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Theatre and Communal Movement as Forms of Trauma Therapy in Gregory Burke's *Black Watch* (2007)

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Abstract: This article explores how elements of trauma therapy can be used to interpret the play *Black Watch* (2007) by Gregory Burke. The introduction provides a summary of *Black Watch*, as well as an outline of contemporary theories regarding the connection between theatre, war, and trauma therapy. The first part focuses on how the seating arrangements, the choice of actors, and the structure of *Black Watch* allow the play to create an environment which resembles a therapy session. The second part concentrates on how communal movement, music, and dance are used in the play to express emotions and trauma which could not be put into words. The conclusion investigates how using some of the features of trauma treatment results in *Black Watch* possessing potential healing properties and insight into the topic of war.

Keywords: contemporary British drama; war plays; trauma; trauma therapy; *Black Watch*

1 Introduction: War, Trauma, and Theatre Theories

In the following article, I investigate how theatre and communal movement appear to have certain therapeutic value, especially in the context of traumatised soldiers. The analysis focuses on Gregory Burke's 2007 play *Black Watch*. In order to examine these aspects, I first provide a brief overview of how trauma and the relationship between theatre and war are understood in the present day. After that, I show how these seemingly unrelated notions can come together in psychotherapy and provide a lens through which *Black Watch* can be viewed.

The traumatic effects of war on individuals and the unique group dynamics among veterans and between the military personnel and civilians are among the main issues raised by Scottish playwright Gregory Burke in *Black Watch.* It is probably the most acclaimed Iraq war play to date. It was first performed at the

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Fringe Festival in Edinburgh in 2006 and then went on tour to Britain, America, and Australia. It was so popular that

> [t]he original three-week run had to be extended, as prizes began to roll in. Unanimous rave reviews have followed it around the world. There were tears in Sydney and Wellington, ovations in Los Angeles. In New York, where Greg Burke was mystified if not unhappy to see one night both Rupert Murdoch and the Coen brothers settling themselves onto hard pews, the entire run sold out in 44 minutes. (Ferguson 2008, n.pag.; see also Heilpern 2007, n.pag.)

The play is based on Burke's interviews with Black Watch soldiers about the regiment, their deployment to Iraq, and the future of their formation. The Black Watch is an infantry battalion of the Royal Regiment of Scotland, with a long and rich history starting in the eighteenth century in the Highlands of Scotland. In between scenes set in a pub in Fife and Camp Dogwood in Iraq, the characters sing songs and perform parade marches. At one point, the history of the regiment is told by one of the soldiers while he is being dressed into uniforms appropriate for the time period he is discussing. After some initial reluctance, the soldiers start opening up to the Writer, who is collecting information to write about the unit and about their daily life in Iraq. The men describe the boredom interrupted by sudden attacks, their interaction with American soldiers and embedded journalists, and the games they play to pass the time. The final part of the play reveals that three of the soldiers sent to Iraq were killed by a suicide bomber, which was discussed earlier in the play by some politicians, who in the same conversation return to the topic of amalgamating the Black Watch with other forces into one big army. Although *Black Watch* is a political play and it touches upon multiple political, social, economic, and military issues, in this paper I focus solely on the possible therapeutic force of the drama.

While drawing parallels between *Black Watch* and therapy, it is necessary to mention that most of the decisions of the creators, such as the seating arrangement, the choice of the actors, or the structure of the play, were probably not made with therapy in mind. The features of the performance which overlap with attributes of therapy might be coincidental, or perhaps they reflect a deeper and older connection between theatre and therapy. Additionally, my analysis does not make it exactly clear who assumes the role of the therapist and who of the trauma survivor. The actors, although they portray very specific people, are embodiments of a universal modern soldier. Although the trauma is not theirs, thanks to certain circumstances, which are discussed later in the article, they can present it in an authentic way. The audience most likely serve as outsiders who witness the trauma story and try to understand it, but their experiences will probably be vastly different depending on whether they are civilians, active-duty soldiers, or veterans. Perhaps, due to their experiences, some of the military members in the audience identify with the trauma survivors rather than with a therapist. Thus, it appears most reasonable to assume that the roles are not distinctly assigned. Instead, the theatrical performance creates an

