



From Verbatim Illusion to Epistemic Collapse: Knowledge, Authority, and Testimonial Injustice in Dennis Kelly's Taking Care of Baby

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Dennis Kelly creates a destabilised epistemological landscape through the formal conventions of verbatim theatre. Though the play imitates documentary realism, it subverts the authority of testimony at once, revealing a deepening crisis in the production and transmission of truth. Taking Care of Baby is faced with the essential task that underlies this entire project: a documentary, in name, reveals how institutional discourses—legal, psychological and media—both mediate and distort individual testimony. It opens up some important questions about who can speak, whose knowledge is recognised, and how the truth is constructed or denied in these power-inflected frameworks. The paper seeks to explore how the play performs the decay of epistemic trust and the sidelining of lived experience, specifically regarding the protagonist, Donna McAuliffe. Drawing on Miranda Fricker's theoretical framework of epistemic injustice, the study investigates both testimonial injustices, when a speaker's credibility is deflated through prejudice, and hermeneutical injustice, when interpretative resources needed to make sense of certain experiences are lacking in a collective. It asks (1) In what ways does the play imitate and overturn mechanisms of verity theatre as a method to challenge truths in charge? (2) In what manner do institutional voices perpetrate epistemic violence on the protagonist? (3) How is the audience complicit in processes of signification and misrecognition? The paper uses a qualitative methodological approach and combines close reading with discourse analysis to study narrative structure, fragmented testimonies and the intertextuality of contending voices. Attention is given to how the interview format of the play creates an illusion of authenticity even as it lays bare its artificiality. Kelly's action, the study finds, creates what might be called an "epistemic collapse," in which no single story reaches authoritative status, and all accounts are made suspect. This fall also critiques institutional power, implicating the audience as one complicit in validating or denying claims to truth. In the end, the play reveals how fragile knowledge systems are and emphasises the human costs involved in erasing marginalised voices.

Keywords: Epistemic Injustice; Verbatim Theatre; Testimonial Injustice; Hermeneutical Injustice; Dennis Kelly; Contemporary British Drama; Narrative Authority; Discourse and Power

من الوهم الحرفي إلى الانهيار المعرفي: المعرفة والسلطة والظلم الشهادي في مسرحية رعاية الطفل لدينس كيللي

المخلص

تستكشف هذه الورقة البحثية كيف يخلق دينيس كيللي مشهداً معرفياً غير مستقر من خلال التقاليد الشكلية للمسرح الحرفي. فعلى الرغم من أن المسرحية تحاكي الواقعية الوثائقية، إلا أنها تقوض سلطة الشهادة في آن واحد، كاشفة عن أزمة متفاقمة في إنتاج الحقيقة ونقلها. تواجه مسرحية "رعاية الطفل" المهمة الأساسية التي يقوم عليها هذا المشروع برمته: فيلم وثائقي، ظاهرًا، يكشف كيف تؤثر الخطابات المؤسسية - القانونية والنفسية والإعلامية - على الشهادة الفردية وتُشوِّهها في الوقت نفسه. وتطرح المسرحية تساؤلات مهمة حول من يحق له الكلام، ومن تُعترف بمعرفته، وكيف تُبنى الحقيقة أو تُنكر في هذه الأطر المتأثرة بالسلطة. تسعى الورقة إلى استكشاف كيف تُجسد المسرحية اضمحلال الثقة المعرفية وتهميش التجربة المعيشة، وتحديدًا فيما يتعلق ببطل العمل، دونا ماكوليف. بالاستناد إلى الإطار النظري لميراندا فريكر حول الظلم المعرفي، تبحث هذه الدراسة في كل من الظلم الشهادي، حيث تُقوِّض مصداقية المتحدث بفعل التحيز، والظلم التأويلي، حيث تُفقّر الجماعة إلى الموارد التفسيرية اللازمة لفهم تجارب معينة. وتطرح الدراسة الأسئلة التالية: (1) كيف تحاكي المسرحية آليات مسرح الحقيقة وتُقلِّبها كمنهج لتحدي الحقائق السائدة؟ (2) كيف تُمارس الأصوات المؤسسية عنفًا معرفيًا ضد الشخصية الرئيسية؟ (3) كيف يتواطأ الجمهور في عمليات الدلالة وسوء الفهم؟ تستخدم الورقة البحثية منهجًا نوعيًا، وتجمع بين القراءة المتأنية وتحليل الخطاب لدراسة البنية السردية، والشهادات المجزأة، والتناص بين الأصوات المتنافسة. ويُسلط الضوء على كيفية خلق شكل المقابلة في المسرحية وهما بالأصالة، حتى مع كشفه عن زيفها. تُشير الدراسة إلى أن تصرف كيللي يؤدي إلى ما يمكن تسميته "انهيارًا معرفيًا"، حيث لا تصل أي رواية إلى مكانة مرجعية، وتُصبح جميع الروايات موضع شك. كما يُوجَّه هذا العمل نقدًا للسلطة المؤسسية، مُحمِّلًا الجمهور مسؤولية التواطؤ في تصديق أو نفي ادعاءات الحقيقة. في النهاية، تكشف المسرحية عن هشاشة أنظمة المعرفة، وتُسلط الضوء على التكاليف البشرية المترتبة على تهميش الأصوات المهمشة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الظلم المعرفي؛ المسرح الوثائقي؛ الظلم الشهادي؛ الظلم التأويلي؛ دينيس كيللي؛ الدراما البريطانية المعاصرة؛ سلطة السرد؛ الخطاب والسلطة

