



مَجَلَّةُ كَلْبِيَّةٌ  
الإمام الأعظم الجامع

العدد السادس والخمسون

«الجزء الثاني»

ذي الحجة ١٤٤٧ هـ

حزيران ٢٠٢٦ م

## هيئة تحرير المجلة لسنة ٢٠٢٦م

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شروط النشر في مجلة  
كلية الإمام الأعظم الجامعة / العراق



الرقم الدولي ISSN: 1817 - 6674

رقم الإيداع في دار الكتب والوثائق ببغداد هو ٨١٨ في ١٧/٣/٢٠٠٥م

مجلة كلية الإمام الأعظم الجامعة، مجلة إنسانية من المجلات العلمية الأكاديمية الرصينة، وقد صدرت موافقة وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي لاعتمادها بالرقم: بت/٨٦٤ في ٢٤/٥/٢٠٠٥.

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١. ألا يكون البحث منشوراً سابقاً في مجلة أخرى، وألا يكون جزءاً من بحث سابق منشور، أو من رسالة جامعية، وعلى الباحث أن يوقع نموذج تعهدٍ بالألا يكون البحث منشوراً، أو سبق تقديمه للنشر في مجلة أخرى، وألا يقدمه للنشر في مجلة أخرى بعد نشره في مجلة كليتنا، وأن يوافق على نقل حقوق نشر البحث إلى المجلة في حال قبول نشره.

٢. ألا يذكر اسم الباحث أو أي إشارة تدلُّ عليه في متن البحث؛ لضمان سرية وحيادية عملية التحكم.

٣. ألا يزيد عدد الكلمات في البحث على (٨٠٠٠) كلمة، مع المصادر والملاحق، أو ألا يزيد على خمس وعشرين صحيفة.

٤. أن تحتوي الصحيفة الأولى من البحث ما يأتي:
  - أ. عنوان البحث باللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
  - ب. اسم الباحث ودرجته العلمية وتخصصه باللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
  - ج. مكان عمل الباحث باللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
  - د. رقم هاتف الباحث وبريده الإلكتروني الجامعي.
  ٥. يقدم الباحث ملخصًا (باللغة العربية والإنجليزية) لا يقل على (١٥٠) كلمة.
  ٦. يوضع بعد الملخص (Abstract) مباشرة الكلمات المفتاحية لموضوع البحث (Keyword)، باللغة العربية والإنجليزية.
  ٧. على الباحث اتباع قواعد الاقتباس وتوثيق المصادر، وأخلاقيات البحث العلمي بما يتوافق مع سياسة المجلة.
  ٨. تكتب الهوامش داخل المتن وبين قوسين (APA) النظام الأمريكي وكما يأتي:
    - مع تطور الحياة (الزمخشري، ١٩٩٩: ٣٥).
    - قائمة المصادر باللغة العربية (APA).
    - قائمة المصادر باللغة الإنكليزية (APA).
  ٩. الاستشهاد بعددين من أعداد المجلة المنشورة سابقًا والمرفوعة في الموقع الإلكتروني الخاص بكليتنا في الرابط الإلكتروني: <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/224/issues>.
  ١٠. تطبق المجلة نظام فحص الاستلال الإلكتروني باستخدام برنامج (Turnitin) ويرفض نشر الأبحاث التي تتجاوز فيها نسبة الاستلال ٢٠٪.
  ١١. يخضع البحث لفحص أولي تقوم به هيئة التحرير في المجلة، وذلك لتقرير أهلية البحث للتحكيم، ويحق لها أن تعتذر عن قبول البحث دون تقديم الأسباب.
  ١٢. تتبع المجلة التقويم المزدوج السري لبيان صلاحية البحث للنشر، إذ يعرض البحث المقدم للنشر على محكمين اثنين من ذوي الاختصاص، ويتم اختيارهما بسرية مطلقة، بالإضافة إلى عرض البحث على خبير لغوي لتقويم سلامته اللغوية.
  ١٣. الأبحاث التي يقترح المحكمون إجراء تعديلات عليها لتكون صالحة للنشر، تعاد إلى أصحابها لإجراء التعديلات المطلوبة عليها، وخلاف ذلك لا يتم استلام البحث، وستتم مراجعة البحث من قبل هيئة التحرير للتأكد من التزام الباحث بالأخذ بجميع الملاحظات المثبتة من قبل المقيمين.

١٤. تُعبّر الأبحاث المنشورة في المجلة عن آراء أصحابها، لا عن رأي المجلة.
١٥. تنشر المجلة أعداداً خاصة بالمؤتمرات العلمية المتوافقة مع تخصص المجلة.
١٦. أجور نشر البحث: يدفع الباحث (٥٠) ألف دينار لتغطية أجور التحكيم، ويكمل دفع بقية الأجور عند قبول البحث للنشر.
١٧. تخريج النصوص القرآنية والحديث النبوي الشريف على ضوء المنهج العلمي الدقيق الكامل.
١٨. يزود الباحث بنسختين مستلة، بعد النشر.
٢٠. يتم إرسال الأبحاث على منصة المجلة <https://journal.imamaladham.edu.iq/index.php/al-Imam-Adham/user/register> أو من خلال مسح رمز QR في أعلى الصفحة.