environment resembling a therapy session, in the sense that it is a communal experience with potentially healing and clarifying effects. These features of the performance appear to adhere to the definition of therapy provided by Judith Lewis Herman, a psychiatrist and one of the pioneers of the cPTSD (complex post-traumatic stress disorder) diagnosis. She argues that "[t]he therapist's role is both intellectual and relational, fostering both insight and empathetic connection" (1992, 135). In accordance with this definition, the performance appears to facilitate a better understanding of trauma and a meeting point between people who went through it and those who did not.

Currently, there is no unanimously agreed upon definition of trauma. However, many mental health professionals have provided their opinions on how to understand this phenomenon. According to Lewis Herman,

> [t]raumatic reactions occur when action is of no avail. When neither resistance nor escape is possible, the human system of self-defense becomes overwhelmed and disorganised. Each component of the ordinary response to danger, having lost its utility, tends to persist in an altered and exaggerated state long after the actual danger is over. (1992, 34)

More recently, Paul Conti, also a psychiatrist, writes that trauma refers

> to the type of emotional or physical pain that often goes unseen, yet actually changes our brain biology and psychology. And although humans tend to be pretty resilient, many of us suffer from these traumatic changes in more ways and for longer than we imagine. (2021, 9)

Both specialists point to the fact that trauma overcomes people with extremely severe mental, emotional, and physical symptoms; and in many cases, individuals are, for a long time, unable to deal with this affliction. It comes as no surprise that soldiers often experience trauma during their military operations. According to an article on the existence of PTSD[1] among soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan

> the prevalence of PTSD has […] been found to differ across different militaries, ranging from 4 % to 17 % for those in the United States returning from the Iraq War and from 3 % to 6 % for those returning in the United Kingdom. (Hines et al. 2014, 469)[2]

Regardless of the level of socially acceptable violence throughout the ages, it stands to reason that at least some people involved in military conflicts have been having these

1 Trauma and PTSD are not the same thing. As Conti observes "PTSD is just one of many ongoing issues than can result from trauma" (2021, 21). Additionally, trauma is not a medical diagnosis, while PTSD is recognised by both the DSM 5, used only in the USA, and the ICD-11, used globally to categorise illnesses. Thus, it is difficult to provide statistics about trauma, but the two concepts are connected.
2 Lewis Herman provides a compelling description of how trauma was (mis)understood over the centuries. She points to how the number of soldiers who were traumatised in the First World War forced the mental health establishment to stop talking about trauma as 'hysteria' which afflicted only women and start treating its symptoms as a serious issue which can affect both sexes (1992, 20–8).

problems since the dawn of time and soldiers have created various methods to deal with them. One of them might have been drama.

Even though at first sight it appears that theatre and military conflicts do not have much in common, it has been argued by some that they have been intimately intertwined for many centuries. Karen Malpede, a playwright and director, observes in the introduction to a collection of plays about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that

> [d]ramatic art arose as a complement to, perhaps also as an antidote to, war. Athenian democracy, Greek tragedy, and the universal conscription of Athenian citizenry (only men were citizens) are products of the same golden age, the fifth century B.C. (2011, xv)

In a similar vein, Bessel van der Kolk, a psychiatrist focusing on treating trauma, argues that

> [b]y the fifth century BCE, theatre played a central role in civic life, with the audience seated in a horseshoe around the stage, which enabled them to see one another's emotions and reactions. […] Military service was required of every adult citizen of Athens, so audiences were undoubtedly composed of combat veterans and active-duty soldiers on leave. The performers themselves must have been citizen-soldiers. (2014, 332)

While theatre undeniably depicts various stories, the topic of war and its repercussions for people involved in it appear to be one of the cornerstones of the European variety of it, as it was originally created predominantly by and for people who had experienced the horrors of war.[3] Additionally, drama allowed people to witness and experience painful or terrifying tales of war as members of a community, not on their own. This feature could be connected to trauma therapy, during which "[r]ecovery can take place only within the context of relationships; it cannot occur in isolation" (Lewis Herman 1992, 133).

