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Research Article

"What is Hecuba to [me]?": The Impossibility of Catharsis and Rupture of Representation in Marina Carr's *Hecuba*

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ABSTRACT

Marina Carr's *Hecuba* (2015), an adaptation of Euripides's tragedy *Hecuba* (424 BC), resonates with Hamlet's famous line "What is Hecuba to him, or he to her?" (Shakespeare, 1599/2003, 2.2.511) for the contemporary spectator by arousing pain and guilt instead of a cathartic effect. In the adaptation, Carr portrays a different presentation of the Queen of Troy from her representations in several classical texts. Contrary to the classical picture of a vengeful mad queen, she retells the untold story of the tragic queen and reveals Hecuba's sorrow, pain, love for her children, and the vulnerability of a woman who is surviving a war. In *Hecuba*, Carr manages to build an ethical encounter between Hecuba and both Agamemnon and the spectator. In doing so, she breaks the representation by applying experimental theatrical devices that disturb the spectator in their comfort zone and subvert the cathartic effect. The play leaves the spectator with the burden of heavy pain and responsibility for the Other. In this respect, this article discusses the impossibility of the purgation of feeling in contemporary theatre through a Levinasian ethical approach in relation to the Other in Marina Carr's *Hecuba*.

Keywords: Marina Carr, Euripides, *Hecuba*, Levinas, Ethics

Introduction

In her plays, Irish playwright Marina Carr portrays a very sensitive, observant, and exceptional point of view towards conventional perceptions of female conditions. Especially in her first plays, she takes the spectator on an uncanny, disturbing intrusion into the dark side of traditional family relations. She manages to depict paradoxically strong but, at the same time, silent women who are suffering in their prison, their

homes. In the same vein, Carr's adaptations of the classical texts reveal the untold stories of mythological female figures who are confined to mythical stories, and as Kübra Vural Özbey maintains, she "brings the female voice and agency into sharper focus in her adaptations" (Özbey, 2023, p. 398). In *Hecuba*, Carr sheds light on the universal phenomenon of war and the untold stories of the invisible victims of it: women and children. This revelation of the often overlooked narratives of women and children in war is sure to enlighten and make the audience more aware of these significant but neglected aspects. In the play, Carr retells the story of another strong but captive woman, the Trojan Queen, Hecuba. Regarding her adaptation of Euripides's *Hecuba*, in an interview with Dan Hutton, she states, "I fundamentally disagreed with the idea of [Hecuba's] killing her two little grandsons in revenge. I just never bought that. So I've written my own version of what might possibly have happened on that beach" (Carr, qtd in González Chacón, 2016, p. 35). Consequently, Carr re-evaluates the conditions and overlooked casualties of the war depicted in Euripides's tragedy with the same title, *Hecuba*.

Euripides's handling of the Trojan War and its aftermath in his plays is significant in terms of his attempt to present the tragic fate of the defeated King Priam's noble wife, Hecuba, and her attendants and children. Similarly, in his other tragedies, he pursues the stories of the neglected in war and provides a questioning look at the suffering of women, children, and other disadvantaged groups. Maria González Chacón draws attention to Euripides's standpoint on the Trojan War and states that "[h]is tragedies address the issues of women, the stranger or foreigner, colonialism, freedom, social injustices in the form of different oppressions, men and women fighting each other, men and women as they are, women as heroines, children as victims, and slaves as the keepers of truths and honors" (González Chacón, 2016, p. 26). Still, as Carr emphasises in the interview above, a discrepancy in Hecuba's story needs to be clarified and challenged. Carr gives an independent voice to Hecuba in her adaptation using an experimental dialogue technique. Therefore, Carr makes her characters, especially Hecuba, speak directly to the audience and turn the spectators into participants in the play. This way, she enables a face-to-face encounter between the audience and the actors/characters, creating a Levinasian ethical encounter.

Emmanuel Levinas argues that an ethical relationship can only be achieved by recognising the alterity of the Other and agreeing to be responsible for the Other without reciprocity, without rendering his/her alterity to the sameness. For Levinas,

the face of the Other is a call for responsibility, and an ethical encounter can only be triggered by a face-to-face encounter. The face is incomprehensible and beholds its undecidability infinitely and "resists possession, resists [Subject's] powers" (Levinas, 2007, p. 197). This resistance frees the Other from the determination, categorisation, and totality of the Subject. Considering the nature of theatre, Levinas's argument can be re-evaluated regarding the ethical encounter between the actors/characters and the spectator. As an art form, theatre brings these two indispensable components together at the same place and time to experience and actively participate in the production. As the artwork is being created, the spectator witnesses the process. In this respect, even by leaving their homes and dressing for an event at a particular place, the spectator challenges the perception of passive consumers of an artwork.

However, according to Levinas, ethical encounters cannot be achieved in works of art because of art's representative aspect. Therefore, he perceives art as an unethical phenomenon. He maintains that "[t]here is something wicked and egoist and cowardly in artistic enjoyment. There are times when one can be ashamed of it, as of feasting during a plague" (Levinas, "Reality", 1987, p. 12). Levinas's opposition to art and its lack of ethics lies behind the idea of representation and the collective response to this representation. In other words, this collective response means being a member of the totality, thus rendering the individuality of a single spectator.

