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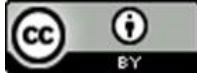
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## The Role of Storytelling in Debbie Tucker Green's Random

### A B S T R A C T

Storytelling is a theatrical method employed by playwrights to delve into the profound aspects of a character's psyche. It allows characters to directly communicate with the audience, serving multiple functions within the story. Moreover, this task can be executed by a protagonist or multiple characters, and occasionally even by actors who are not directly engaged in the play's plot. Playwrights have employed this form in different variations throughout the whole history of drama. Debbie Tucker Green, a Black British playwright, employs the technique of storytelling in her play Random to engage the audience in responding to street violence in London. The present paper aims to focus on this play, particularly on the act of storytelling, as the researcher observes that existing studies often discuss Tucker Green's play solely within the context of her identity as a Black writer addressing issues within Black communities, neglecting to explore her unique stylistic approach. So, this study aims to fill in this gap. Debbie Tucker Green, unlike other Black playwrights, portrays traumatic experiences of loss and violence through her distinctive style of writing. By utilizing storytelling, she effectively depicts the feelings and thoughts of her characters, thus raising awareness among the audience about the vulnerability of Black citizens.

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## دور الحكاية في مسرحية عشوائي للكاتبة ديبي تاكر جرين

م.م. الاء راضي مكي/وزارة التربية / مديرية تربية واسط  
الخلاصة:

باستعمال الحكاية بوصفها أسلوباً مسرحياً ، يقوم الكتاب المسرحيون بالتنقيب في الجوانب العميقة لنفسية الشخصيات، مما يتيح لها التواصل المباشر مع الجمهور وأداء وظائف متعددة داخل القصة. يمكن للبطل أو الشخصيات المتعددة، وأحياناً حتى للممثلين غير المشتركين مباشرة في الحكاية المسرحية، أداء هذه المهمة. استخدم الكتاب المسرحيون هذا الأسلوب بتفاوتات مختلفة على مر التاريخ المسرحي. تقوم ديبي تاكر جرين، الكاتبة السوداء البريطانية، بتوظيف تقنية الحكاية في مسرحيتها "عشوائي" لجذب الجمهور للتعبير عن مواقفهم

تجاه العنف في الشوارع في لندن. يهدف هذا البحث إلى التركيز بشكل خاص على هذه المسرحية وتقنية الحكاية، إذ يلاحظ الباحث أن الدراسات الحالية غالبًا ما تناقش أعمال ديبي تاكر جرين في سياق هويتها السوداء دون استكشاف أسلوبها الفني الفريد، مما يشكل فجوة في الأدب المسرحي. على عكس الكتاب المسرحيين السود الآخرين، تقدم ديبي تاكر جرين تجارب صادمة للفقدان والعنف من خلال أسلوب كتابة مميز، وذلك باعتماد الحكاية لتصوير مشاعر وأفكار شخصياتها بشكل فعال، مما يعزز الوعي بين الجمهور بخصوص هشاشة المواطنين السود.

الكلمات المفتاحية: حكاية، سرد، عنف، حزن، فقدان، ديبي تاكر جرين، عشوائي

## 1. Introduction

Storytelling, or narrative, is a method where characters directly engage with the audience to convey information and delve into character motivations or scene actions. It can be done by characters within the story or by a separate performer. In drama, storytelling takes various forms such as monologues, soliloquies, and asides. Historically, narration was used in classical drama for prologues or offstage events. However, modern playwrights integrate narration to depict both onstage and offstage actions, sometimes making it the central focus of the play. These concepts are rooted in Aristotle's *Poetics*, which prioritize drama over epic, discussing character, plot, beginnings and ends, poetic justice, and representation. Thus, dramatic and narrative theories are deeply intertwined, drawing from Aristotle's foundational insights.

Traditionally, there was a prevailing belief that drama was only enacted on stage, while fiction was predominantly conveyed through narration. Gerard Genette (1930-2018), a French literary theorist known for his association with Structuralism, argued that narrative fiction was predominantly diegetic, with occasional instances of mimesis through quoted dialogue. On the other hand, Herman (2007) said that, drama was primarily mimetic, but could also incorporate elements of diegesis through internal narration. Nevertheless, the twentieth century boasts a plethora of exemplary instances of storytelling in both on and offstage plays. One of the most fascinating recent approaches to dramatic theory focuses on the analysis of dramatic narrative.

According to Abrams (2018) narratology, emerging in the mid-20th century, encompasses the study of storytelling theory and practice across various literary genres. Modern narrative theory expands upon earlier theories, from Aristotle's *Poetics* to Wayne Booth's *The Rhetoric of Fiction*.