2 Trauma Treatment and Theatre

The first aspect where *Black Watch* and therapy overlap is in how certain conditions of the modern play resemble ancient Greek theatre and its mentally restorative impact. While the audience sat in the viewing area which was shaped like a horseshoe in the past, *Black Watch* viewers were provided with "seating banks [positioned] down either side of an esplanade" (Tiffany 2010, xii). In both cases, audience

3 Van Der Kolk notes that "Sophocles was a general officer in Athens's wars against the Persians, and his play *Ajax*, which ends with the suicide of the Trojan War's greatest heroes, reads like a textbook description of traumatic stress" (2014, 332). Many playwrights, cast and audience members were soldiers in ancient Greece, and the performed plays often focused on military conflicts, to name just a few: *Philoctetes* by Sophocles, *Hecuba*, *Orestes,* and *The Bacchae* by Euripides.

members could see each other, which is important, as van der Kolk argues. What is more, ancient Greece actors were soldiers themselves, and the contemporary performers share very similar backgrounds and are the same age as the soldiers they play. As Ferguson observes:

> [While talking to t]he young actors in *Black Watch*, [who] almost all [come] from Fife and Tayside […] it is hard to remember they are actors, not real soldiers; for they laugh, swear, rib each other in the same way and, but for a marginally different turning of the fates, they could easily have been in the army, in Iraq. […] [The actors had] grown up knowing about the Black Watch, played football as kids with now-serving soldiers. And all are now friends, a real band of brothers. (2008, n.pag.)

It could be argued that these analogies between *Black Watch* and ancient Greek drama make the theatre a safe space for the modern actors to tell the soldiers' traumatic story. Thanks to the seating arrangement, members of the audience can see one another, as well as the actors. Everyone is exposed to some extent and they witness the traumatic story together, as members of the same little community. The safety created by this positioning allows audience and actors to meet on a plane where actors can talk openly about their experiences without fear of judgement. In this context, both sides enter a state resembling a therapy relationship,[4] where one side wants to tell its story and the other one wants to understand it. The similitude between the actors and the characters permits the story to be as authentic as possible. These conditions allow the performance to have a level of authenticity, vulnerability, and rawness, which invites the viewers to connect with it deeply.

Secondly, *Black Watch* shares other similarities with therapy which are not a staple of ancient Greek drama. The structure of the play, where we move between scenes in the pub in Fife in the present and scenes from Camp Dogwood in the past, resembles a method used by therapists to allow patients to explore their traumatic memory in a safe way. In this approach,

> [t]he therapist must help the patient move back and forth in time, from her protected anchorage in the present to immersions in the past, so that she can simultaneously reexperience the feelings in all their intensity while holding on to the sense of safe connection that was destroyed in the traumatic moment. (Lewis Herman 1992, 178)

4 Lewis Herman describes the therapy relationship as a "relationship between survivor and therapist [whose] sole purpose is to promote the recovery of the patient. […] The therapist is called upon to bear witness to a crime. She must affirm a position of solidarity with the victim" (1992, 134–5). In the theatre, it is not clear what the intentions of the audience are, but even if there is no sense of solidarity, they want to understand the story of the soldiers. Moreover, from the reviews, it appears that most members of the audience were won over by the end of the play.

In other words, with the help of the therapist, the patient moves like a "pendulum" (van der Kolk 2014, 333) between memories of the traumatic past and the safe present. When the patient is about to get overwhelmed by the strong emotions evoked by past events, the therapist reminds them that they are in the therapist's office in the present, and that they are safe.