### شروط النشر (الفنيّة):

- ١ - يقدّم البحث بملف واحد، يبدأ بالعنوان وينتهي بالمصادر، وألاً يزيد على خمس وعشرين صحيفة.
- ٢ - تكتب الهوامش داخل المتن وبين قوسين (APA) النظام الأمريكي وكما يأتي:
- مع تطور الحياة (الزمخشري، ١٩٩٩: ٣٥).
  - قائمة المصادر باللغة العربية (APA).
  - قائمة المصادر باللغة الانكليزية.
- ٣ - حجم الخط ل (١٦).
- ٤ - نوع الخط باللغة العربية (Simplified Arabic) واللغة الإنجليزية (Times New Roman) . - ملاحظة: في حال عدم الأخذ بشروط النشر نعتذر عن استلام البحث ونشره. - يمكن زيارة موقع المجلة في مبنى الكلية في سبع إبكار أو التواصل عبر البريد الإلكتروني [magazine@imamaladham.edu.iq](mailto:magazine@imamaladham.edu.iq) أو الاتصال بمدير التحرير عبر الهاتف (٠٠٩٦٤٠٧٧٣٢٤٣٥٦٩٣)، ويمكن الاطلاع على أعداد المجلة عن طريق موقع وزارة التعليم العالي والبحث العلمي <https://www.iasj.net/iasj/journal/224/issues>

### مميزات المجلة:

- ١ - سياسة الوصول المفتوح: جميع الأبحاث متاحة مجاناً فور نشرها.
- ٢ - تُنشر أربعة أعداد سنوياً منذ عام ٢٠٠٥.
- ٣ - تستخدم برامج متقدمة للكشف عن الانتحال لضمان الأمانة العلمية.
- ٤ - تُعنى بنشر الأبحاث التي تواكب التطورات وتسهم في معالجة قضايا المجتمع والحد من الظواهر السلبية.
- ٥ - تنشر أعمال المؤتمرات والندوات المتخصصة.

## كلمة العدد السادس والخمسين

مع إسدال الستار على موسم الامتحانات النهائية، يحسن التوقف عند مرحلة توصف بأنها خاتمةً لجهدٍ علمي امتد لأيام طوال من العمل الأكاديمي، وتليها مرحلة لا تقل أهمية في رسالة الأستاذ الجامعي، وهي مرحلة البحث العلمي والإنتاج المعرفي. فإن الحياة الجامعية لا تُقاس بفاعلية برامجها التعليمية فحسب، بل بقدرتها على إنتاج المعرفة وتطويرها، والإسهام في معالجة قضايا المجتمع والإنسانية. فدور الأستاذ الجامعي لا ينتهي عند حدود التدريس فحسب، بل يبدأ فصل جديد من النشاط العلمي والمهني، والإسهام في رفع المكانة الأكاديمية لمؤسساتنا من خلال إنتاج معرفي يتسم بالجدة والمنهجية والأثر لا سيما بما يتكامل بنتائج البحث العلمي الذي يرفد العلوم بنتائج علمية رصينة.

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**Digital and Posthuman Trauma  
in Jennifer Haley's The Nether  
and Jordan Tannahill's  
Draw Me Close**

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**Abstract:**

Twenty - first century theatre is becoming a place of fusion where technology and images merge to produce human emotional and psychological experiments and experiences (Bay - Cheng et al., 2010). In the digital age, representations of trauma have moved beyond traditional contexts of war and provocation to non - fashionable, algorithmic, and mediated posthuman experiences. This article examines the impact of digital and posthuman representations of trauma in Jennifer Haley's *The Nether* (2013) and Jordan Tannahill's *Draw Me Close* (2017) and how memory, identity, and emotion are represented in cyberspace. The version that Bollmer (2017) puts forward in his critique and examination of virtual reality as an empathy machine is that digital trauma can be understood as the impact of emotions on those in whom empathy and intimacy are mediated by artificial information and communication. In *The Nether*, Haley presents the psychological trauma of pervasive escapism and the way moral judgment and empathy are eroded by separation. In contrast, only in *Draw Me Close* does he virtualize loss and grief, transforming the scene into a laboratory of human emotion and memory. Drawing on Caruth's (1996) and Barad's (2007) theories of trauma, this study argues that both plays articulate a recognition of the beauty of technological pain and suffering, in which suffering is no longer limited to humans but is transformed into the human - machine in all humans. This study contributes to the ongoing dialogue in trauma research, posthumanism, and digital ethics by examining and reframing the performance of trauma in theater through digital mediation.

Keywords: Trauma, Digital Theatre, Posthumanism, Virtual Reality, Jennifer Haley, Jordan Tannahill.

## الملخص

يصف باي - تشنغ وزملاؤه (٢٠١٠) مسرح القرن الحادي والعشرين بأنه فضاء هجين تتداخل فيه التكنولوجيا مع التجسيد المادي لإنتاج تجارب شعورية ونفسية جديدة. في العصر الرقمي، لم يعد تمثيل الصدمة مقتصرًا على سياقات الحروب والعنف التقليدية، بل انتقل إلى تجارب خوارزمية ووسائطية تجسد ملامح ما بعد الإنسان.

يستقصي هذا المقال تجليات الصدمة الرقمية وما بعد الإنسانية في مسرحيتي «الأعماق» (The Nether - 2013) لجنيفر هالي و«ارسميني قريبة» (Draw Me Close - 2017) لجوردان تاناهيل، وكيفية إعادة صياغة الذاكرة والعاطفة والهوية داخل البيئات الافتراضية.

وفقاً لبولمر (٢٠١٧) في نقده للواقع الافتراضي بوصفه «آلة تعاطف»، تنشأ الصدمة الرقمية حين يتأثر الفرد عاطفياً بلقاءات تُبنى فيها مشاعر التعاطف والألفة عبر البيانات والواجهات الاصطناعية. ففي «الأعماق» تكشف هالي الأضرار النفسية الناجمة عن الانغماس في الهروب الافتراضي وكيف يؤدي الانفصال عن الواقع إلى تآكل الحس الأخلاقي والقدرة على التعاطف. أما في «ارسميني قريبة»، فيُعيد تاناهيل تجسيد مشاعر الفقد والحزن عبر التجسيد الافتراضي، محوِّلاً خشبة المسرح إلى مختبر وجداني يستحضر العاطفة والذاكرة الإنسانية.