This contemporary framework integrates concepts and analytical techniques from Russian Formalism and French Structuralism, offering a systematic and rigorously structured perspective on narratives. Narratologists within this paradigm view narratives as deliberate creations, departing from mere representations of reality. Consequently, coherence and overarching themes in narratives have become focal points of examination in British theater from the late 20th century to the early 21st century. This is achieved paradoxically by employing a variety of narrative methods available for its theatrical storytelling. "During that era, British plays present diverse and decentralized interpretations of the British nation and society while also providing alternative perspectives to dominant historical accounts" (Schwanecke, 2022, p. 305).

According to Hardy (1997), "nature, not art, makes us all storytellers, but narrative art reflects and explores the nature of storytelling, in art and outside art. Narrative art takes many different forms: drama is one of these forms" (p.13). This suggests that plays are akin to novels in their storytelling nature, and the narratives they present are equally valid as those found in novels or prose fiction. While this idea according to Schwanecke (2022) has gained broader acceptance in different fields thanks to recent studies on the connection between drama and storytelling, it still holds a conservative stance in specific areas of literary studies and the methods used to teach literature in Europe. Storytelling is a form of compelling action. It is commonly thought that mere words may not suffice to effectively convey a narrative. As exemplified by Miranda in Shakespeare's *Pericles*, "If I should tell my history, it would seem like lies, disdain'd in the reporting." (Shakespeare & Lee, 1909, pp. 117-118). There is a prevailing notion that merely reporting something may never truly encapsulate the entirety of what we are trying to convey (Bowles, 2010).

## **2. Exploring Narrative Techniques in Theatre: From Epic Features to Modern Dramatic Narratives**

The analysis of plays containing epic features has been approached similarly to the examination of narrative elements found in conventional narrative genres like novels or compilations of short stories dating back to the Middle Ages. Often, these plays take on traditional dramatic forms that incorporate narrative elements such as storytelling characters, messenger reports, commenting choirs, teichoscopy, and generative narrators within the action. Furthermore, alongside transmedial occurrences, transgeneric elements like focalization, perspective, and point of view have been examined in research on a genre that historically focused on depicting external realities rather than

internal psychological aspects, and on supposedly direct modes of presentation. Single-character stories have also gained recognition as narrative plays. Instances include *The Winter's Tale* by Shakespeare, where the title itself suggests a story, *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw, which draws from a myth and concludes with narration rather than depiction, and *Peter Pan* by J. M. Barrie, where fairy tales and bedtime stories play crucial roles in both the storyline and organization (Schwanecke, 2022).

Characters speaking directly to the audience has a long tradition which goes back to the ancient Greek. Shakespeare used storytelling in the form of soliloquy as well as sideshows “to create tension between onstage, and the audience as a means of deepening the theatrical experience.” (Dafack, 2022, p.728). Storytelling has a rich history throughout human civilization, evident in renowned epic poems such as the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* from the 9th century BC, the East Indian *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana* from the 4th century AD, the *Aeneid* from the 29th century BC, the *Norse Sagas* from the 13th century AD, and the various books of the Bible spanning from the 13th century BC to the 1st century AD. These literary works have served as vital instruments for individuals to share their narratives and have been instrumental in documenting stories for future generations through oral traditions passed down over many years. This tradition has allowed for the transmission of history from one era to the next (Cramer, 1996).

Storytelling might be a frustrating act. As we can see in Beckett's *Endgame*:

“CLOV : *What is there to keep me here?*  
HAMM : *The dialogue. (Pause) I've got on with my story. (Pause)*  
*I've got on with it well. (Pause. Irritably)*  
*Ask me where I've got to.*  
CLOV : *Oh, by the way, your story?*  
HAMM: *(surprised): what story?'* (Beckett, 1970, p. 58)

As Hamm endeavors to recount his tale, he frequently becomes exasperated with his own recounting of events as well as with his audience, Clove. The act of storytelling can indeed be vexing in reality. For instance, playwright Alan Bennett, in his work *Untold Stories* (2005), a compilation of autobiographical accounts, recounts an incident where he was assaulted by a group of youths while walking with a friend along an Indian seafront one night. Despite reporting the attack to the authorities, they dismissed his account, assuming Bennett had been seeking illicit encounters, finding a hint of humor in his narrative that diverged greatly from the truth. This illustrates how Bennett, the playwright, struggled to narrate the events in a manner that would

change their perceptions. "Bennett demonstrates how storytelling can lead to both understanding and misunderstanding. In essence, a story cannot be effectively conveyed if the listeners believe they already possess knowledge of it" (Bowles, 2010, p. 1).