Burke's play appears to mimic this structure. The scenes in the pub represent the safe present. The soldiers are in Scotland, they do not express any strong emotions, and if anything starts bothering them, they use obnoxious humour as a smokescreen. Moreover, the play contains a number of songs, praising the Black Watch, performed by the soldiers. They seem to offer a similar kind of respite from the emotionally charged content of the play. The scenes in Camp Dogwood, conversely, depict the traumatic events which haunt the soldiers. They often talk about using excessive fire power (Burke 2007, 19, 39–40, 62) and experience the suicide bomber attack, during which three of their fellow soldiers die (Burke 2007, 66–8).

What is more, the reliance of the theatre on the spoken word appears to additionally resemble trauma treatment in the sense that "the 'action of telling a story' in the safety of a protected relationship [with a therapist] can actually produce a change in the abnormal processing of the traumatic memory" (Lewis Herman 1992, 183). It could be argued that performing in or just watching, listening to, or reading a play which triggers the traumatic response, but is experienced in a safe and non-threatening environment, can have healing properties.[5] The intermissions in *Black Watch* appear to be there mostly for the audience, the cast is constantly in motion. Perhaps, because of rehearsals and having performed the play in the past, the actors take on the role of the therapist in these instances. They already know and are at peace with the trauma story, but guide the audience through it in a way which will not overwhelm them.

We also have an example of what happens when the safeguard of returning to the present fails, as the emotions overpower one of the soldiers. Towards the end of the play, Stewarty, the only one with an official diagnosis of a depression, assaults the Writer in an attempt to break his arm and says: "Let me break your arm and see if you can write it down way a broken arm […]. If he wants tay ken about Iraq, he has tay feel some pain?" (Burke 2007, 65). The character is unable to regain emotional equilibrium and appears to perform a traumatic re-enactment of how his arm got broken in the explosion which killed his friends. According to van der Kolk, "[t]he

5 Indeed, there are a number of theatre programmes for war veterans. Van der Kolk writes about and provides examples of such groups in America (2014, 334–46). Apart from that, there also exist groups, for example Arts in the Armed Forces, who give performances for active-duty soldiers in military bases, allowing the combatants to interact with the theatre in a more passive way (Vice News 2016).

traumatic enactment serves no function. […] Reenactments are frozen in time, unchanging, and they are always lonely, humiliating, and alienating experiences" (2014, 180).[6] Returning to the traumatic memories before or without establishing a sense of safety in the present appears to lead only to more serious mental health problems.

The elements of *Black Watch* which resemble trauma therapy appear to suggest that a theatrical performance can facilitate a better understanding and acceptance of even very difficult topics if two conditions are met. Firstly, all parties included need to feel secure, which can be arranged if both, the audience and the actors, are willing to be open, vulnerable, and non-judgemental in expressing their feelings. In more metaphorical terms, if everybody surrenders their arms, there are chances for peace talks. Secondly, the trauma story has to be revealed gradually, not all at once. It needs to include safe, or at least neutral, pauses, during which the viewers can rest. Otherwise, when the negative emotions become overpowering, everybody becomes defensive, and they either lash out or withdraw, which prevents them from making progress in dealing with the trauma.

3 Trauma Treatment and Movement

Van der Kolk establishes a connection between acting on stage and the ability of traumatised individuals to regain control over their bodies and lives. He explains that "[o]ur sense of agency, how much we feel in control, is defined by our relationship with our bodies and its rhythms […]. Acting is an experience of using your body to take your place in life" (2014, 331). He thus argues that speech is not the only way to treat trauma: "The capacity of art, music and dance to circumvent the speechlessness[7] that comes with terror may be one reason they are used as trauma treatments in cultures around the world" (2014, 243). To paraphrase, if an individual

6 Van der Kolk notes that Freud "and many of his followers believed that reenactments were an unconscious attempt to get control over a painful situation and that they eventually could lead to mastery and resolution. There is no evidence of that theory – repetition leads only to further pain and self-hatred" (2014, 32). He additionally shares his experience of treating war veterans. He recalls that "[w]hen we encouraged them to talk about the precise details of a traumatic event, we often inadvertently triggered a full-blown flashback, rather than helping them resolve the issue" (2014, 19). Thus, it appears that forcing trauma survivors to talk about it before they are ready causes only further harm, and Stewarty's reaction seems to reflect this.