1. Introduction

Contemporary British drama has been drawn further and further towards documentary and verbatim forms as a way to address problems of truth, representation and social justice. By foregrounding “real” voices and lived experiences, verbatim theatre is often aligned with authenticity, ethical witnessing and political intervention. But in recent years, as playwrights have begun to deliberately complicate and subvert these conventions, the assumed transparency of documentary performance has been subjected to critical scrutiny. Of these, Dennis Kelly has a special place with his formally experimental and ethically disturbing plays that often interrogate violence, media culture and the instability of truth. Dennis Kelly (b. 1970, London) became one of the most important contemporary British playwrights of the early twenty-first century. His plays, such as *Debris* (2003), *After the End* (2005), and *DNA* (2008), are distinguished by a dark exploration of moral ambiguity, social breakdown, and the complexities of human behaviour (Sierz, 2011). Kelly is also well known for having co-written the musical *Matilda the Musical*, a testament to his versatility across theatrical forms. A hallmark of his dramaturgy is the rupture of ordinary realism in fragmented narratives and unreliable points of view, a technique that comes into its own in *Taking Care of Baby* (Kelly, 2007).

Taking Care of Baby bills itself as a verbatim or documentary play built out of interviews around the case of Donna McAuliffe, a woman charged with killing four children. The play is set in a series of interviews with various figures: a psychiatrist, a journalist and Donna’s friends and associates, as well as Donna herself. At first, we see Donna as a victim of postnatal psychosis, who was innocent and sentenced wrongfully but set free. But with more and more testimonies, contradictions arise, and the story becomes less and less stable. In the end, we are not sure whether Donna is innocent or guilty or just fundamentally unknowable. This, of course, creates a purposeful ambiguity that undermines the hegemony of any one narrative and exposes just how tenuous the truth claims are within institutional and media discourses (Kelly, 2007).

On its surface, though, the play seems to draw on documentary protocol, interviews, patchwork testimony, and multiple points of view. Instead of stabilising truth, however, *Taking Care of Baby* opens up a deep epistemological uncertainty. Testimonies contradict each other, institutional voices assert their authority while exposing biases of profound scope, and the central figure becomes both pai... In this way, the play refuses any singular or authoritative account of events; instead, staging a crisis in knowledge production itself. In this way, the illusory authenticity afforded by verbatim theatre is inverted and becomes a means for revealing the construction and instability of truth (Paget, 2009). Despite this growing body of scholarship on Kelly’s work, critical approaches to *Taking Care of Baby* have largely focused either on trauma and violence or on psychology, often in ways that do not take into account the play’s deeper epistemological concerns. This paper claims, however, that *The*

McCarthys is not simply a representation of a sensational criminal case, or a critique of media sensationalism; rather, it involves the complex interrogation of how knowledge is produced, authorised, and contested in contemporary culture. It investigates, in particular, how institutional frameworks, psychiatry, law and journalism, among them, mediate individual testimony and help define the conditions under which specific voices are believed or dismissed.