As one of the essential elements of Greek tragedy, catharsis offers "purgation of the feelings" and lets the spectator enjoy the relief of pity and fear after the performance. As this is the story of an Other, the spectator feels no responsibility. Being aware of the representational aspect of the play on stage, a spectator of a classical tragedy does not feel defamiliarisation and can be purified from emotions as a result of sympathetic identification with the characters. However, Marina Carr's employment of experimental techniques hinders the reader/spectator from identifying with the characters and breaks the representation by creating a face-to-face encounter between the actor/character and the spectator. Consequently, through defamiliarisation, she constructs an ethical stance and leaves the audience with some burden and heavy feelings instead of catharsis/relief. Moreover, in the ethical encounter with the actor/character, the spectator does not expect reciprocity in this encounter. This Levinasian face-to-face encounter between the spectator and the actors/characters results in an ethical encounter. Thus, the spectator feels the burden of responsibility for the Other with his/her singularity, without rendering him/her into sameness. In this respect, contrary to

Levinas's argument on the unethical nature of art, theatre is a form of art capable of constructing an ethical bond between the two parties without reciprocity.

Euripides's *Hecuba*

Euripides recounts the tale of the women who survived the Trojan War in *Hecuba* and gives them a chance to document the brutality and atrocities of the war. He presents Hecuba, the Trojan queen, as a grieving and vengeful mother whose sons and husband are butchered, her daughter Polyxena is sacrificed for Achilles, and her last son Polydorus is killed by the greedy Polymestor. In the end, Hecuba avenges Polydorus by gouging Polymestor's eyes and killing his sons. The play ends with Polymestor's prophecy of Hecuba's transformation into a dog and her only daughter Cassandra's murder in Agamemnon's palace by Clytemnestra, Agamemnon's wife.

In his time, Euripides was accused of portraying women incorrectly in his plays, as his depiction of active women was not considered decent for his age. Unlike the obeying, silent, and, at the same time, strong representation of noblewomen, he depicts them as openly expressing their frustration with society and their position and victimisation in it as female members. In this respect, many classical dramatists accused him of being a "misogynist" because of his unconventional depiction of women, which is considered an insult to the decency of the women of his time. However, a contemporary critical examination of his characters reveals that he portrays "frequently women acting and why they were acting" (Storey & Allan, 2014, p. 144). Maria González Chacón emphasises Euripides's frequent employment of woman condition as the subject matter in his plays and states that "[o]f the seventeen plays by Euripides that survive, twelve take their title from and have a woman or a group of women as protagonists. They are usually strong, kill enemies and sacrifice" (Gonzáles Chacón, 2016, p. 26). Moreover, Helene P. Foley draws attention to Euripides's unfamiliar handling of these female protagonists/women and maintains that "Euripides' female characters in particular adopt the full range of rhetorical techniques that were normally the province of men and acquired as part of an education for public life from which women were excluded" (Foley, 2001, p. 275). Euripides's *Hecuba* is one of those plays in which he depicts a female character in the act and her motivation behind it. Storey and Allen draw attention to Euripides's genuine standpoint on the wars and the position of women in them, stating that in *Medea,* Euripides "takes a figure of traditional myth with three strikes against her: a foreigner, a woman, and a practitioner of the dark arts, and makes a living and sympathetic

human character out of her, who attracts the sympathy of the chorus of Corinthian women, as well as of most modern audiences, with her proclamation at lines 248–51" (Storey & Allan, 2014, p. 145). In these lines, Medea maintains, "They say of us women that we live a life free from danger inside the house, while they fight in battle. Idiots! I would rather stand three times in battle than bear one child" (qtd in Storey & Allan, 2014, p. 145). In *Hecuba*, Euripides presents the stories of women in times of war through the tragic queen of Troy, Hecuba. He portrays

> a woman, who has lost everything, husband, position, city, children, and who suffers two final catastrophic events: the loss of her last daughter and the discovery that the young son whom she sent away for safety has been murdered. All that is left for her is a bloody revenge and then madness. Euripides dramatizes the final collapse of a previously heroic woman. (Storey & Allan, 2014, p. 143)

In the play, despite her precarious condition, Euripides depicts a strong and valiant woman accompanied by female servants who also lost their children and husbands in the war. S. E. Wilmer points to the depiction of a victimised woman as a strong figure in Greek tragedies like Clytemnestra, Medea, Electra and Hecuba, stating that they resist and "empower themselves and are empowered by the support of other women to take action to overturn their oppression" (Wilmer, 2005, p. xx).