وبالاستناد إلى نظرية كاروث (١٩٩٦) في الصدمة، ومنهج باراد (٢٠٠٧) فيما بعد الإنسانية، تخلص الدراسة إلى أن العاملين يقدّمان جماليات جديدة للمعانة التكنولوجية: لم يعد الألم حبيس النفس البشرية وحدها، بل بات موزعاً عبر التشابكات بين الإنسان والآلة. تُسهّم هذه الدراسة في النقاشات المتنامية حول دراسات الصدمة وأداء ما بعد الإنسان والأخلاقيات الرقمية، عبر استكشاف كيفية تجسيد المسرح للصدمة بوساطة تقنية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الصدمة، المسرح الرقمي، ما بعد الإنسانية، الواقع الافتراضي، جنيفر هالي، جوردان تاناهيل.

## Chapter One: Introduction

Trauma is a contemporary concern for modern theatre, offering artists a way to express violence, memory, and loss that resists direct expression (Luckhurst, 2008). For most of its history, dramatic trauma has been tied to the presence of human pain. However, with the digital age and 21st century technology, this aesthetic has changed. Digital and posthuman theatre are creating new forms of embodiment of emotion that no longer stop in the body, but rather extend into algorithmic and figurative space (Bay - Cheng et al., 2010).

This transformation is part of what Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) call digital liveness, in which virtual reality, motion archives, and AI - generated characters blur the line between real and simulated emotions. Theatre has become a fusion medium that combines physical presence with immersion in technical principles to produce new human - machine interactions and responses. Hawley in *The Nether* (2013) and Tannehill in *Draw*

*Me Close* (2017) are two clear examples of this development: both stage digital trauma, the emotional pain that is mediated and played out through virtual systems.

*The Play – The Nether* It is part police procedural, part sci - fi thriller and it sparks important conversations about technology, virtual reality and the effects of the internet. In Jennifer Haley's 2013 drama, social and professional activity has become primarily digital, environmental degradation has pushed us away from the natural world, and human beings are increasingly estranged from one another in a dystopian future. it provides a virtual means for people to have sex with and kill children. A rookie detective leads an investigation team and has to navigate the physical and moral space between in - world and virtual reality as she interrogates Sims and tries to take him down.

This is a 90 - minute thriller that will grip you and leave you with big questions about who we are and how we live. What are the social consequences of environmental destruction? Do we all need to be connected? Are there legal and ethical limits to

online interaction? Are real - life connections different from virtual real - life connections? Does the Internet expand or diminish our privacy and freedom? And finally, is there such a thing as a “life outside of consequences”?

Tannehill’s “Bring Me Close” (2017) works in opposition. The theatre blends virtual reality with live performance to reenact personal memories and the absence of a mother, presenting a story of digital empathy rather than digital escape. Reading the two theatres together demonstrates how a technology can produce both connection and unfamiliarity (Bollmer, 2017).

Caruth (1996) describes trauma as a story that cannot be fully represented, a pain that is fragmented by narrative and re - created memory. When this hypothesis is applied to digital performance, trauma is disseminated across human and technological connections, echoing the meaning and implication implicit in Barad’s (2007) action, where meaning, matter, and emotion are revealed by the entanglement of human and machine. Braidotti (2013) develops a related post humanist idea: the posthuman subject is at once malleable and efficacious, and trauma in the digital age is not only psychological suffering but also an active discourse between artificial and structural living systems.

The existing study and research asks how posthuman representation redefines and redefines the recognition of the beauty of empathy and pain. By reading Draw Me Close and The Nether together, it is argued that grief, trauma, and healing are performed and sustained through technological absorption in a way that is not exclusively visual but spiritual: an embodied morality and the engagement of affect. This analysis contributes to the ongoing task of trauma. studies, performance theory, and digital humanities by arguing that technology, rather than erasing the human, can expose some of its deepest emotional truths.

### **Background of the Study**

Caruth (1996) describes trauma as a wound that cannot be contained in a short period of time or by direct representation; rather, it is exacerbated through repetition and experimentation, experience, and delayed understanding. In *The Unpredictable Experience*, he argues that the wound of trauma is characterized by delayed return: the story is not fully understood at the time of the event, but it comes back to haunt the survivor afterwards. Whitehead (2004) develops this view in narrative form, suggesting that trauma narratives, precisely because they insist on a disturbing and damaging story against the prevailing narrative, develop a remarkable aesthetic recognition of fragmentation, repetition and intertextuality. Accordingly, Luckhurst (2008) suggests that the spectacle is a contemporary and modern one that reflects social and existential tensions and, by recreating and embodying pain, collective memory and emotional stress.

In the 21st century, trauma research encompasses digital experience and experimentation, posthumanism, and technological expertise. The intersection of trauma and digital knowledge offers a real transformation in the way pain is depicted and perceived. Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) describe digital dynamism as a state in which representation in an environment engages in a fusion between material and physical flow and virtual flow. Listeners in this environment, rather than being directly present, are met with empathy and emotion through algorithmic mediation, a situation that, as Bennett (2015) reminds us, is never passive but rather actively involved in the creation of meaning. Dixon (2007) makes a similar argument: Digital implementation redefines presence itself, transforming the landscape into a place for human and machine collaboration and participation. Akersall, Gerhan, and Shear (2017) make this point more clearly, arguing that the new media and intermediaries of love and amateurism are best understood through a materialist lens of the new, in which performance is co - authored through human and technological institutions.

This articulation is visible in “The Nether” and “Draw Me Close.” Haley creates a dystopia of artificial purity and spiritual detachment that intensifies trauma rather than alleviating it. Tannehill, with a task in opposition, combines material and virtual reality to create and reconstruct memory and loss, proving that the spectacle of the pandemic can re - create grief in a form of shared empathy.

Barad (2007) develops this conversation with her posthumanist hypothesis of reciprocal behavior, in which nonhuman and human workers jointly create spiritual essence, consciousness, and affect. (feminine). In this framework, theatre is not simply a copy of reality but a technological process of feeling, where emotions and memories circulate through human and machine networks. Within this shifting epistemology, digital theatre becomes a site for the re - embodiment of human trauma. As Braidotti (2013) argues, posthuman subjectivity does not mark the end of humanity but its transformation. This is a condition where pain, vulnerability and affect spill over biological boundaries. For trauma studies, this view recasts digital performance as a relational ethics of empathy that mediates between human suffering and artificial systems.