It is important to note that storytelling involves not just any story, but a compelling one, which can be achieved through two key conditions. Firstly, the storyteller must ensure the story is believable and immune to doubt, meeting the requirement known as "Tellability" in narrative studies. Secondly, the storyteller must captivate the audience's interest to maintain their attention; otherwise, the story loses its impact. However, these two conditions of tellability may sometimes clash. Balancing making a story both captivating and believable can be challenging. Consequently, storytellers are compelled to engage their audience while ensuring they believe the narrative, thus making it "tellable." This dilemma places storytellers in a vulnerable position (Bowles, 2010).

Bennett illustrates how the narrator's vulnerability translates into behavior aimed at self-protection, where the need to be believed leads to actions meant to prevent misunderstanding. Therefore, storytelling becomes an ongoing practice of self-representation tailored to different audiences at different times. Playwrights capitalize on these characteristics of narratability, and the narratability of narrative episodes can be manipulated in plays to serve various dramatic purposes, such as providing background information about a character or referencing events that have taken place offstage. Storytelling can serve to fill in background details about a character or allude to events that have transpired offstage. This is evident in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, where the Ghost recounts the story of his poisoning to Hamlet. By narrating past events, he sets the stage for future actions. The manner in which the story is relayed directs the audience's focus onto Hamlet (the listener) and his response to the story rather than on the Ghost's delivery, as the subsequent progression of the play hinges on Hamlet (Bowles, 2010).

In different instances, the attention of the audience might be directed towards the storyteller as playwrights present them with varied, disinterested, or doubtful viewers. The act of narrating can be likened to walking a tightrope, as the storyteller strives to maintain credibility while meeting the audience's varying levels of engagement. In these scenarios, the narrative itself becomes the focal point, and understanding the storytelling process becomes crucial in grasping the play in its entirety. Unlike everyday conversations where stories can be either central or peripheral, in drama, a story serves as a play within a play, fulfilling specific purposes such as shaping relationships,

propelling the plot forward, reflecting a character's decline, or providing insights to the audience (Bowles, 2010).

The realm of theatrical narration is vast and serves various purposes. For instance, there are plays like Beckett's *Not I* or Pinter's *Landscape* that revolve around a single extended act of storytelling. Additionally, numerous plays emphasize storytelling as a central element, deviating from the traditional focus on plot-driven actions on stage. This shift can be observed in works such as Beckett's *Endgame*, Pinter's *The Collection*, O'Neill's *The Iceman Cometh*, Albee's *The Zoo Story*, among others. In these plays, storytelling itself becomes the primary action, necessitating an examination of how the narrative is conveyed. While storytelling may not always be the primary mode of communication in certain plays, it still fulfills significant roles. These functions may include presenting diverse perspectives through narrators, referencing relationships, identity, and themes, conveying information, and enriching the plot through revelation stories and messenger scenes (Bowles, 2010).

The status of drama as a genre is evolving, departing from the central narrative norms of British and European culture. Storytelling modes increasingly challenge and redefine theater conventions. Playwrights like Harold Pinter and Samuel Beckett minimize action or infuse it with absurdity, prioritizing narrative modes such as extended dialogue and storytelling in their groundbreaking works. This trend extends beyond Beckett and Pinter, evident in Caryl Churchill's integration of narratives from diverse women across historical periods into a cohesive dramatic narrative. Additionally, in Sarah Kane's plays, characters are stripped of significance as she presents nothing beyond streams of consciousness and thoughts. Some playwrights, like Lucy Prebble, Debbie Tucker Green, and Peter Shaffer, deviate from conventional methods by incorporating narrative and transgeneric modes into their plays, enhancing the distinctiveness and unconventionality of their works as well as of the drama genre. Works from the late 20th and early 21st centuries offer fresh perspectives on British society and critical issues by departing from singular, cohesive narratives in favor of hybridizing their plays, creating a dynamic drama of enacted stories. This shift reflects an expansion of the genre system, as drama now embraces a diverse range of narrative techniques. Narrative forms extend beyond textual transmission to encompass genres like the novel, epic, and oral traditions such as rumor and gossip. Additionally, influences from opera, film, and television contribute to the evolving landscape of dramatic storytelling (Schwanecke, 2022).

Hence, it is evident that storytelling techniques are found in various types of literature, and authors utilize these methods to convey a message to their readers or spectators by drawing their attention to the narrative itself and its presentation or delivery, rather than its enactment, which is considered the primary element in theatrical productions. Moreover, authors, through the use of this style of writing, focus the audience's gaze on the narrator, the audience, their responses, thoughts, or emotions. Therefore, understanding how these writing strategies are utilized and the purpose they can serve is crucial.