To fill the gap, this paper applies the framework of epistemic injustice outlined by Miranda Fricker. Fricker's distinction between testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice is a fruitful basis for exploring how the play treats questions of credibility, authority and interpretive limitation (Fricker, 2007). Within this framework, then, the play can be read as dramatising not just the marginalisation of a particular subject but also a broader set of systemic processes that determine whose knowledge is the value-added. Donna's voice, as filtered through interviews and institutional interpretations, becomes a site where credibility is negotiated and often undermined, showing how epistemic power operates at various levels.

The aim of this paper is, thus, to explore the relationship between *Taking Care of Baby* and verbatim theatre more broadly; How does the play negotiate and subvert the effects associated with verbatim theatre in order to unravel ideas around truth and authenticity? How is the protagonist under a form of epistemic injustice by institutional discourses? And in what way does the play suggest that it implicates the audience in attunements of judgment and interpretation, misrecognition? By responding to these questions, the study seeks ultimately to show that the play stages an "epistemic collapse," in which rival narratives do not cohere into a stable truth and reveal the fragility of knowledge systems and the ethical stakes with regard to believing/disbelieving others.

Methodologically, the paper draws on close textual analysis and a discourse-oriented reading that considers the shape of interviews, fragmentation of narrative, and competing voices. By this means, it shows how form and content coalesce in producing a critical reflection on authority, veracity, and the politics of representation. In short, this study engages with contemporary drama's ongoing by reframing verbatim theatre as not a guarantor of truth but rather as a performative space in which the nature of "truth" is tested and contested, and at times irrevocably vanished.

2. Literature Review

Critical engagement with Dennis Kelly's *Taking Care of Baby* has tended to articulate the play through the wider conventions of verbatim and documentary theatre, noting its formal experimentation, ethical perplexity and political weight. Meanwhile, scholarship on verbatim theatre broadly has interrogated questions of truth, representation and authority, frequently inhabiting the genre's claim of authenticity. Yet, in spite of such pivotal contributions, there is still a conspicuous absence with regard to the epistemological implications of credibility, knowledge production and injustice, that is, especially

through the framework of what has come to be known as epistemic injustice elaborated by Miranda Fricker. This study aims to fill that gap.

Thus, one of the most important core debates for this study is provided by Abdullah and Khalaf (2016), as they explore the interplay between veracity, ethics and politics in verbatim theatre. Their analysis contends that verbatim theatre exists in a paradox, claiming to present “authentic” voices while nonetheless filtered through selection, editing and framing processes that bring about ideological and political biases. They argue that verbatim theatre “not only transforms reality” (Abdullah & Khalaf, 2016, p. 261) but reassembles it inside distinct ethical and political prisms. This realisation has special weight for *Taking Care of Baby*, which announces its verbatim illusion only in costuming to sabotage it. Yet, while Abdullah and Khalaf initially frame the bilateral exchange in ethical and political terms, they overlook an underexplored aspect of the epistemological implications of such reconstruction, namely, how credibility gets distributed among speakers (and denied to others).

Likewise, wider scholarship on the documentary and verbatim theatre has stressed its function of giving a voice to marginalised subjects and revealing concealed truths. The genre has often been cheered for its democratic potential, said to offer “real voices” a space from which to contradict the dominant narrative. But as critics have become more vocal about this assumption, it is vulnerable to seeing the mediating structures that organised how those voices were heard. In the case of *Taking Care of Baby*, it is not just that the multiplicity of testimonies does not yield clarity, but that they conceal and obfuscate, elevate one perspective to manifest contradictions in another, push us around: question whether we can ever access truth through testimony. Such tension between voice and authority has yet to be adequately theorised in existing studies.