Marina Carr's *Hecuba* as an adaptation

Marina Carr's re-vision[1] of Euripides's *Hecuba* from a feminist perspective is another way to support the vulnerable and empower the silenced and discarded victims of wars. In her *Hecuba*, Carr achieves this by "offering a revised point of view from the 'original', adding hypothetical motivation or voicing what the text silences or marginalizes" (Sanders, 2016, p. 23). Regarding her adaptations, Melissa Sihra points out, "[i]n returning to the landscapes of classical Greece, Carr's plays reveal a need in contemporary theatre for imaginative spaces of possibility, transformation and a fundamental 'search for myth' at

1 The term "re-vision" refers to Adrienne Rich's definition as "the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction- is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival" (Rich, 1972, p. 18). She argues that an insightful analysis of literature, driven by a feminist perspective, would view the work as a key to understanding our lives, our past, our constructed self-image, the ways in which language has both confined and empowered us, and how we can embark on a new way of perceiving and living (p. 18).

a time which the playwright considers is plagued by a 'lack of belief' and limited by 'an existence on the rational plane'" (Sihra, 2005, p. 116). Like Euripides, Marina Carr's *Hecuba* is dedicated to exposing the tragedies of the unfortunate groups of society by giving voice to Hecuba and other Trojan women in her play. Although Euripides's attitude towards the Trojan War and its aftermath is outstanding in terms of telling the story of a woman whose home is shattered and children are killed and captured as a trophy by the enemy, Marina Carr's adaptation sheds light on some discrepancies in the play, especially the depiction of Hecuba as a vengeful, mad woman who can kill other children, her grandchildren, without any remorse to take revenge from Polymestor. In Carr's adaptation, Polymestor does not betray Hecuba by killing her son Polydorus for gold; in fact, his two sons are killed, and he is blinded not by Hecuba but by the invaders.

The tragedy of the noble queen becomes the tragedy of an ordinary woman in a war-ridden place, and it is no more a distant, unreachable Other who is experiencing the atrocity. Carr's anachronistic technique of dialogue structures an ethical responsibility for the Other no matter how distant the time and place are. Marina Carr retells this story and presents a different version of Hecuba's story. In this respect, Clare Wallace also uses the same cue as Hamlet and asks, "What is Hecuba to Marina Carr?" (Wallace, 2019, p. 7). In the introductory notes to *Hecuba*, Carr maintains that

> I always thought Hecuba got an extremely bad press. Rightly or wrongly I never agreed with the verdict on her. This play is an attempt to re-examine and, in part, redeem a great and tragic queen. History, as they say, is written by the winners. Sometimes I think myths are too and the fragile Greek state circa 500 BC needed to get certain myths in stone to bolster their sense of themselves and validate their savage conquests. It was easy to trash her. She was dead. She was Trojan. She was a woman. No doubt she was as flawed as the rest of us but to turn a flaw to monstrosity smacks to me of expedience. This is my attempt to show her in another light, how she suffered, what she might have felt and how she may have reacted. (Carr, 2015, p. x)

Adaptations and appropriations bring attention to the gaps, absences, and silences that can be found in the original text. Catherine Rees points out those gaps and emphasises the political function of adaptation, stating that "adaptations can utilise the synergies, and gaps, between two texts to invite audiences to recognise these echoes and, frequently, to see the act of adaptation as a political act where the new dramatist seeks

to challenge or critique either the assumptions of the earlier text or their own national and cultural environment" (Rees, 2017, p. 179). In this regard, among several adaptations of Euripides's *Hecuba*, Marina Carr's experimental approach stands out, challenging the original text's assumptions, especially in form. Gonzáles Chacón maintains, "Marina Carr is mainly interested in the emotional passions that moved *Hecuba* and, thus, she is determined to unveil her most private thoughts in the play's dialogues. In order to achieve this, Carr uses free reported speech through which each of the characters in the play retells what the others say and, in addition, add their own interpretations" (Gonzáles Chacón, 2016, p. 35). Consequently, we can hear Hecuba's voice telling her story directly, how she suffers from losing her children and grandchildren, and how she can empathetically understand Polymestor's betrayal by handing Polydorus to Agamemnon. On the other hand, in the play, Carr gives voice to the different parties of the story. As every character directly tells their version of the story, they turn into a member of the chorus narrating, commenting on, or evaluating the events and other people. In her interview with Holly Williams, Marina Carr states that "everyone becomes everyone else's chorus –they comment on the other person" (qtd in Gonzáles Chacón, 2016, p. 35). Even Agamemnon tells his version of the events and how he feels for real: how he felt helpless and furious when his daughter Iphigenia was killed for the sake of wind to head for Troy and how other warriors decided to sacrifice Hecuba's daughter Polyxena for the same reason to leave Troy. Nevertheless, Carr does not make him a victimised character like Hecuba. Several studies (Sihra, 2005; Wallace, 2005; González Chacón, 2016; Wang, 2020) on Marina Carr's *Hecuba* emphasise her experimentation with language and turning those classical "female figures from monstrous murderers into precarious beings who suffer irreparably from the loss of their children" (Wilmer, 2005, p. 281). In her play, Carr transforms their vulnerability and otherness into their strength. In the light of Levinasian ethical thinking, which argues that the ethical starts with the face of the Other, this study also explores how Marina Carr preserves the alterity of every character, including violence-inflicting ones like Agamemnon, Polymestor, and Neoptolemus, without rendering them into totality or sameness.