Taken together, trauma theory and posthuman performance bring the psychological and the technological into one frame and produce a new aesthetics of suffering. Digital theatre reimagines trauma as a relational condition generated by the entanglement of organic bodies with intelligent systems (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013; Luckhurst, 2008).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Classical trauma theory was developed for a world in which suffering was experienced through, and represented by, the human body and human memory. Caruth (1996) and Luckhurst (2008) describe trauma as belated, repetitive, and resistant to direct narration, anchored in embodied human experience. The frameworks they propose are powerful, but they were not designed to account for trauma that emerges in technologically mediated environments where the body is partially absent, the encounter is algorithmically

structured, and the victim may be an avatar rather than a person.

Contemporary digital theatre throws this gap into relief. In *The Nether*, Haley dramatises moral and emotional damage produced inside a virtual world where there are, strictly speaking, no physical victims. In *Draw Me Close*, Tannahill stages grief through a VR encounter with a mother who is not physically present. Neither work fits cleanly into a model of trauma built around bodily injury or eyewitness testimony, yet both clearly stage trauma. The problem this study addresses is therefore both theoretical and analytical: how can trauma theory be extended to account for digitally and posthumanly mediated suffering, and what do these two plays in particular reveal about that extension?

The study addresses the question by combining Caruth's (1996) account of belated, fragmented trauma with Barad's (2007) concept of intra - action and Braidotti's (2013) account of posthuman subjectivity. It treats the two plays as test cases in which alienation and connection, escape and reconnection, are produced by the same kind of technological mediation. The aim is to identify what posthuman theatre adds to trauma studies and what trauma studies add, in turn, to the analysis of posthuman performance.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main aim of this research is to examine how contemporary theatre represents and reinterprets trauma in the digital and posthuman age through a comparative reading of *The Nether* (2013) and *Draw Me Close* (2017). Traditional trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; Luckhurst, 2008) treats the psychological wound as something that cannot be represented directly and that manifests through repetition and fragmentation. Digital implementation has changed the way that injury and trauma are described, experienced, and expressed.

Digital representation raises ontological questions about embodiment, empathy, and per-

ception (Bay - Cheng et al., 2010; Dixon, 2007). The notion of digital aliveness suggests that it is not only found on the screen, but also in technologically transformed environments that approach emotional unity. A scheme that Parker - Starbuck (2011) argues is that post-human implementation, using machines, avatars, and the body, destabilizes ideas of the realizable human subject and alters the emotional scope of the screen.

These insights inform the study's reading of trauma in technologically immersive environments. Haley shows that digital escapism in *The Nether* produces moral paralysis and alienation: audiences are drawn into ethical complicity with the spectacle of pain. Tannahill, by contrast, reimagines trauma through virtual embodiment in a way that resonates with Machon's (2013) account of immersive intimacy, where sensory engagement allows for empathetic reconnection.

Theoretically, the study is grounded in Barad's (2007) concept of intra - action and Braidotti's (2013) account of posthuman affect. From this angle, emotion and meaning are produced in the material entanglement of humans and technological systems. The paradigm challenges humanist boundaries and treats trauma in the digital era as something co - constituted in transactions between organic and artificial agents.

Schechner (2020) argues that performance in the digital century no longer requires co - presence; what it requires is an affective contract between performer, technology, and spectator. That idea aligns with the aim of this study, which is to show how the virtual stage can function as an ethical laboratory in which trauma is both performed and worked through by way of technological mediation. The analysis connects trauma theory (Caruth, 1996) and the posthuman framework (Barad, 2007) in order to examine the construction of an aesthetics of suffering in the age of simulation.

The study has three main objectives:

(1) to examine how digital embodiment and virtual reality reshape emotional pain, empathy, and ethical awareness on stage; (2) to analyze the aesthetic and technological strategies through which Haley and Tannahill reconstruct trauma and memory in

posthuman environments; and (3) to argue that theatre can humanize technological trauma by producing connection and ethical reflection across the human—machine boundary. This research aims to bridge the gap between trauma theory and digital implementation research, suggesting that posthuman representation is not a negation or denial of humanity, but rather the development of vulnerability, empathy, and resilience.

### **Research Questions**

This research is guided by one fundamental question and five branching questions, all of which are created within the orbit of representation, persistence, and re-experiencing of wounds in digital and posthuman representation.

Fundamental Question: How do the plays “The Nether” (2013) by Jennifer Haley and “Draw Me Close” (2017) by Jordan Tannehill depict trauma and wounding in digital and virtual environments? The question is not how each play physically unfolds on screen, but how emotional and spiritual suffering is shaped by technological implementation. As Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) argue, digital representation reconfigures representation and embodiment through data - driven models, thereby enabling emotional transmission in a human - machine fusion environment.

(1) What role do digital technologies such as virtual reality, assimilation, and algorithmic response play in redefining human representation and empathy in the depiction of trauma and wounding? Luckhurst (2008) notes that the function of trauma has historically been rooted in material memory.

(2) How can the posthuman implementation hypothesis guide trauma research beyond human - centered frameworks to include nonhuman and technological agents? This question is addressed by Barad’s (2007) intra - action hypothesis and Braidotti’s (2013) posthuman philosophy. The hypothesis asks whether trauma can be understood as a shared story across artificial and human systems. Parker - Starbuck (2011)

argues that posthuman representation blurs the distinction between body and machine, and a new psychic environment emerges in which emotion and agency are diffused.

(3) What is the beauty of creating and understanding the depiction of pain and suffering caused by knowledge and technology on screen? This question is related to how the virtualization of trauma complicates the viewer's emotional responsibility and freedom. Schechner (2020) argues that digital tools transform viewers into participants and draw them into the midst of the experience of suffering.

(4) How does twenty - first - century representation manage the crisis between human fragility and artificial mediation? The question is how digital implementations expand the meaning of trauma to encompass both psychological and technological states. Dixon (2007) argues that pervasive technologies are shaping a new era of affective unity, while Machon (2013) notes that this immediacy can simultaneously shape both unfamiliarity and empathy.