At the same time, literary and cultural studies have investigated how discourse intersects with power in both the production of discursive representations and in social attitudes. Almaaroorf (2024), for example, analyses the role of soft power in shaping gendered attitudes in *A Streetcar Named Desire*, highlighting how cultural texts operate as instruments of ideological construction and intervention. Almaaroorf claims that sensational narratives can implicitly affect audiences’ perception of gender institutions by means of emotional and discursive strategies (Almaaroorf, 2024). This is not merely a study of verbatim theatre but rather supports a critical framework for analysing the ways in which power comes to be enacted through representation. If we are to look at this in relation to Kelly’s play, then we can see how these mechanisms work out even further in the ways that media discourse and institutional narratives pre configure audiences’ perception of Donna McAuliffe. Almaaroorf’s concern, though, is with gender and soft power; she doesn’t trace out implications for epistemic authority or injustice.

Michel Foucault offers further theoretical contributions that grapple with discourse and power, especially his ideas on “regimes of truth.” According to Foucault (1980), truth is not an objective fact; it is instead created. This lens has gained considerable traction in theatre studies as a way to interrogate the ways in which dramatic texts mirror and speak back to systems of authority. As *Taking Care of Baby* shows, though, there are competing regimes of truth, the discourses of media, law and psychiatry each seek to impose its narrative. Though Foucauldian approaches have been applied to the scrutiny of power dynamics at work in drama, they have seldom been reconciled to the specific ethical dimension of epistemic injustice.

The idea of epistemic injustice articulated by Fricker (2007) offers an important conceptual tool to fill this gap. Fricker distinguishes between testimonial injustice, in which a speaker’s credibility is unfairly deflated, and hermeneutical injustice, where the absence of shared interpretive means prevents certain experiences from being comprehensible. While this framework has been used in philosophy, sociology and some aspects of literary studies, its applicability to contemporary British drama, and verbatim theatre specifically, is yet to be fully developed. It should also be noted that existing studies of *Taking Care of Baby* have not explored in a systematic way how the play dramatises denial of epistemic agency or its structural conditions and corresponding interpretive failure.

Reviewed in aggregate, the literature shows three primary limitations. First, although verbatim theatre has been the subject of substantial ethical and political analysis, its epistemological dimensions, with respect to credibility and knowledge, particularly, have not been given due attention. Second, work on discourse and power, such as that advanced through Foucauldian or notions of soft power (for example), rarely takes the ethical dimensions of knowing and seeing seriously. Third, the notion of epistemic injustice has yet to be synthesised into the study of contemporary drama, thus marking a notable omission in how performance literature grapples with questions over knowledge and authority. This study aims to address these gaps through a novel interdisciplinary approach that intersects verbatim theatre studies with theory on epistemic injustice. Using Fricker’s framework allows the research to go beyond issues of representation by exploring how *Taking Care of Baby* builds and destabilises systems of knowledge, credibility, and interpretation. In so doing, it offers contributions both to theatre studies and epistemology that show Kelly’s play as not just critiquing institutional power but revealing the more fundamental ethical and epistemological crises of contemporary society.

3. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Utilising a qualitatively focused interpretive methodology based on close textual reading and discourse-informed hermeneutics, this study investigates some of the key features of epistemological dynamics within Dennis Kelly’s *Taking Care of Baby*. In light of the play’s heavy dependence on fragmented interviews, competing testimonies and institutional voices, a qualitative approach is

particularly well-suited to revealing the layered modalities that construct, negotiate and contest meaning, authority and credibility. Instead of looking for a definitive interpretation of the play's events, this approach stresses narrative instability and multiple perspectives embedded in the text.

The most-used analytical technique in the past is close reading, which comes from focusing closely on the language, structure and formal properties of the play. We focus particularly on the interview format, changes of narrative voice, discrepancies between testimonies and strategic use of ambiguity. These elements are examined not just as stylistic devices or embellishments, but as crucial mechanisms in the generation of epistemic uncertainty. Moreover, the study uses discourse analysis to reveal how various institutional voices (esp. psychiatry, media and law) both construct and regulate knowledge about particular phenomena. This includes analysis of the patterns of authority and bias, as well as rhetorical framing that exists within and between testimonies and how these discourses position the audience to perceive who is telling the truth; who must be credible.