7 Lewis Herman provides descriptions of other therapists who talk about trauma memory as being "'prenarrative' […] it does not reveal the storyteller's feelings or interpretation of events. Another therapist describes traumatic memory as a series of still snapshots or a silent movie; the role of therapy is to provide the music and words" (1992, 175).

is unable to translate their traumatic experience into words, there is another, perhaps more visceral and intuitive, way to express trauma in secure surroundings, namely moving the body in a communal fashion, with other actors on stage, staying in synchrony.

Significantly, there is also a relationship between armed forces and communal movement. William H. McNeill, a historian and author, observes that

> this sort of merger between self and the surrounding group, attained in the heat of battle, is analogous to the 'boundary loss' attributed to dancers. It is also induced by close-order drill, though only in attenuated measure. If so, drill, dance and battle belong together. All three create and sustain group cohesion. (1995, 10)

Once again, we see a surprising overlap between the war experience and trauma treatment. Not only is there communal movement in both, but it is used to achieve similar goals. The army wants to encourage good group organisation and a sense of attachment among the soldiers, which can be used in battle, while the therapist wants the traumatised and isolated individual to regain control over their body and reconnect with the wider society.

In *Black Watch*, in scenes without dance, music, or movement, we mostly see the soldiers' being unable to show emotions to a lesser or greater extent. As was mentioned earlier, whenever they feel uncomfortable answering the Writer's questions, they start joking crudely. However, this behaviour seems to be the norm encouraged by the army. In the scenes from Camp Dogwood, we have numerous exchanges which appear to try to cover up emotions, such as fear and uncertainty, with humour and irony. When the men first arrive at the base and are instantly attacked, they have the following conversation:

Macca [Camp Dogwood is my home for the next s]ix fucking months?
Nabsy I thought they said we were gonnay be home by Christmas?
Cammy You didnay believe that shite, did you?
Stewarty This is the fucking army we're talking about here.
The Sergeant enters.
Sergeant What are youse fucking daying?
Another explosion.
Cammy Taking cover, Sergeant.
Sergeant Taking cover?
Cammy Someone's firing …
Another explosion.
Mortars. Light. If I'm no mistaken.
Sergeant They're just saying hello. You fucking shitebags.
Granty You'd think they would have fucking let us get unpacked before they attacked us.
Fraz Cheeky bastards.
Sergeant What, have you no read *jihadi* infantry manual number four-four-seven-nine-

one-six-five-three?
Another explosion.
Inshallah!
Beat.
The infidel shall be attacked at the rising ay the sun and at its setting. And when he unpacks his decadent western sunblock.
Another explosion
Allah akhbar.

(Burke 2007, 11)

The soldiers are aware of the danger they are in, the unreliability of the army, and the cultural and religious context of the conflict. However, they seem to assume the stance of indifference, nonchalance, and machismo. Perhaps this is the best approach when they are constantly in danger of dying, but, at the same time, they have to remain composed, logical, and alert. Unfortunately, this kind of behaviour makes them unable to talk about what they really feel. In consequence, most of the scenes where the soldiers express emotions appear to incorporate non-verbal actions. Choosing such forms to display the feelings of the soldiers seems to follow van der Kolk's observations about the healing properties of movement and art, and McNeill's theory regarding the connection between armed forces and communal movement. *Black Watch* contains a number of scenes which incorporate a combination of speech, music, dance, and various types of communal or individual movement.