(5) How does digital representation help rehumanize emotions through technology? This final question examines whether digital empathy acts as a new psychological model that changes the listener's relationship to suffering, attachment, and resilience in the posthuman era.

This research is important because it sits at the intersection of three areas that rarely interact directly: trauma research, digital performance research, and the posthuman hypothesis. Caruth (1996) and Luckhurst (2008) paved the way for understanding trauma as a delayed, repetitive, and linguistically fragmented event, but their frameworks were not modeled for explaining trauma in a time of technological mediation and artificial visualization. By measuring and comparing “The Nether” and “Draw Me Close,” this research extends the trauma hypothesis to the digital environment and asks how pain, consciousness, and emotional empathy are reconfigured by posthuman performance.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is significant because it sits at the intersection of three fields that rarely speak directly to one another: trauma studies, digital performance studies, and post-human theory. Caruth (1996) and Luckhurst (2008) laid the groundwork for understanding psychological trauma as belated, repetitive, and linguistically fragmented, but their frameworks were not designed to account for trauma in the age of technological mediation and artificial embodiment. By comparing *The Nether* and *Draw Me Close*, the study extends trauma theory into digital space and asks how suffering, empathy, and ethical awareness are reconfigured by posthuman performance.

Theoretically, this research contributes to the re - meaning of trauma in modern performance. Barad (2007) and Braidotti (2013) propose embodiment as the fusion of human and non - human agency, and argue that subjectivity and emotion are co - created through physical connections. The present research uses these insights to extend the frameworks of Caruth (1996), Whitehead (2004), and Luckhurst (2008) to examine the pain and memory repair through technology, and builds on this broad approach to the implementation hypothesis developed by Carlson (2018). Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) and Bollmer (2017) argue that digital implementations create new forms of emotional space and challenge viewers to engage with mediated suffering, although Bollmer warns that virtual reality - based empathy can also fail to validate the experience it claims to convey. This study pursues this argument rigorously, testing it against two specific theatrical works.

In this way, this research contributes to the conversation between trauma theory, implementation research, and posthumanism, and offers a new perspective on the shifting identity of empathy and representation in theatre. This research also has practical implications. It suggests how theatre can use digital and immersive technologies not only as media of aesthetic cognition, but also as spiritual media that orient audiences to empathic participation and reflective feeling. Machon (2013) argues that to-

tal and inclusive representation creates unity and immediacy by paving the way for the listener to visualize emotions. Schechner (2020) adds that digital fabrication dissolves the boundary between performer and listener, creating a participatory experience that redefines spiritual duty and awareness. Dugan (2012) makes a comprehensive argument: contemporary art can create a “trauma presence effect,” whereby listeners are drawn into the structure of trauma rather than being asked to watch from the outside.

Digital communication has turned the topography of trauma upside down. In *The Nether* and *Draw Me Close*, trauma is no longer a spatial narrative embedded in the biological body, but rather manifests as what we might call a “virtual wound.” Drawing on Gross’s (2001) work on digital spatialization and the body, he suggests that in posthuman stories, communication transforms into a new skin. Once that digital skin is dissolved, whether by the assimilationist transgressions of Haley’s “shelter” or by the reconstructed maternal grief of Tannehill’s virtual, real memory, trauma is ontologically real even when it is not physically tangible.

In *The ethical issue* in *The Nether* is most acute when interpreted through Baudrillard’s (1994) notion of hyperreality. Baudrillard believes that once we are in simulation, traditional moral frameworks no longer apply because those frames depend upon the materiality of the victim.

Haley’s *Detective Morris* struggles to prosecute crimes in which no physical blood is shed, yet the play shows that trauma remains lodged in the consciousness of the users. This squares with Braidotti’s (2013) posthumanist view that the self is a networked entity: a wound to an avatar is, in effect, a wound to the human psyche that inhabits it.

In Tannehill’s *Draw Me Close*, virtual reality is used to navigate the trauma of terminal illness and death. The digital medium here is not only a representation of memory; it is a remediation of memory into something tangible. The haptic, immersive environment reconstructs the trauma of the mother’s death by collapsing the border

between spectator and sufferer. This is what Hayles (1999) calls the posthuman body, a body that exists in the fluid space between the organic and the algorithmic. In both plays, trauma is the bridge between physical human reality and the possibilities of the digital void, which suggests that the virtual is not the same as the unreal when it comes to suffering.

This research also presents a semantic model for incorporating trauma - influenced creativity into the aesthetic of technological art. The assessment and comparison between “The Nether” and “Draw Me Close” demonstrates how performance can move between the psychological and the digital, transforming unfamiliarity into empathy. Dixon (2007) and Parker - Starbuck (2011) argue that digital performance destabilizes older notions of agency and embodiment, forcing performers to reimagine performance as something that is spread across physical and virtual realms.

Overall, this research argues that posthuman representation, by linking trauma, empathy, and digital embodiment, is instrumental to any model of serious reconsideration of human nature across the globe. This research advances theoretical work on trauma and embodiment and paves the way for applied and consumerist approaches to inclusive, empathetic, and ethical creative and innovative performance.