### 3. A General Overview about the Playwright and the Play

Debbie Tucker Green emerged as a leading playwright among Black British women in the initial decade of the 21st century. Her play *Dirty Butterfly*, staged in 2003, received acclaim from critics who recognized her as a promisingly authentic talent to watch. Following the production of *Born Bad*, she was honored with the Laurence Olivier Award for Most Promising Newcomer (Goddard, 2013). Tucker Green's reputation in the realm of in-her-face theatre has earned her significant acclaim and acknowledgment, firmly establishing her as a notable figure among British playwrights of the early 21st century. She is often likened to esteemed European and American playwrights like Sarah Kane, Henrik Ibsen, Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, David Mamet, and Harold Pinter, for her exploration of challenging themes, focus on alienation, displacement, and nihilistic desolation, as well as her meticulous craftsmanship in theatrical structure and language (Rebellato, 2013).

Tucker Green's plays, including *Random*, *Dirty Butterfly*, and *Stoning Mary*, present fresh perspectives within a political tradition of Black playwriting that experiments with form to shed light on the harsh realities of contemporary life. Through innovative language and a distinct approach to theatrical structure, Tucker Green vividly portrays the impact of extreme violence and trauma in the modern world. Her unconventional use of language and rhythm deviates from the typical focus on identity politics seen in traditional black playwrights, setting her apart in the realm of Black British theatre. By challenging linguistic norms through lowercase titles and a sparse, rhythmic dialogue style that captures the essence of real speech with its fragmented and overlapping nature, Tucker Green forges a unique path in her storytelling. Drawing inspiration from music, she employs poetic dialogue punctuated by pauses and silences that resonate like musical beats, while also utilizing repetition as a powerful tool to gradually unravel the core conflicts within her narratives (Rebellato, 2013).

Tucker Green's *Random* (2008), along with Roy Williams' *Fallout* (2003) and Richard Norton Taylor's *The Colour of Justice* (1999), addresses a common issue in modern Britain concerning inner-city racial violence. *Random* responds to the surge of youth murders in London between 2007 and 2008, with approximately 90% of the victims being black or Asian. Tucker Green penned this work, which is seen as a significant development in British theater post-1989, characterized by the play's unique artistic approach, formal experimentation, and thematic focus (Aragay and Monforte, 2013, p. 96).

*Random* was crafted in response to a notable surge in the occurrence of fatal stabbings involving young black boys and men in London during 2007 and 2008, with around 75% of the victims being teenagers. In the theatrical rendition, a sole black female performer takes center stage to portray a typical day in the life of a black family. The narrative commences with the sounds of neighborhood dogs barking and birds chirping, marking the beginning of a regular day. However, the day takes a tragic turn when the family receives the devastating news of their son's death. The play also resonates with the theme of loss across generations, prompting the audience to empathize with black parents coping with the profound grief of losing their child (Goddard, 2020).

#### 4. The Role of Storytelling in *Random*

The play *Random* (2008) is divided into two parts. The initial segment depicts a typical day in a West Indian family's life, while the second part takes a tragic turn upon learning about their son's murder. Directed by Sacha Ware and performed by one actress, Nadine Marshall, at the Royal Court Downstairs, the play narrates a usual day in the life of a black family shattered by the news of their teenage son's stabbing. The stage directions call for a solo actress to portray various characters, resembling a contemporary African storyteller. These characters include Sister, the central voice in the play, along with Mum, Dad, Sister's friend, Brother's teacher, and police officers who visit the family. The play's emotional core revolves around the fragility of young lives, as highlighted by the poignant line, "death used to be for the old" (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 42). *Random* focuses on knife crime's impact on black individuals, diverging from traditional portrayals of such issues by not depicting the crime itself or delving into its causes. Instead, it centers on the emotional aftermath experienced by the family and their immediate community.

Tucker Green's work focuses on themes of trauma, violence, and loss, conveyed through shifts between humor and sorrow. The play depicts a typical family morning disrupted by the



devastating news of Brother's death. It initially presents mundane activities, such as Sister's quarrel with her brother and Mother's concern over breakfast. The arrival of the police interrupts this tranquility. The second part explores the rituals following Brother's murder, highlighting Mum and Sister's struggles with grief. Sister confronts her brother's body in the hospital, while Mum finds solace challenging due to the unfamiliarity of Victim Support Officers. Later, Sister reflects on their last moments together, observing community tributes at the site of his death.

In the play, Debbie Tucker Green challenges traditional norms by having a single Black actress portrays all characters, transcending gender, and race stereotypes. This approach prompts an exploration of the unique grieving process within a Black family following a tragic loss, avoiding clichéd portrayals of urban council estates. The actress demonstrates remarkable talent under bright lights in a minimalistic Royal Court setting, dressed casually. Engaging the audience as if they were guests in her home, she skillfully conveys character changes through subtle shifts in body language, dialect, and pacing. Despite the absence of a realistic stage set, diverse settings like the family home and street shrine are vividly brought to life through seamless transitions. Tucker Green's deliberate focus on characters' inner thoughts and emotions, portrayed by a single actress on a sparsely decorated stage, aims to captivate the audience's attention without distractions.