The first scene which, apart from speech, includes a lot of synchronised movement is where the soldiers tell the history of the Black Watch. According to the production notes, we hear

> [m]usic. A red carpet rolls out, and as Cammy narrates the following history of the Black Watch the other soldiers manoeuvre him around the stage dressing him into and out of significant and distinct uniforms from the regiment's history. They resemble a squad assembling and disassembling a military cannon. (Burke 2007, 30)

Although the actor enumerates a lot of dates and names of places where the regiment fought in the past, the crux of the speech appears to be when he establishes his character's identity as defined by being a member of a group. As he describes it: "We're warriors. We're Celts. […] We're a fucking tribe ourselves" (Burke 2007, 31). Cammy does not talk about himself as an individual; the most important thing for him is belonging to a group. The Black Watch, with its ties to the communities of rural Scotland and its military history, provides that. Although the characters are aware of all the drawbacks, they still take a lot of pride in being members of the regiment. The spoken part of the scene expresses the valour, virility, and honour which men can talk about openly in the masculine world of the army. The gentler part of it, the unity and working together, are largely expressed through communal movement. For

example, the impressive cooperative skills of the actors/soldiers while dressing and undressing Cammy seem to emphasise the ideas of unity and teamwork.

Similarly, emotions which, for one reason or another, are taboo, are expressed mostly through movement. A lot of the feelings are presented in the form of military drills or fights. As Ferguson has observed, the play

> is also fiercely physical, with rigidly authentic drills – they brought in a Black Watch instructor to crisp these to perfection – and fights, and dancing and, as the staging switches from a pool hall in Fife to the Iraq desert, there are some astonishingly choreographed set-pieces. (2008, n.pag.)

In one scene which seems to centre on repressed anger and hostility towards one another, the soldiers stage ten-second fights. As we can see in the production notes, we hear

> [m]usic. The soldiers all pair up around the space and attack each other in turn, each fight lasting exactly ten seconds, as the video screens [hung from each of the four towers which flank the seating area] count down from ten to one. The music, movement and count downs intensify to a climax. (Burke 2007, 56)

While the soldiers in the unit constantly tease and are obnoxious towards one another, it is clear that there is no, or little, ill will behind it. This type of behaviour seems to be another element of the masculine culture of the army. However, there appear to be real feelings of anger in this scene. In order not to let the antagonism overcome the soldiers, they are allowed to express their authentic emotions through their body movement. The whole process is strictly controlled and the participants are expected to repress the remaining resentment. Once again, it would seem that there is a distinction between what is expressed through speech and what through movement. The things the soldiers say out loud are socially accepted; by contrast, what they express through movement is sincere but, in this case, frowned upon.

In yet another scene, where the soldiers receive letters from home, we see them displaying more positive emotions. According to the production notes,

> [t]he Sergeant enters with a bundle of airmail letters (blueys). Stewarty notices him and takes the letters. He opens one and starts reading it, the words giving him comfort. Another soldier enters and takes the remaining letters. Stewarty creates a subconscious sign-language which expresses the content of his letter. One by one the soldiers enter, take the bundle of letters and, finding the one addressed to them, repeat the process for themselves. (Burke 2007, 39)

This scene, without any words, seems to be the only one where the soldiers experience genuine feelings of affection. Yet, they appear determined to go through this process in isolation, or perhaps they do not know how to share the kindness and love expressed in the letters with their fellow soldiers. Regardless of the motivations, the

soldiers never say out loud what their loved ones wrote to them about. They only express it through the sign-language, which is, again, body movement.

In the last scene of the play, there is a combination of all the methods of displaying trauma and emotions. As the soldiers are preparing for an attack, they say:

Cammy I fought for my regiment.
Rossco I fought for my company.
Granty I fought for my platoon.
Nabsy I fought for my section.
Stewarty I fought for my mates.
Cammy Fucking shite fight tay end way though.
Officer This may be the last attack for the First Battalion, the Black Watch. Let us make sure it goes as well as anything we have done in the past and is one that we can be proud of.
Pause.
Five – four – three – two – one.
Beat.
Forward the Forty-Second!