Emmanuel Levinas and the Ethical Encounter in Marina Carr's *Hecuba*

"What is Hecuba to him?" (Shakespeare, 1599/2003, 2.2.511) is a famous line Hamlet utters in *Hamlet*, which has been a matter for many others for centuries. While reading Marina Carr's *Hecuba*, the very same question occurred to me as well, and it took me

several days to kiss my son's neck without thinking about the following lines from Carr's *Hecuba*:

> **Hecuba** These are the remains of my sons I say, pointing to the dung heap of limbs, heads, necks, necks I loved and kissed. (Carr, 2015, p. 214)

Then the question became, "What is Marina Carr's Hecuba to me?" Why did I not feel the same misery, pain, responsibility, and even guilt while reading Euripides's *Hecuba*? This ethical bond with Hecuba from Carr's outstanding adaptation results from her employment of experimental techniques, creating an anachronistic defamiliarisation between the reader/spectator and the character/actor. By using direct speech, she successfully brings these two components of theatre face to face, igniting a Levinasian ethical relationship.

Extraordinary and unpredicted political, economic, technological, and cultural developments in the last decades of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century brought ethical discussions forward. These developments, which shrink the individuals into precarious Othered conditions, challenge the understanding of the "ethical" in the traditional sense. Referring to the otherness of the Other and the unconditional responsibility for the Other constitute the core of Emmanuel Levinas's ethical discussion. David Wood defines Levinas's ethical stance as "unpromising and uncompromising language of difference and alterity" (Wood, 2014, p. 3). Because of his emphasis on the singularity of the otherness and the asymmetrical relationship between the Other and the Subject, the Levinasian ethical approach has received wide attention in the blurred and precarious experiences of the contemporary human being.

In *Ethics and Infinity*, Levinas explains the asymmetrical relationship between the Subject and the Other depending on no reciprocity and explains, "I am responsible for the Other without waiting for reciprocity, were I die for it. Reciprocity is his affair. It is precisely insofar as the relationship between the other and me is not reciprocal that I am subjection to the Other" (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 96). This unconditional recognition of the alterity and singularity of the Other and responsibility without a demand outstand to attain an ethical stance towards the unprecedented catastrophes of the twentieth century. The asymmetrical unconditional recognition and responsibility, which is based on the alterity of the Other, is the idiosyncrasy of the Levinasian ethical stance. Alex Sierz draws attention to this idiosyncrasy by comparing Levinasian ethics to the

arguments of the traditional understanding of ethics, which stands on the notion of a "good life". In this regard, he interrogates how to pursue this ethical notion in the contemporary war-ridden age, asking, "How should you behave to your fellow men and women? What does it mean to be true to yourself? In the postwar era, after the twin shocks of the Holocaust and the Atom Bomb, these questions have been clarified by a range of philosophers, among whom Emmanuel Levinas has been predominant, and the greatest inspiration" (Sierz, 2014, p. x). For Levinas, the primary condition of this ethical relationship is the encounter with the face of the Other. William Large explains the singularity of the face in the Levinasian ethical approach as follows: "The human face is ethical because it is expressive. It speaks. It is only because I relate to the face through speech that I relate to the other as a singularity: this other in front of me now who speaks to me, and not the 'other' as a category that could be said of many things" (Large, 2015, p. 78.) Levinas's argument on the Subject's infinite responsibility for the Other without rendering its otherness to the mainstream, to the totality, challenges the position of the Subject in traditional Western ethical approaches.

Recently, literary criticism has also turned to ethics, paralleling the rise of interest in ethics in different disciplines. As Robert Eaglestone asserts, Levinasian ethics "offer a new and different way of attending to the ethical in the textual and of the responsibility inherent in the reading" (Eaglestone, 1997, p. 8). Compared to other forms of art, theatre offers the most direct relationship with the reader/spectator because it is "produced in the necessary presence of an audience and through the collaborative activity and enabling capacity of others, theatre is thus, arguably, the art form which provides the ultimate forum for ethical debate" (Cochrane & Robinson, 2016, p. 3). However, for Levinas, because of being a "representation", art hinders the ethical encounter with the Other, and in "Reality and its Shadow" he declares art as being unethical. Participation is another aspect of art, making it an unethical experience. Because of being a part of a group, the reader/spectator becomes a part of the totality; thus, as Helena Grehan maintains, for Levinas, "through 'participation' the subject will somehow become deaf to the need for responsibility, and, as a consequence, will not be able to hear the call of the other, that most powerfully informs his mistrust of art. It is as if the fact of participating in a collective (for example as an audience member) negates any possible individual responses" (Grehan, 2009, p. 30). However, in its literal meaning, theatre and its audience share the common ground of being in the same place during a performance. In this respect, considering Levinas's suspicion about the totalising effect of participation, Jacques Rancière emphasises that the spectator is always already an active receiver of

the artwork. He argues, "Drama means action. Theatre is the place where an action is taken to its conclusion by bodies in motion in front of living bodies that are to be mobilised" (Rancière, 2009, p. 3). Thus, this condition preserves the spectator's individuality and singularity.

