remember the world she lived in; he can narrate the world; he can relate his grief to listeners. The hole remains. The purpose is not to overfill it, but to ensure ongoing life around it. In both plays, meaning is therefore divorced from consolation. There is no reward for suffering; there is meaning. It is a building that has been constructed in response to this loss of structure, where the new structure may be fragile, incomplete and permanently defined by its lack. This is also why it is important not to take the formal division of the plays as the indication or the precondition of the necessary unity. The dismembered shape encapsulates an ethical reality: that something is always broken even when it is told. A flawless conclusion would lie at the end of the drama that the plays have been building for their dramatic length.

The comparison implies that the modern traumascape is not merely a theatre of injured speakers, but a theatre of ethically situated listeners. There is a clear theme of hearing versus understanding, which is

continually presented to the audience. Spectators hear Sister and Alex, but are not full participants in what they are describing. This implies that in the plays there is a reluctance to accept the illusion of equivalence that would make empathy the same as claiming possession of someone's experience (Felman & Laub, 1992).

This resistance is of moral significance. There is a need to receive trauma testimony without taking it over and to listen while remaining separate from the one who experienced the trauma (Felman & Laub, 1992). No one has to have the same experience in order to respond. The role of the audience is to simply be present to difference. This ethics is accentuated by the randomness, since silence itself is a social problem within the play. The spectators' silence in listening becomes a substitute for the unwillingness of the witnesses to speak. Seeing *Sea Wall*, Alex's seemingly spontaneous speech relies on the intimacy of an audience member to whom he can tell the story.

Theatre thus provides a temporary community of loss. This community can't reverse death, but it can stop suffering from being completely separated. This is where Herman's relational model is very useful for performance analysis. A formal mechanism of reconnection can be understood within the theatre, as speaker and audience are in the same time and space, in which the traumatic story is reconstructed. But the plays are cautious of the power of witnessing! Neither states that an audience will be the answer to social violence and bereavement. Witnessing is a must, but not enough. But *Random* wants to hear Responsibility, and *Sea Wall* reminds viewers that if you hear it, you can't defuse another person's suffering. The ethical purpose of theatre is not cure, then, but making relation possible. It is the glue that unites speaker and listener at the point of the breakdown of explanation.

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