## **Chapter Two: Analytical Discussion of the Selected Plays**

### **1. Jennifer Haley’s The Nether (2013): Digital Escapism and the Trauma of Dis-embodiment**

Haley’s *In The Nether* (2013), Haley offers the dystopian ideal of digital escapism as humanity’s escape into an immersive online environment dubbed “The Nether,” where users can dissociate from their physical bodies and indulge in fantasy behaviors without moral consequence. This electronically built world captures what Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) call “digital liveness” in which the lines between presence and absence blur, dramatizing the duality of empathy and alienation . In her study of digital subjec-

tivities in *The Nether*, Pham (2018) states that at the heart of the play lies a staging of a crisis of moral culpability, where bodies and victims are constructed as algorithmic rather than corporeal. Haley's articulation of this conflict in the *Morris / Sims* inquiry represents virtual identity as emotionally fragmented and disassociated from physical reality and the ethical instability of digitally mediated pleasure (Haley, 2013). Caruth (1996) characterizes trauma as an event that "repeats itself over and over in the form of haunting memory, defying complete understanding." Haley's work demonstrates this return in recursive scenarios of denial and confession, in which characters return to the same actions of suppression via technology simulation. Haley (2013) describes *The Nether* as a sort of escape, where virtual freedom replaces physical and emotional reality, creating a cycle of estrangement rather than healing. In today's digital culture, emotional engagement is often transformed into a technologically mediated experience, in which virtual systems change the bounds of empathy, identity, and ethical obligation. In *The Nether*, Haley demonstrates how digital spaces might confuse emotional connection with artificial simulation (Haley, 2013). From a performative perspective, Haley's play stages what Popat (2016) refers to as the ethical ambiguity of embodied experience in virtual reality, in which the body is both present and absent, and where the moral conventions of physical meeting between performer and audience are put under pressure. Haley refers to a virtual contact as emotionally unstable, whereby the absorption in technology reduces direct human connection and distorts the sensation of empathy (Haley, 2013). This image echoes Machon's (2013) notion of immersive performance as a transitional realm between presence and absence.

Posthuman subjectivity, as described by Braidotti (2013), is an instability of established moral hierarchies, which may be observed in Haley's characterization of users who experience moral distance as a mixture of shame and gratification. Thus, *The Nether* is a posthuman laboratory in which the intersections of trauma, emotion, ethics, and technology are being redefined. Schechner (2020) postulates that modern

performance is increasingly an audience participation in ethical and emotional engagements especially in electronically mediated situations.

In *The Nether*, spectators become closely connected to the moral ambiguity of the virtual world, which intensifies the play's exploration of empathy, responsibility, and alienation.

The play's futuristic setting is a virtual reality network called *The Nether* that has superseded the internet. Within this structure, individuals are free to act out their wildest dreams without worrying about how they could affect the actual world. Exploring the Hidden Place: The Narrative. Sims, or "Papa" as he's known, constructed a dimension in *The Nether*. Relationships with what seemed to be kid avatars are only one example of the unethical and unlawful activities that users of this virtual realm are able to accomplish. In normal life, they adhere to societal norms and morals, but on this site, the Sims and other deviant individuals may freely express their sexual impulses. Through interviews and flashbacks, the play delves into the characters' motives and challenges. Iris, a prominent avatar in *The Hideaway*, personifies the challenge of juggling liberties in virtual realm with actual ethical ramifications; Doyle, a former educator, claims that the game provides him an emotional connection. A federal investigator with a background in statistics called Detective Morris questions the residents of Sims' *Hideaway*. By questioning Sims, Morris reveals the shadowy ethics that lurk in the realm of virtual escape. In her question on the role of technology in the formation of identity and relationships, Haley (2013) invites the audience to think about the potential ethical consequences of acts performed in a virtual world that is distinct from the actual world (Pham, 2018).

The play revolves on information. Just as our dependence on digital places for intimacy, identification, and escape is a wider reality, the play's virtual reality serves as a sanctuary from the imminent collapse of the actual world outside it. By creating a virtual environment in *The Nether* where the usual gender roles are inverted, Haley

undermines the patriarchal family system. Everything, from ideas to interpersonal relationships, is ravaged by the postmodern period. *The Nether* was written at a period of fast technological advancement and the public discussion about the ethics of virtual worlds was only beginning. Virtual reality (VR) goggles, augmented reality (AR) systems, and complex online gaming arenas all emerged in the early 2010s. These developments have raised questions about identity and the border between the real and the virtual. Theorists like Sherry Turkle (2011) have called attention to this fear of the dehumanizing potential of technology, but Haley's work reveals a more general social anxiety about the function of digital links in the construction of human relationships.

The illusion of camaraderie, without the responsibilities of friendship, feeds the emotional detachment of the Nether (Turkle, 2011, p. 16). The play responds to the philosophical and ethical questions highlighted by postmodern thinkers like Jean Baudrillard (1994) who suggested that the proliferation of signs has erased the difference between reality and virtuality. This, thus, elucidates *The Nether's* criticism of our growing reliance on virtual spaces as a means of evading the reality of our existence, which in this audacious new environment jeopardizes responsibility and may foster behaviors tolerated in real life. The first two decades of the 21st century seen an increasing consciousness about online ethics and privacy problems, with discussions on the regulation of digital platforms. *The Nether* consolidates these anxieties into a narrative, using its fictional framework to examine the ramifications of unrestricted virtual environments. Rosi Braidotti's (2013) posthuman criticism emphasizes the transformation of human subjectivity and ethics by technology, advocating for the rectification of its most unsightly aspects.

### **CYBERNETIC SUBJECTIVITY AND DISSEMBODIMENT**

The characters' liminal experiences in *The Nether* often mimic a boundary - cross-

ing cyborg as theorized by Donna Haraway (1985). The cyborg is ‘a hybrid of machine and organism’ that does not recognize categories of either human or computer, military or civilian, and is ‘a creature of social reality as much as a creature of fiction’ (p. 65). Its users can wear avatars in the virtual Nether that separate them from their real bodies, and allow for explorations of identities and behaviors that are ordinarily shackled by traditional standards. “We’re not built to live in reality,” says Sims, the designer of the artificial world “The Hideaway.” “We are supposed to feel it” (Haley, 2013, p. 29).

This phrase is the articulation of the posthuman predicament as the flux between the corporeal and the embodied. Haraway’s cyborgian challenge to fixed identities is echoed in Sims’ virtual environment as a zone of suspension of conventional family roles and social expectations. Ultimately, Haley utilizes the stage to confess technology, to reveal the moral cost of digital disengagement. The Nether is both a symptom and critique of what Braidotti (2013) calls “the posthuman predicament”: the simultaneous extension and enfeeblement of the human intimacy in the age of artificial desire.