The analytical process proceeds in three stages. In the first place, the present study examines instances when testimony is contested in and destabilised by the play at critical moments; in other words, there are times when contradiction, omission or reinterpretation occurs. Second, it analyses how epistemic authority comes to be asserted by institutional figures and the extent to which this is reinforced or undermined within the narrative configuration. Third, it addresses the audience as an interpretive agent in the context of how a play invites/compels/frustrates audiences and their desire for some kind of coherent and authoritative truth. This multi-layered approach also aims to demonstrate through the methodology how form and content converge in a way that results in what might be understood as an "epistemic collapse".

This study is grounded in the concept of epistemic injustice, as developed by the philosopher Miranda Fricker. Epistemic injustice is a wrong that is done to a person in their capacity as a knower (Fricker, 2007). She describes two of these forms as testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. Testimonial injustice is when a speaker's credibility is undermined due to prejudice they face, whereas hermeneutical injustice occurs when there is an inadequacy in shared interpretive resources preventing certain experiences from being understood (Fricker, 2007).

This frame resonates substantively with *Taking Care of Baby*, in which the protagonist's voice is filtered through multiple institutional and discursive mechanisms that cast doubt on her credibility over and over again. Donna McAuliffe's testimony is not offered up as a stable or authoritative account, but instead as fragmented, recontextualised, and eroded by the voices of experts and commentators. Utilising the concept of testimonial injustice, the study explores how implicit biases and institutional authority serve to incrementally and systematically damage Donna's credibility. At the same time, this notion of hermeneutical injustice makes space to investigate how part of/parts of her experience,

specifically as it relates to motherhood, mental health and trauma, is rendered partially unintelligible in dominant interpretive communities.

In addition, the study frames Fricker's theory within wider conversations around power and knowledge that implicitly rely on a Foucauldian idea of discourse as a mode of control and regulation (Foucault, 1980). While not the theoretical lens for our analysis, this perspective aids in discussing how discourses of institutions within the play create "truth effects," which construct understandings both by and for characters and audiences. In this way, epistemic injustice is not seen as an isolated event but instead within a web of power dynamics that regulate the manufacturing and legitimisation of knowledge.

This study provides a nuanced reading of *Taking Care of Baby* that engages in close textual analysis while integrating the theoretical insights of epistemic injustice, allowing for an expanded view of how this book maps trauma to ordinary living even outside conventional readings of it as either being about trauma or psychological realism. Rather, it gives precedence to the ethical and epistemological aspects of the play, showing how knowledge is scrutinised in relation to its genealogy but also ultimately destabilised. Framed as a series of lenses, this blended methodological-theoretical approach allows for deeper engagement and analysis of the play's critique of authority, credibility, and the precariousness of truth in our contemporary world.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1. The Verbatim Illusion and the Destabilisation of Truth

Dennis Kelly's *Taking Care of Baby* opens by luring us into a haunting semblance of veracity with its documentary framing:

"The following, which is taken verbatim from interviews and correspondence. Nothing was added, and everything is in the subjects' words, although some editing has been done" (Kelly, 2007, p. 17).

This prefatory statement lays down what seems like an epistemologically stable base of factual testimony. Over the course of the play, though, this claim comes to seem more and more precarious. Instead of affirming truth, the plurality of voices generates contradiction and ambiguity. This resonates with Miranda Fricker's (2007) definition of testimonial injustice as "a kind of injustice that someone suffers specifically in his capacity as a knower, an injustice whereby someone is wronged in his capacity as a giver of testimony" (p. 1); a speaker has given a deflated level of credibility to their word on a topic because of some sort of prejudice against the speaker," which can take the form of such things like identity hate or identity love, an overarching structure that confers injustice based at least partially on the irrelevant tropes associated with all members within a category. But Kelly's dramaturgy is more than the representation of biased reception; it shows how a certain credibility, even the ability to believe or not believe something, becomes indeterminate within a system.