The primary narrator, known as Sister, recounts a typical day beginning with the family's morning routines. However, the narrative takes a sudden and tragic turn when Sister receives an urgent text from her mother, instructing her to leave work immediately as her younger brother has been fatally injured in a street incident. The subsequent part of the play focuses on the family's responses to the Brother's tragic death, urging the audience to empathize with the sorrow inflicted on the family regardless of their fixed racial, class, age, or gender identities (Aragay and Monforte, 2013). As Bowles (2010) claims, a narrative within a theatrical production reflects the viewpoint of the storyteller. The storyteller, through their personal perspective, shapes the meaning of their story or account by interpreting reported events. Rather than depicting the act of violence or the subsequent police inquiry, the play centers on the family's emotional responses to the crime. Sister vividly illustrates the everyday routines within her family in the following manner:

*SISTER: ...You awake*  
*BROTHER : this is one can't be inna my dream.*  
*SISTER: You awake –*

**BROTHER:** *nightmare.*

*(BROTHER kisses his teeth)*

**SISTER:** *I can borrow y'phone?*

**BROTHER:** *I'm sleepin.*

**SISTER:** *This room stinks-*

**BROTHER:** *come outata it then-*

**SISTER:** *so I can borrow y'phone – an' you ent sleepin – you sleepin?*

*- How come yu sleepin all now? – mek mi borroe your phone -*

**BROTHER:** *you credit – less – your problem (Tucker Green, 2008, pp. 5-6)*

Tucker Green aims for the audience to be actively involved in the play by having a single actress portray all roles in *Random*. This allows the audience to interpret the family's response and encourages them to engage critically. By doing so, she prompts viewers to become conscious of their ability to question the horrors present in their society that lead to instability and injustice.

The character of Sister in *Random* fulfills the role of the primary narrator, recounting the events of the day and conveying the family's pain and sorrow. The play explores the theme of witnessing through Sister's observations of various reactions to the crime: from the creation of a makeshift memorial at the crime scene to the indifference of passersby, the inappropriate behavior of Brother's classmates, the biased coverage by the mainstream media, and the reluctance of some witnesses to speak up. The close bond between the solo performer and the audience transforms the audience into direct witnesses to Sister's narrative. By positioning them in this role, the play fosters a feeling of empowerment, prompting viewers to embark on a personal journey of self-discovery rather than imposing a predetermined ethical or political stance. The play's ability to achieve these dual aims is contextualized within broader political, social, and cultural changes that have challenged traditional racial norms in contemporary Britain.

Sister further recounts her visit to the street shrine, emphasizing the significance of 'Black on Black love' and presenting an alternative view to the often-negative portrayal of urban youth in the media. As his peers paying respects and focusing on “a hard-lookin’ ‘hoodie’... / under the cloak of Adidas / is a brotha / whose eyes don’t stop flowin. We raw with weeping. / But ... they don’t show that bit tho” (Tucker Green, 2008, p.50). *Random* reshapes the portrayal of teenage violence, shedding light on the cyclic nature of sorrow pervasive in contemporary urban environments. Tucker Green's storytelling structure serves as a reminder that this is a story that resonates universally with humanity. As the play concludes, Sister finds herself alone in her brother's empty room, reflecting on the scent of his body that she had rejected earlier and contemplating the senselessness of premature death. Tucker Green delves into the intimate aftermath of a murder

seldom exposed in the public perception of interactions between black families and the media, delving into the emotional turmoil experienced by a black family in grief. The mother chooses to refrain from visiting the street memorial and engaging with the 'blue-eyed reporters' to avoid fitting the stereotype of a grieving black mother of a slain black teenager, and to resist being pigeonholed as dignified, strong, or forgiving. Nevertheless, notable comparisons can be made between the reactions of black mothers like Doreen Lawrence to the loss of their sons (Goddard, 2020). Tucker Green counters the stereotype of black fathers as indifferent or unintelligent by portraying the father as a stoic figure with reserved tendencies. Despite his limited speech, he emerges as a strong, empathetic, and pivotal member of the family, taking charge upon the police's arrival and the discovery of his son's body. The play critiques media portrayals of young black manhood and intra-community violence, prompting conflicting viewpoints. For instance, Prime Minister Tony Blair's suggestion that the rise in knife and gun crimes in London was not linked to poverty but to a distinct black culture is questioned. Blair's viewpoint, which isolates recent violence as specific to black youth rather than part of a broader crime trend, is scrutinized in several scenes of the play (Rebellato, 2013).