Nicholas Ridout draws attention to the role of the spectator in the ethical approach to theatre and its being a performative art. Thus, performance "encourages the spectator to stop seeing the performance as an exploration of his or her own subjectivity and, instead, to take it as an opportunity to experience an encounter with someone else. Performance, in this view, invites the spectator to assume ethical responsibility for the fragile life of the other" (Ridout, 2009, p. 8). According to the Levinasian ethical encounter, face-to-face interaction between the characters/actors and the reader/spectator enables ethical engagement. Recent experimental developments in theatrical productions, specifically in performance, have strengthened this ethical bond by rupturing the representation. Moreover, like several experimental techniques, adaptation defamiliarises the spectator with the text they already know by activating them. Sanders points out the relationship between adaptation and the active role of the reader/spectator, stating that it "is their mobilization of the familiar that sets off a chain reaction which produces new meanings for these versions" (Sanders, 2016, p. 116). By providing an infinite number of new meanings, adaptations contribute to the Levinasian argument of the indefinability of the face and, consequently, the Other.

Face and speech are the primary elements of theatre, and Levinas's argument on the human face as the ignitor of the ethical relationship finds its reflection in theatre. Speech is a theatrical tool that is used simultaneously with the face during theatrical performances. Considering the developments in contemporary theatre, which prioritises performance and "word," the ethical encounter is more achievable in contemporary plays. Mireia Aragay draws attention to the intersection of Levinas's ethical approach and the face and speech as the fundamental elements of theatre and states that theatre and performance "seem to be based, almost literally, on co-presence, on the face-to-face encounter between embodied, vulnerable spectators and Others wherein the former are summoned to respond, to become actively engaged in an exemplary exercise of ethical 'response-ability'" (Aragay, 2014, p. 4). Recent experimental practices brought performance forward rather than text-based acting on stage; the spectator's position is blurred, and the interaction between the spectator and the actor has become more direct, engaging them in an ethical

encounter. Because of the breakup of representation with experimental practices, contemporary theatre disturbs the spectators in their comfort zones and engages them as active participants of the production facing the Other.

Although Euripides's tragedy is a significant attempt to voice the Othered victims of war by directing the focus to women, children, and the old, a face-to-face encounter is hindered because of the traditional representative nature of the play. For this reason, according to the Levinasian ethical approach, an ethical bond cannot be built with the Other because of the tragedy's cathartic effect on the spectator. Regarding the extraordinary developments of the contemporary age, the theatre has also undergone unconventional developments, especially in terms of performance, to convey these extraordinary experiences. Political, sociological, technological and cultural developments in the twenty-first century parallel the transformation of ethical approaches to these developments. Regarding literary criticism, an ethical view of literature and theatre necessitates a new perspective that recognizes the alterity, indefinability, singularity and otherness of the Other.

Emmanuel Levinas is also one of the many to bear Hamlet's renowned questioning and explain his ethical understanding of the Other in *Otherwise than Being, or Beyond Essence*. He states, "Why does the other concern me? What is Hecuba to me? Am I my brother's keeper?" (Levinas, 1998, p. 117). For Levinas, ethics is an unconditional responsibility for the Other, and the ethical relationship starts with the encounter with the face of the Other. In this respect, in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas articulates the role of the face in his ethical stance, stating that "[t]he face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense, it cannot be comprehended, that is encompassed" (Levinas, 2007, p. 194). As the face is incomprehensible, this encounter must be free from any attempt at defining or describing. This ethical encounter with the Other does not define or categorise the Other to the sameness and "[i]f one could possess, grasp, and know the other, it would not be other. Possessing, knowing, and grasping are synonyms of power" (Levinas, *Time*, 1987, p. 90). In this regard, in addition to the theatre's nature as an art form performed in the form of a face-to-face encounter and the spectator's presence in the production procession, Carr's experimental revisit of *Hecuba* with innovative techniques in both form and content disturbs the spectators in their comfort zones and stimulates their active participation.

The opening of her play reveals Carr's intention to reverse the narrative of the classical tragedy, which opens with the ghost of Hecuba's youngest son, Polydorus. He

recounts the tragedies his family experienced and prophesies about the future events and sorrows that await them. On the other hand, Carr's *Hecuba* opens with Hecuba's lengthy speech in "*the throne room. Hecuba surrounded by her women*" (Carr, 2015, p. 211). She reiterates Hecuba's motherhood and allows her to voice the female experience of grief in the face of the body parts of her slaughtered sons. Hecuba describes the horrors of the conditions in which they are in a direct speech, confirming the intention of building a direct relationship with the spectator. The directness of her speech, short phrases, and the calm tone she attains to tell such a terror achieves defamiliarisation as in the opening lines:

> **Hecuba** So I'm in the throne room. Surrounded by the limbs, torsos, heads, corpses of my sons. My women trying to dress me, blood between my toes, my sons' blood, six of them, seven of them, eight? I've lost count, not that you can count anyway, they're not complete, more an assortment of legs, arms, chests, some with the armour still on, some stripped, hands in a pile, whose hands are they? Ears missing, eyes hanging out of sockets, and then Andromache comes in screaming, holding this bloody bundle. My grandson, intact except for his head, smashed off a wall, like an eggshell. They're through the south gate, she says, they've breached the citadel, they're here. (Carr, 215, p. 211)