PARADE

Music. The bagpipes and drums start playing 'The Black Bear'. The soldiers start parading. The music intensifies and quickens as the parade becomes harder and the soldiers stumble and fall. The parade formation begins to disintegrate but each time one falls they are helped back onto their feet by the others. As the music and movement climax, a thunderous drumbeat stops both, and the exhausted, breathless soldiers are left in silhouette. (Burke 2007, 72–3)

The power of the scene stems from the fact that the emotions which are expressed through speech are then reinforced by body movement and music. The idea of solidarity among the soldiers is first stated when the soldiers say that they would die for one another. Then this idea is underscored when they help each other up when one falls. Next, the Officer encourages the soldiers to remain true to the proud history of the regiment. The esteemed traditions of the Black Watch are later expressed through the bagpipe music and parading. Lastly, the fact that the soldiers start their attack, despite knowing that the unit might be disbanded, shows their resilience and strength of character in spite of an uncertain future. This notion is portrayed through the last glimpse of the soldiers the audience gets. On the scene, they can see a group of indistinct, anonymous soldiers, who, despite their fatigue, are still standing tall.

The hardship of warfare and any possible sustained trauma cause the soldiers to avoid expressing feelings whether they are among soldiers or civilians. However, the bottled-up emotions cannot remain dormant forever. The eventual outburst can be violent, like Stewarty's traumatic enactment, or steps can be taken to find a healthier outlet for all the negative experiences gathered during the war. One option is to talk

about it under conditions described in the previous part, and the other is expressing it in a more physical way. The communal movement taught to the soldiers by the army provides them with a non-verbal means to communicate what they cannot or will not say out loud. Using a 'language' the soldiers are familiar with and which gives them a sense of control over their bodies, as well as a place in a group, empowers them to face and share their true stories. The scenes which use these methods do not push the action of the play forward, they are there to communicate to the audience the parts of the soldiers' experiences which they were not able to put into words.

4 Conclusions

In conclusion, while there are obvious differences between therapy and a theatrical play, some politics of therapy might be used in the theatre to facilitate a deeper understanding of the subject matter, especially if it is controversial. The audience/witnesses to trauma, similarly to a therapist, come to the performance wanting to understand the story of the soldiers, and the soldiers/actors are eager to tell it, just like a patient. As both sides enter the 'therapeutic relationship' during the performance, facilitated by adhering to certain standards of therapy, the audience gains a deep and authentic insight into the experience of war and the soldiers/actors feel seen and heard. It has to be remembered, however, that the playwrights, actors, and the rest of the company hold more power than a therapist. They tell the story, they decide what means to use to communicate most effectively, and they arrange the surroundings, thus to a large extent they take on the role of both the therapist and of the survivor. Knowing how to create a safe space, how to make sure that the storytellers do not become overwhelmed, and making various forms of expression available to them, allows the actors to tell the story as honestly as they can. The audience feels a rapport with the characters and are more open to listening to the story, regardless of how unfamiliar with or critical of it they are.

In terms of aesthetics, it could be argued that *Black Watch* managed to capture the essence of psychotherapy. The performance possesses the potential to become a meeting place for traumatised soldiers/actors and the audience/witnesses to the trauma, just like during a trauma healing therapy session. On an almost bare stage, the focal point of the play is the experience of the soldiers and the various ways it can be expressed. The main means of communication is speech, as it is also the case in traditional, talking therapy. The topics which are too difficult, shameful, or painful for the soldiers to be put into words, are manifested through sound, music, movement, and images projected on the screens, which corresponds to methods used in alternative trauma therapies.

Black Watch appears to have managed to use these features of therapy to tell a story about an unpopular war, fought by men who probably do not have much in common with the mostly anti-war audience, and achieve massive success. Similarly to therapy, the creators of the play arranged a space where, comparably to a trauma survivor in therapy, the actors could tell the story of the soldiers on their own terms, at their own pace, in their own words, with all the good, bad, boring, and horrifying elements. The audience, in turn, gains an insight into the experience of the soldiers comparable to that of a therapist. Perhaps the strength of *Black Watch* lies in the fact that, intentionally or not, it utilises some of the psychologically beneficial properties of ancient Greek theatre, and then supplements it with some elements of modern trauma treatment. To be more precise, *Black Watch* manages to seamlessly combine the first-hand narratives of the soldiers and the healing power of facing trauma as a community, introduced in the Greek drama, with the gradual uncovering of trauma, which can be expressed in many, often physical, ways, which, in turn, is encouraged by modern trauma therapy.

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