Tucker Green diverges from the typical urban council estate backdrop often seen in works by other black British playwrights of the same period. She challenges stereotypes by opting not to provide a clear explanation for the stabbing incident, such as whether it was a case of 'Black-on-Black violence' or racially motivated, and instead focuses on exploring the causes and repercussions of disillusionment among urban youth. In a departure from the common portrayal of a teenage black boy as the central figure, the play shifts its perspective to primarily showcase the events through the eyes of the black female character, Sister. Nadine Marshall "skillfully embodies all significant speaking roles, effectively presenting the day's events through the singular voice of the black woman who assumes multiple characters. This restructuring visually encompasses both major and supporting roles, with occasional additional lines given to characters to elucidate their role in the narrative" (Goddard, 2020, p. 114).

Examining the narrative within the context of the strained relationship between law enforcement and Black communities in Britain highlights the cautious response of the mother, father, and sister towards the police officers delivering distressing news. Their wariness reflects a deep-rooted unease stemming from historical conflicts, riots, and the disproportionate targeting of Black men through stop and search laws, as well as the use of excessive force during police raids

on Black households. While previous plays have explored the dynamics between Black men and the police in Britain, Tucker Green offers a fresh perspective on institutional racism, police procedures, and the experiences of young Black men in urban settings, diverging from conventional approaches (Goddard, 2020). *Random* diverges by narrating the unfolding events from the perspective of the Black family, delving into their internal reflections following the police visit. Tucker Green delves into the family's emotions and private musings as they interact with the authorities, shifting away from a public discourse on these issues. This narrative touches upon the harsh realities faced by too many Black mothers who endure the tragic loss of their sons to street violence. Sister, in this segment of the play, contemplates the complex historical and present-day ties between Black individuals and law enforcement. As the police encroach on their home, Father and Mother adopt a defensive stance.

*MUM: Dark boots and heavy shoes-  
Beatin down my  
for best carpet  
without a second thought...  
from them.  
Outside shoes ent worn in this house –  
an'  
'no I don't wan' no cup a tea'  
An'  
ennit fo me to offer? [...]  
DAD: an'no- mi nah want no cup a tea-  
Thass fe us to offer-  
An' no  
Mi noh wan' fe sit. Neither. (Tucker Green, 2008, pp. 26-27)*

When the police officers arrive and deliver the news about their son, the play's atmosphere shifts to a solemn tone. The family displays resistance in coming to terms with the reality of their son's death. Despite their initial defensiveness towards the police, they are overcome by the devastating news. Additionally, the police exhibit a prejudiced stance, subtly suggesting the involvement of their son in a gang. This biased behavior of the officers is depicted through the sister's lines.

*SISTER: How y'know he ent juss late? How y'know ent with he's spars-  
Spars?  
Friends – man dem – mates – bredrins-  
No...  
not a 'gang'  
Why you here?  
Why you sittin here? (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 32)*

The second act of the play presents Sister's own description of the events. After receiving the news of the murder, Sister alongside with her father go to identify Brother's corpse. In fact, Tucker Green does not stage any scene of this violent act; however, the language she uses is highly descriptive that it can portray Brother's horrific state:

*SISTER: But his been  
Cut thru  
With a chunk of him gone  
Now.  
He had an eye  
Two.  
Now he got juss one.  
They try to pretty it up  
Mek it look like he winkin  
But  
You can't pretty up whass horrific Y'not meant to.  
His mout'  
Look like a clown-  
Now  
Wider than it should be.  
It slashed so much on a one side  
from there  
to there  
That juss he's face. (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 35)*

Tucker Green's exploration of fractured communities prompts contemplation on vulnerability, shared accountability, and interdependence (Rebellato, 2013, p. 209). The narrative trajectory emphasizes these instances by eliciting profound sadness for the premature loss of a young life. The play's central murder occurs offstage, yet the depiction of Brother's body by Sister in the morgue vividly conveys the brutality of the crime (Rebellato, 2013), with details such as his injured arms and face, missing eye, and the fatal wound on his back (Tucker Green, 2008, p.35). While the parents' voices are prominent in the initial segment, Sister takes over the narration in the second part, serving as a witness not only to her brother's murder but also to the family's anguish post-tragedy.