Through this pornographic description of the violence and atrocity around the Trojan Queen, Carr manages to create a defamiliarising effect and disturb the representation, allowing a face-to-face encounter with Hecuba. In Euripides's *Hecuba*, Polydorus describes the violence during and after the battle; however, his depiction matches the messenger figures in the classical tragedies, where the audience does not see the violence on the stage but becomes familiar with the situation through the narrative and representation. In this way, Carr's *Hecuba* takes the first step towards a Levinasian ethical encounter, which depends on the face-to-face encounter: Hecuba and the spectator. She makes the spectator respond to the call of the Other, demanding unconditional responsibility. For Levinas, this unconditional responsibility results from "meeting the face", which is free from intentionality and definition. He argues that "since the Other looks at me, I am responsible for him, without even having taken on responsibilities in his regard; his responsibility is incumbent on me. It is a responsibility that goes beyond what I do" (Levinas & Nemo, 1985, p. 96). In the play, being the Other for both the victorious Greek army and the twenty-first-century spectator, Hecuba is given the chance to voice her

own story and her perception of the events around her. As Clare Wallace maintains, Carr is "strategically giving [Hecuba's] voice priority. Hecuba also physically occupies the centre stage here" (Wallace, 2019, p. 9). She even presumes the role of the chorus, describing the stage and the action on it, putting the spectator in a position to respond to her call without reciprocity.

As an experimental technique, Carr makes Hecuba and other characters use both direct and indirect, employing tags like I say- s/he says. In addition, they tell their own stories, retell what other characters tell, express their inner feelings and thoughts, and describe the stage to the spectator as if giving stage directions. Therefore, as González Chacón argues, "dramatis personae address the spectators/readers directly, and this brings Greek tragedy closer to contemporary audiences. The classical mode has definitely been modernized through this technique, which, moreover, results in a deeper analysis of Hecuba's psychology and contrasts heavily with the one line dialogues between characters in Euripidean version" (González Chacón, 2016, p. 35). Besides the innovative attempts in form, regarding the content, Carr also brings the Other to the centre without rendering them into totality; she gives them a voice and the opportunity to retell their version of the events, making them visible. Still, her achievement in the ethical stance mainly results from her innovative theatrical form. She ruptures representation through experimental performance; thus, she does not allow the spectator to experience the purgation of feelings. She builds a Levinasian ethical bond with the spectator and between the characters, depending on an ethical relationship without reciprocity and totality.

Regarding the ethical relationship between the spectator and the play, the Levinasian argument on the impossibility of ethics through art is challenged by Carr's subversion of catharsis in the play. Carr constructs the dialogues as direct and indirect speech that intermingled and overlapped with the respondent's lines. As Michael Lloyd asserts, throughout the play, "dialogue includes self-referential comments, stage directions, and quotations of other characters' words" (Lloyd, 2019, p. 101). Here, the characters address the audience, creating a Brechtian alienation effect. In this way, Carr brings the spectator and the actor face-to-face, positioning the spectator as a respondent to the call of the Other. In the following dialogue, both Hecuba and Agamemnon "narrate" their exchanges, and instead of acting, they describe their actions:

> **Hecuba** They told me many things about him, this terror of the Aegean, this monster from Mycenae, but they forgot to tell me about the eyes.

> Sapphires. Transcendental eyes, fringed by lashes any girl would kill for. I pretend I don't know who he is. And you are? I say. You know damn well who I am he laughs, and you may stand.
>
> **Agamemnon** And she says she'll stand when she feels like it. So I lift her off the throne. Now that wasn't too difficult, was it? I say. I can't resist twirling her though I know I should show more respect. Used but good. Still good. I was expecting an auld hag with her belly hanging down to her knees. But she's all right, there's bedding in her yet. (Carr, 2015, p. 213)

This innovative technique disrupts the representation by disturbing the reader/spectator in their comfortable seats. Michelle Wang draws attention to the activating effect of those techniques on the spectator and puts forward the following statement: "Rapid shifts between direct and reported speech accentuate the play's narrative (rather than dramatic) qualities, enriching the reader's/audience's access to character interiority by paradoxically fragmenting and redistributing subjectivity. In doing so, Carr dynamically elicits our active participation in joint meaning-making through an experimental mode that foregrounds the characters' mutual implications in each other's lives" (Wang, 2020, p. 400). In her version, Carr reevaluates the mode of narration, which is a defining element in classical tragedies. In these works, a chorus or a messenger narrates the events for the audience, or the characters express their thoughts and emotions to the audience in lengthy speeches or monologues. Without our contemporary visual or audio technologies, presenting the events, characters, their thoughts, emotions, and motives through dramatisation to the thousands in the open-air theatres was a difficult task. Thus, narration by the messengers and the characters solved the problem for the playwright, the actors and the spectator. Under these conditions, "a shown dramatization cannot approximate the complicated verbal play of told poetry or the interlinking of description, narration, and explanation that is so easy for prose narrative to accomplish" (Hutcheon & S. O'Flynn, 2013, p. 23). Like Euripides, Marina Carr exploits narration, keeping the familiar form of the tragedy. However, her experimentation with postmodern self-references, speech tags, tone, and disturbing content disrupts the traditional form of narration. She defamiliarizes the audience by taking away their familiarity with the form and breaks the representation. Being the receiver of these utterances and the face-to-face encounter, the reader/spectator becomes responsible for the Other. Consequently, by forbidding them from totalising engagement with the play, Carr posits the audience in an ethical zone as the direct respondents of the call of the Other. In Levinasian ethical criticism, they feel obligated to be for the Other

and respond to its call without expecting reciprocity. As previously emphasised, this ethical relationship is sparked by the experimental, defamiliarising attempts that break the boundary of representation.