2. Jordan Tannahill’s *Draw Me Close* (2017): Virtual Memory, Embodied Grief, and Posthuman Empathy

Where *The Nether* approaches trauma through moral alienation and disembodiment, *Draw Me Close* moves in the opposite direction: it stages embodied memory and emotional reconciliation. Through an immersive emotional experience, Tannahill uses virtual reality and live performance to reconstruct personal memory and maternal loss (Tannahill, 2017). The participant - audience enters an affective loop that resonates with contemporary discussions of digital trauma as an embodied emotional experience.

Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) describe digital performance as a hybrid ontology of liveness in which virtual interfaces enable affective engagement across physical dis-

tance. Draw Me Close enacts this in a literal way: the spectator's sensory immersion produces feedback loops of empathy and memory. As Wilson (2020) observes in her account of Draw Me Close at the Young Vic, the encounter is the product of the specific meeting point between virtual reality technology and live performance, where embodied spectatorship moves between the actual and the virtual, intimacy and distance, immersion and estrangement. Virtual interaction in the piece is an emotionally immersive experience that mixes memory, empathy, and sensory participation, which is consistent with Machon's (2013) account of immersive performance as a liminal space between presence and absence.

Phelan (1993) argues that performance exists only in the present moment of its disappearance. In Draw Me Close, that paradox becomes the basis of empathy: spatial boundaries collapse and presence blends with absence. Schechner (2020) makes a related point about contemporary theatre's tendency to turn spectators into active participants in emotionally and ethically charged performances. Tannahill's dramaturgy collapses the distance between witness and performer and produces an intimate participation that resonates with both Phelan's and Schechner's arguments.

The aesthetic layering of Draw Me Close also fits Caruth's (1996) account of trauma as an experience tied to emotional fragmentation and to the reconstruction of memory. Tannahill braids Caruth's framework with Braidotti's (2013) posthuman ethics and turns trauma from loss into affective reconstitution: virtual intimacy restores emotional presence. As Klimek (2025) argues, the tactile interactions in Draw Me Close — the physical engagement with an actor and with objects on stage — intensify the spectator's emotional involvement and dissolve the line between physical and virtual realms, calling for an interdisciplinary frame that goes beyond the cinematic to attend to sensory immersion as the medium's defining feature. The performance is an example of what Parker - Starbuck (2011) describes as a cyborg - style human-machine interface that extends empathy through technological apparatus. Tannahill's

VR - based theatre turns digital machinery into a channel for remembrance. In this way, *Draw Me Close* shows how empathy in the digital age recasts grief as a form of reconnection, turning loss into a posthuman articulation of human resilience.

### 3. Comparative Insight: Alienation vs. Connection in Digital Trauma

The digital turn in contemporary drama has forced a rethinking of human suffering, one that goes beyond the physical and reaches the space of the virtual wound. In *The Nether* and *Draw Me Close*, trauma is reconfigured as an ontological crisis in which the self is no longer contained inside biological skin but is mediated through digital interfaces. The shift rests in part on the concept of alienation, which is both a cause and a consequence of digital experience. Jaeggi (2014) describes alienation as a relation of relationlessness in which people are estranged from their material reality. In *The Nether*, that alienation drives the characters into the *Hideaway*, a digital refuge that ends up imposing a new, fragmented trauma rather than relieving the old one.

Both plays unfold inside what Baudrillard (1994) calls hyperreality, a condition in which simulation becomes more visceral than the physical world. In *The Nether*, alienation leads the players to the *Hideaway*, a digital sanctuary that ultimately inflicts a new, broken trauma rather than assuaging the old one.

Both plays take place in the universe of what Baudrillard (1994) terms hyperreality, a world where simulation is more real than the material world. In *The Nether*, there is a moral vacuum because traditional ethics rest on the materiality of the victim, yet the play maintains that even when the avatar is a digital construct, the psychological scars are real. This is consistent with Braidotti's (2013) vision of the human subject as a networked being: any disruption in the digital layer resonates across the interface and settles in the human mind, which makes the distinction between real and virtual pain less useful than it first appears.

In Tannahill's *Draw Me Close* demonstrates how digital tools can mediate and maintain trauma through the convergence of memory and technology. Tannahill's use

of virtual reality to recreate a relationship with her dying mother, intersects with what Hayles (1999) describes as the erasure of embodiment. The viewer is thrown into a space where the estrangement of death is temporarily blurred by an algorithmic ghost. But the posthuman reconstruction can also intensify the trauma rather than soothe it, because the haptic immersion accentuates the irreversibility of the physical loss. Read together, Haley and Tannahill suggest that digital trauma is one of the more difficult inheritances of posthuman life: efforts to use technology to escape alienation often produce more complex and deeper forms of psychic dislocation.

Both plays engage the paradoxes of posthuman subjectivity in technologically mediated space. Braidotti (2013) describes the posthuman subject as oscillating between disconnection and a longing for affective continuity. Haley and Tannahill dramatise this oscillation in different ways: Haley's dystopia exposes the moral emptiness of digital escapism, while Tannahill reframes technological mediation as a site of emotional repair.

In *The Nether*, Haley constructs trauma as a dismantling of ethics. The repeated insistence that virtual acts have no real consequence is exactly what the play refuses; in Haley's dramaturgy, empathy erodes inside a world driven by data and desire. This is a clear instance of what Bay - Cheng et al. (2010) call digital liveness, in which presence is an algorithmic performance rather than an embodied encounter. The line between simulation and sensation thins to the point where trauma persists even inside simulated intimacy, which is a literalisation of Caruth's (1996) point that the wound insists on its return.

*Draw Me Close* reframes trauma through sensory co - presence. At several points in the piece, the audience - participant is asked to do something simple, such as close their eyes, and the work uses small acts of perception to generate what Barad (2007) calls intra - action: touch and perception weave together to produce affective meaning. Where Haley's users remain at a distance, Tannahill's audience becomes co - author

of the emotional narrative and embodies trauma as collective remembrance. Participants often describe sensing the presence of a body that is not present. This mediated proximity reconstitutes empathy as something experienced rather than observed.