Tucker Green, in this play, does not fetishize suffering and pain, but she presents it as a sign of contingency. Sister shows her grief through anger rather than being presented as wounded and fragile. She asserts on addressing the eyewitness of the crime and their failure to respond (Fragkou,2020):

*“Whole heep some bodies on street. Saw.  
Whole heaps a peeps on road was present.  
But I lissen-hard-an'still I hear...(Silence)*

*Silence shoutin the loudest. Cos it seem that now no one wanna witness what happened to my Brother'' (Tucker Green, 2008, p. 45)*

Throughout the play, one can notice this insisting on witnessing as responsible position. Furthermore, in *Random*, Tucker Green elucidates a critique of media's manners of witnessing besides selective reporting on tales of pain and violence constructing distorted, fragmented as well as spectacular realities (Fragkou, 2020):

*"The press pressin [...] for a \_ 'good', 'urban' story  
[...] Feelin brave askin a hard-lookin 'hoodie' what he think.  
Only to find under the cloak of addidas is a brotha  
Whose eyes don't stop flowin [...] But.. they don't  
Show that bit tho."* (Tucker Green, 2008, pp. 41-42)

By the end of the play, As Mum and Dad's voices are muted in the second act, Sister's narration reflects the family's deep sense of sorrow. Their house becomes quiet due to Brother's absence, and this shows their inability to communicate with each other, or to comprehend the unbearable fact that their son would never come back again: "And the house is quiet.../ Y'know?/ The house that never was.../ is well quiet." (Tucker Green, 2008, p.49). What is worse, after all, is that they do not know Brother's murderer since the police tries to convince them that their son is randomly killed, and this deepens their feeling of sorrow: "Random don't happen to everybody/ So. / How come / 'random' haveta happen to him? (Tucker Green, 2008, p.49)

The play reaffirms the black boy's vulnerability and presents a different narrative from that which is typically used in political and media discourse. By doing this, it raises concerns about witnessing and response-ability considering urban alienation. The play's poignant narrative highlights how the body is seen as 'human waste', as shown by the descriptions of Brother's corpse in morgue (Fragkou,2020); "a chunk of him gone / now' and the small but fatal killer cut that 'punctured his... / su'un – important' (Tucker Green, 2008, pp. 33-37)

*Random* is a poignant exploration of teenage murder issues, diverging from traditional black playwriting conventions by not depicting the stabbing itself or delving into its motives. Instead of focusing on male victims and perpetrators of urban youth violence, and staging graphic violence scenes, the play, echoing Tucker Green's central theme of post-traumatic aftermath rather than causation, centers on the perspectives of black women regarding the impact of knife crime. From Sister's perspective, the audience views the family's raw grief after the loss of their youngest

member due to murder, diverging from typical media portrayals of adolescent violence. Tucker Green challenges societal norms through compelling dialogue, vividly showcasing how knife crime can drastically reshape a family's existence, highlighting it as a major danger in London, trailing only terrorism. The play *Random* by Tucker Green, through its structure and language, generates a tangible tension between the personal narratives of the characters and the audience's understanding of a broader public reality. Rather than offering a direct resolution to London's issue of knife crime, the play seeks to shed light on the individual struggles within black communities. By steering clear of extensive social commentary, "random" delivers a powerful depiction of the personal impacts stemming from acts of violence.

Tucker Green's *Random*, besides *Dirty Butterfly* and *Stoning Mary*, offer new perspective on a political black playwriting tradition that plays with form to make the audience aware of some of the horrors of modern existence. Provocative dramatizations of the effect of extremely violent and traumatic situations in the modern world are supported by linguistic innovation and a unique use of theatrical form. The 2000s were a grounded breaking decade marked by the unprecedented mainstream presence and national recognition of black British playwrights as they represent the status of the nation. "A pivotal moment in the realization of the broader appeal of black British plays to primarily white, middle-class theatre audience. This play still has the potential to draw in a new, young, working class, black audience" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 191). The play captures the cascading effects of pain using monologue and grief as potent dramaturgical devices. Although stories of suffering and loss and how they relate the kids run the risks of making viewers feel empathy. The play handles these themes delicately and thoughtfully, and shows broader implications for unstable lives (Fragkou, 2020).

In her play *Random*, Tucker Green utilizes monologues to delve into the family's sorrow following the loss of their youngest member to a street crime. By employing monologues, she allows for a focused exploration of the characters' grief. This narrative approach provides a direct window into the characters' innermost thoughts and emotions, as they openly share with the audience. The play is narrated entirely by a female character, placing women at the forefront of the narrative in addressing contemporary societal issues. Tucker Green's narrative strategies aim to address and potentially mitigate negative behaviors like violence and abuse, highlighting the collective societal responsibility to confront and combat such actions. Through her work, Tucker

Green prompts her audience to recognize not only their circumstances but also their duty to respond to these challenges.