By naming the play after Hecuba, like Euripides, Marina Carr places the Trojan Queen at the centre of the play. However, she allows other characters to challenge the representations of their stories by retelling them in their own words. She preserves their Otherness and their singularity in the totality of wartime madness. Polymestor, for instance, depicted as the betrayer in Euripides's text for killing Hecuba and Priam's last son Polydorus for gold, turns out to be the victim here. In Carr's adaptation, he does not kill the child but has to give him to Agamemnon to rescue his sons, who are held captive. Polydorus describes Polymestor's despair when Agamemnon's men take him to his death in the third scene, stating, "Polymestor throws himself on the ground, kisses my feet" (Carr, 2015, p. 236). Agamemnon becomes the scene's narrator and describes Polydorus's maturity and courage in the face of death:

> **Agamemnon** [Polydorus] raises [Polymestor] up, a gesture of such tenderness, he studied his father well, the poise, the economy of movement. It is not your fault, he says to Polymestor. In your place I would've done the same though you sense he wouldn't. (Carr, 2015, p. 236)

Unlike Euripides's maddened Hecuba, as the play reveals, Carr's Hecuba is not the one blinding Polymestor and killing his children, but Agamemnon's men do it. In contrast, Hecuba tenders Polymestor instead of torturing him and gouging out his eyes. Wallace points out that in this new version of Hecuba, Carr "diminishes the protagonist's agency and complicates the play's capacity to speak to a contemporary feminist anger" (Wallace, 2019, p. 3). Hecuba's anger is not directed at Polymestor; instead, she is depicted more as a woman grieving the loss of her children and the devastation of the war. In this version, she is not the vengeful mad queen. As Clare Wallace points out, "Hecuba's violence is turned instead on her own body" (Wallace, 2019, p. 10). Instead of tricking and attacking Polymestor and his children, she tears her own body. Like the rest of the speeches in the play, Cassandra tells what happened after Hecuba finds Polydorus's dead body among a pile of children's corpses:

> **Cassandra** She tears at herself, goes at her arms, neck, face with her nails, I will put myself on my own pyre she says, she rams a fist down her throat,

> bangs her head off the ground, finds a stone, carves herself till the blood runs in ribbons, this experiment is over, she cries, over. (Carr, 2015, p. 256)

Agamemnon is another character to whom Marina Carr gives the opportunity to display his Otherness and express his inner feelings. Rather than portraying the arrogant, proud, self-confident commander, his direct address to the spectator reveals that he has become both the part and victim of the totality, unable to express his singularity in his actions because of his unnamed fears. In her version, Carr gives him a chance to express his feelings and despair over killing his own daughter as a sacrifice to the Gods. When Odysseus reveals that the men are impatient for the wind and asks for another sacrifice, Agamemnon expresses his sadness and anger:

> **Agamemnon** And what would they know about symmetry? Spit it out! What do you mean? I know damn well what he means. Well, he says, we sacrificed a girl before the war. We certainly did, I say. We sacrificed my girl. Fucking cannibals had me slit my own daughter's throat for the fucking wind to change. Iphigenia, twelve. . . We don't slit the throats of children in Mycenae. No. You do it or we storm the palace and take your whole family out. Her eyes. Iphigenia's eyes . . . (Carr, 2015, p. 232)

In Euripides' text, Hecuba's daughter Polyxena is killed by Achilles's son Neoptolemus, and Euripides emphasises how swiftly he cuts her throat to lessen her pain. However, in Carr's *Hecuba*, it is Agamemnon who slits Polyxena's throat in two unsuccessful attempts to kill her, and in the end, she is stabbed by a priest to end her pain. Unlike his classical vengeful depiction, Neoptolemus is presented here as an affectionate young man who is ashamed of the things done in the name of his father, Achilles. Hecuba expresses his sadness because of this sacrifice:

> **Hecuba** Then the boy is there, Neoptolemus, he pulls at my sleeve, my father would never have wanted this, he says, tears in his eyes, never. But Agamemnon's men shove him aside. (Carr, 2015, p. 247)

By bringing the spectator and the actors face-to-face, Carr turns the spectators into witnesses to the most brutal scenes on the stage. Wang maintains that "[t]hough violence and death typically occurred offstage in Greek theater—where pathos in Euripides's play, for example, is elicited through the use of character laments—

contemporary playwrights like Carr move these events onstage in order to emphasize their ethical and political stakes" (Wang, 2020, p. 411). These unsettling scenes, told with obscenity on stage, burden the spectator with ethical responsibility. Through the employment of innovative theatrical forms, the defamiliarising effect intensifies and disturbs the contemporary spectator, preventing them from participating in the "act of totality", which is one of the reasons for Levinas's sceptical approach to the arts.