The ethical consequences are evident. Haley's play stages what Bollmer (2017) might call a failure of the empathy machine: a mourning that is disconnected from physical consequence, what we can call technological grief. Tannahill's performance, by contrast, stages embodied grief, where pain is re - felt through tactile engagement. This contrast resonates with Walsh's (2021) account of mediatized theatre as a "grief machine," in which digital dramaturgies of disembodiment, fragmentation and dematerialization both reproduce and reflect critically on the conditions of loss in the digital age. In *The Nether*, trauma manifests as moral paralysis; in *Draw Me Close*, the silence is replaced by participation and the loss by touch. The participant's navigation of the virtual space echoes what Duggan (2012) describes as a circuit between affect and ethical response, in which spectatorship can shift into something closer to solidarity.

For Haley, trauma is repetition and moral rupture: the *Nether* is a paradise that feels like hell, an instance of what Duggan (2012) describes as the cycle of technological immersion that numbs ethical sensibility. Tannahill, by contrast, recovers meaning through affective immediacy. Grief in *Draw Me Close* is less about remembering the dead than about remembering how to feel alive, an idea that is consistent with Braidotti's (2013) argument that posthuman art redistributes feeling across organic and inorganic forms.

Ultimately, both writers show that digital trauma is not an absence of feeling but a reshaping of it. *The Nether* externalises pain through alienation; *Draw Me Close* internalises it through empathy. Haley dramatises the consequences of detachment, while Tannahill imagines a redemption through embodiment. Barad's (2007) suggestion that matter feels, converses, and desires is enacted in both plays, even if the

affective outcome is opposite. In Haley, the entanglement produces moral collapse; in Tannahill, it produces reconciliation. Either way, trauma in the digital age is a hybrid condition of feeling that survives its own mediation (Braidotti, 2013).

#### 4. Recommendations

First, digital empathy can be used in theatre pedagogy. Drawing on Schechner (2020) and Fischer - Lichte (2008), theatre educators can use immersive technologies such as virtual reality and digital scenography to teach empathy through experiential learning. These tools let students take part in performative witnessing in the sense Duggan (2012) develops and produce a “presence - in - trauma effect” that builds both analytical and emotional literacy.

Second, trauma studies could move beyond classical psychoanalytic models (Caruth, 1996; Luckhurst, 2008) and treat trauma as a distributed and relational process, following Barad’s (2007) account of intra - action and Braidotti’s (2013) affirmative ethics. This posthuman expansion opens up future research on digital archives of collective memory, virtual mourning practices, and technologically mediated empathy.

Third, the rise of immersive technology forces artists and scholars to address the ethical questions raised by virtual representation. Baudrillard (1994) cautioned that excessive simulation can blunt moral reaction. Bay - Cheng et al. (2010), however, suggest that when employed thoughtfully, digital performance might improve, rather than dull, critical awareness.

The task for researchers is to design models that are aesthetically novel and ethically accountable at the same time.

Fourth, the study points to the need for collaboration between theatre artists, cognitive scientists, and digital technologists. Damasio (2018) and Haraway (2016) argue that emotion and cognition are embodied, relational, and material. Future research that combines work on the neuroscience of empathy with posthuman performance analysis could clarify how technological environments shape affective response and memory

formation.

Fifth, digital theatre rejects strict humanist categories but retains the capacity to rehumanise audiences through mediated emotion. Braidotti (2013) and Parker - Starbuck (2011) argue that artists should continue to explore prosthetic embodiment and the meeting of human fragility with machinic precision in order to provoke ethical reflection and cultural awareness.

Sixth, future researchers should look at more digital plays than *The Nether* and *Draw Me Close* in order to identify wider trends in posthuman dramaturgy. Digital theatre is increasingly a global conversation about technology, identity, and ethics, and comparative work that includes non - Western posthuman performance would broaden the field considerably.

Finally, following Schechner's (2020) idea of performance as research, scholars can treat creative practice as part of the methodology. Digital performance projects can function as laboratories for testing hypotheses about empathy, embodiment, and the portrayal of trauma, and can bring scholarly thought into dialogue with artistic experimentation.

### **Conclusion:**

This study set out to examine how trauma is reconfigured and re - experienced in the digital and posthuman age through a comparative reading of *The Nether* and *Draw Me Close*. The reading shows that both plays articulate a changing relation between technology, empathy, and ethics in contemporary theatre. Within the frameworks of trauma theory (Caruth, 1996; Luckhurst, 2008) and posthumanism (Barad, 2007; Braidotti, 2013), digital performance moves beyond the limits of traditional theatrical representation. In *The Nether*, trauma takes the form of moral detachment and emotional alienation, a staging of Baudrillard's (1994) hyperreal condition. In *Draw Me Close*, trauma becomes a restorative act of remembrance that resonates with Braidot-

ti's (2013) account of affirmative affect and with Haraway's (2016) cyborg empathy.

Taken together, the analysis suggests that posthuman theatre constitutes a new ethical and aesthetic paradigm. It reconfigures empathy through affective participation (Bay - Cheng et al., 2010) and through performative witnessing (Duggan, 2012), and it puts spectators in a position where confrontation and catharsis are both possible. Posthuman performance is not the abolition of the human but the augmentation of it, lessening the emotional chasm between self and machine, trauma and recovery, presence and mediation. The study also provides a posthuman - traumatic model of interpretation for future multidisciplinary work in digital humanities, media philosophy and immersive arts. Performance, as Schechner (2020) writes, is still a rehearsal for humanity, and in the digital century that rehearsal takes place not only on the stage but in the circuits of empathy, data, and shared affect. *The Nether and Draw Me Close* both remind us that the heart of theatre, its ability to reflect, alter and heal, is preserved when reframed through screens, sensors and algorithms. This coupling of the two shows that, rather than decreasing human emotion, the digital age gives up new methods to express and interpret emotion.

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