Rebellato (2013) addresses the two primary criticisms of Tucker Green's work that are frequently made first, that her plays would be more effective as radio dramas than as staged productions; and second, that her pretentious attention to style overshadows her engagement with the central themes of each play. In fact, Tucker Green's plays pose crucial questions regarding human rights; and it also unites audiences in a common area as witnesses to the aftereffects of violence, loss, grief and trauma". Some critical opinions suggest that Tucker Green's plays would be more suited for radio rather than the stage, overlooking the potency of her work in confronting audiences with the harsh realities of contemporary life in a live setting. The collective experience of witnessing intense emotional narratives of violence and grief in a shared space amplifies the impact of Tucker Green's plays. Through her portrayal of brutality and indifference towards family and neighbors, she encourages audiences to reflect on broader themes of civic responsibility, directly involving present spectators.

The vitality of the performance compels engagement, captivating audiences with the stylistic nuances of every spoken word. The addition of a visual component becomes essential to complement the portrayal of black stories by white performers, especially considering the depth of character representation lost in radio transmissions. In live performances, audiences appreciate the remarkable talent needed to bring the play to fruition. Ensemble acting becomes essential to convey the significance of carefully chosen words, as well as to navigate overlaps, interruptions, and active silences, all of which contribute to creating a profound emotional impact on the audience (Rebellato, 2013). Reviewers have directed their attention towards the residue remaining post the Royal Court presentation of the play. "Joe Kelleher examines the impact of the actors' presence on the audience's consciousness. In a similar vein, Jenney Hughes explores how the play lingers with an intrusive, palpable essence of loss and squandered existence that endures significantly beyond the final curtain call" (Fragkou, 2020, p. 75)

As a contemporary British playwright with political themes, Tucker Green's importance lies in her adeptness at intertwining form and context to heighten audience awareness of pertinent social issues. She emphasizes a novel approach to addressing these concerns through theater that prioritizes emotional impact. A crucial aspect of her success as a modern black British playwright is her skill in rendering her characters' experiences as simultaneously individual and universally



relatable. "Experience where it gives a voice to a black woman; and universal is by presenting emotions of loss, fear, and grief. Her personal stories highlight a few of the pressing issues facing the globe right now" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 212). Moreover, the casting of a single black actress in a variety of racial, age, and gender roles suggests a broader focus on an average or universal British family, redefining the issues as teenage concerns rather than ones exclusive to the black community. For example, Joe Kelleher's analysis shows how the family's apparent helplessness puts the politics of the situation out of the reach of those most affected and most interested in acting. "It also identifies how the actress's ordinary appearance on a bare stage dressed in everyday clothes, speaking to an ordinary audience as though they were her invited friends who came to hear her testimony, heightens the political messages in the play" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 210).

The play was warmly received overall, and praises emphasized how Tucker Green's attention to the family's sorrow inspires empathy in all racial, social class, and gender backgrounds. Aleks Sierz notes a similarity between the bereaved family and the audience when he says, "It is interesting that their grieving is so typically English even though the family is black, and the parents have been written as if they were migrants rather than British born. Although it is reasonable to question his underlying presumption that black British people would grieve any differently from English people, his comment also demonstrates how she stresses mourning experiences as a common reaction to loss (Rebellato, 2013).

The main concern of this play is to present the impact and consequences of violent acts on individuals. The play situates the audience as witnesses to this knife crime and gives them the chance to criticize negative acts in their society. Tucker Green uses the form of storytelling particularly polyphonous style to hold the audiences' attention and, at the same time, make them see the reaction of each member in this family through a female perspective. The primary focus is on the characters' feelings of grief after losing their son, she wants to evoke that this traumatic experience may stay with them forever. Thus, the audience is responsible for taking action to put an end to such acts which are still existed within societies that they themselves demand and support human rights.

## Conclusion

The play *Random* by Debbie Tucker Green is a response to the targeted violence in London from 2007 to 2008, primarily affecting Asian and black individuals, challenging the notion that

these crimes were random, as the title ironically suggests. Tucker Green aims to illuminate the aftermath of such violence rather than the act itself, focusing on a West Indian family's immediate response to the tragic news of their son's death. Using storytelling techniques, she employs a single actor to portray various characters, effectively engaging the audience as witnesses to the unfolding events. Storytelling is central to "random," serving multiple purposes and addressing social issues like identity, racial violence, human rights, and community instability in contemporary Britain. The play highlights the lasting impact of violence on not only the direct victims but also their families and communities, emphasizing the long-term repercussions of such acts. By delving into the characters' inner thoughts and emotions, Tucker Green enables the audience to empathize with the profound sense of loss and grief experienced. Through a predominant female character's perspective, the audience is urged to consider their own role in combating societal threats to stability and human rights, underscoring the power of words and storytelling in raising awareness and prompting action.

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