Marina Carr's treatment of Helen is also very significant when evaluating *Hecuba* as a war play. In Euripides's text, she is presented as the reason for the Trojan War and is condemned by Hecuba. However, in Carr's adaptation, she turns out to be a meaningless justification for the invaders of Troia:

> **Hecuba** You saw our beautiful city, our valleys, our fields, Green and giving. You had never seen such abundance. You wanted it. You must have it. You came to plunder and destroy.
>
> **Agamemnon** I say, where's Helen? We can't find her.
>
> **Hecuba** Helen? Helen? Helen was never here and well you know it! (Carr, 2015, p. 216)

Melissa Sihra describes *Hecuba* as "a war play which exposes the devastating civilian cost of conflict and violence upon women and children" (Sihra, 2005, p. 265). Euripides's *Hecuba* is one of the most rewritten texts in Western literature about the theme of war, especially the tragedies of civilians. Making a connection with the violence in the contemporary age, Christina Lamb asserts, "Euripides's play was written more than 2,400 years ago, yet it feels remarkably contemporary. […] From Aleppo to Kandahar, Baghdad to Gaza, hundreds of thousands of women and children have been left widowed, orphaned and homeless by the rockets or bombs of armies and terrorist groups" (qtd. in Sihra, 2018, p. 265). Thousands of children have been killed and are being killed at the moment in search of some "Helens" like terrorists or nuclear bombs, and as Cassandra prophesies, "They will lie about what happened this day" (Carr, 2015, p. 257). In her lengthy speech in the first scene, Hecuba describes the atrocities with the anachronistic word: genocide. She questions the civilian deaths and butchering of the vulnerable in the following lines:

> What about the women? The children? The women too, they are killing the women he says, all the old ones, the ugly ones, the ones past childbearing, past work. And the children? I say. Priam's head is oozing on to my dress. The children he says, all the boys and all girls under ten. . . . Not enough room on the ship he says . . . And I think this is not war. In war there are rules, laws, codes. This is genocide. They are wiping us out. (Carr, 2015, p. 212)

The ethical encounter between the spectator and the victims of these atrocities—the Others—results in an ethical relationship that places responsibility on the Subject. For the contemporary spectator who is already witnessing these atrocities happening around the world on TV, social media channels and other media tools, the ethical burden becomes heavier. This responsibility and the recognition of the Other in their vulnerabilities linger in the consciousness of the reader/spectator, further reminding them of the precarious position of human beings in the face of wars. One of the most significant figures in her adaptation is the cursed prophetess Cassandra, who is only mentioned by Polymestor at the end of Euripides's work. Although her mother ignores her, she shares her visions throughout the play. She ends the play by explaining to the audience how they will lie about Hecuba, referring to Polymestor's prophecy in Euripides's text.

Conclusion

Echoing the famous questioning of Hamlet, Marina Carr's adaptation of Euripides's *Hecuba* paves the way for ethical questioning: "What is Hecuba to us?" and why we cannot experience the purgation of feelings, pity and fear but feel the responsibility for the unknown Other and even guilt because of our position as a witness to her condition. Carr creates an ethical relationship between the characters and the spectator because of the unconventional handling of the classical play and bringing it to the contemporary spectator as a direct addressee. In addition, because of the nature of adaptations and appropriations, Carr provides untold stories of the characters or bestows them to tell their version of the stories, thus filling the gaps in the story. Added to the experimental practises like the direct speech of the characters/actors to the spectator retelling their version of their stories, creating an anachronistic situation, representation is disturbed, and defamiliarisation gives way to a Levinasian ethical encounter between the spectators and the actors.

This ethical bond disturbs the spectator and obliges them to respond to the call of the Other, acknowledging its Otherness. In the play, Hecuba, a fictional character from an ancient time, calls the spectator's attention, binding them to respond, and she demands recognition of her alterity. The spectator takes responsibility for the Other and recognises her undefinability. Bearing the responsibility of the Other at the end of the play, the spectator cannot experience relief, a catharsis. Instead of having a cathartic impact, Marina Carr's *Hecuba* makes the modern audience feel hurt and even guilty. Carr's adaptation portrays a different picture of the Queen of Troy from her representation in several classical texts and other rewritings. Carr retells the unheard tale of the tragic queen and portrays Hecuba's grief, agony, love for her children, and the vulnerability of a woman surviving a battle, in contrast to the traditional portrayal of a spiteful queen. She destroys the representation in this way by using experimental theatrical tactics to disturb the audience in their comfort zone and subvert the aspect of catharsis. The play leaves the audience with a feeling of guilt and an intense sense of grief for the Other. In relation to the ethical connection between the viewer and the play, Carr's inversion of catharsis facilitates the building of an ethical relationship between the reader/spectator and actor/characters. This encounter prioritises the singularity and alterity of the Other. In the end, the starting question, "What is Hecuba to me?" finds its answer: Hecuba is my responsibility, with her Otherness and alterity, without reciprocity.

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