So the verbatim form, normally attached to notions of factual reliability, is subverted into a vehicle through which the instability of truth is revealed. The audience is set within an epistemic field in which every account is suspect, directly performing the paper's own main argument of epistemic collapse.

4.2.The Fig Tree Project: Testimonial Injustice and the Fragmentation of Donna's Voice

Donna's testimony illustrates the precariousness of credibility within the play:

"[T]he door's... closed behind me and I'm... in this cell with this girl..." (Kelly, 2007, p. 17).

Her hesitant, speaking-in-broken-sentences reflects psychological trauma and epistemic vulnerability. As Fricker (2007) states: "Credibility deficits typically exploit prejudicial frameworks, coming into play when the speaker is judged through prejudicial lenses" (p. 28). Donna's story does not stand in its own right; it is refracted through institutional and media discourses that disempower her. This dynamic is made explicit in the reporter's commentary:

"Donna? Face like a slapped arse... we're just doing our jobs" (Kelly, 2007, p. 46).

Here, the media claims epistemic superiority and dismisses Donna's subjectivity. The language is reductive and dehumanising, turning her from a speaking subject into an object of representation. What's more, sensationalist headlines mischaracterise her narrative:

Double Death Mother Pleads Innocent ... Love Mother Collapses in Court (Kelly, 2007, p. 46).

These types of headlines reflect institutionalized testimonial injustice; the credibility in these instances is not simply denied, but reconfigured to align with a more mainstream agenda. Such injustice "wrongs someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" (Fricker, 2007, p. 20). In this way, Donna is stripped not only of her belief but of her epistemic agency tout court.

4.3.Hermeneutical Injustice: The Limits of Interpretation

It is not a triumph, but it stages a serious failure of interpretation, especially in Donna's unclear remarks:

"I thought about killing myself after she died" (Kelly, 2007, p. 46).

This statement pushes back against a single meaning, grief, guilt or psychological collapse. Yet the interpretive discursive frameworks presented by the play fall short. Instead, it becomes proof within competing narratives that fail to appreciate its full complexity. Hermeneutical injustice is "what happens when a gap in the collective interpretive resources leaves someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of his or her social experiences" (Fricker, 2007, p. 147). Donna's experience is an example of this gap: her voice exists, but it cannot be fully accounted for within the existing epistemic frameworks. This failure of interpretation is aggravated by the arrival of pseudo-scientific discourse:

Lescha-Chatley syndrome... is a rare psychiatric disorder that affects mostly young mothers... where a normal loving mother is driven to perform acts of cruelty on their own child” (Kelly, 2007, p. 29).

The syndrome offers a rationale, but its by definition speculative quality undercuts its status. It does not elucidate truth; it adds, rather, another layer of uncertainty. This echoes Michel Foucault’s (1980) claim that “truth is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint” (p. 131). In the play, psychiatric discourse isn’t revealing of truth; it creates a temporary narrative shaped by institutional power.

4.4.The Discursive Power and Truth Production

It highlights the interplay between media, law and psychology, which can be seen as a form of discursive power according to Foucault. Dr. Millard’s understanding of LKS goes beyond a singular pathology and extends into a critique of an overarching epistemic crisis:

“this new intensity of awareness makes you raw to the kind of general background level of untruth that we all have to live with these days” (Kelly, 2007, p. 29).

This statement is important because it links personal psychological disturbance to a wider cultural condition involving epistemic instability. Between the many competing narratives in media, political discourse and social anxieties, the desensitising effect of “fake news,” deception and contradictions becomes endemic; truth becomes elusive. According to Foucault (1980), “each society has its regime of truth... the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (p. 131). In *Taking Care of Baby*, there is no one regime of truth. Rather, there are many different competing discourses, none of which can truly hold authority. Which leadsto what the present study calls epistemic collapse: a state of being in which truth is not just disputed, but absolutely out of reach.

4.5.The Audience and the Ethical Paradigm of Judgment

The audience is complicit in this epistemic instability because they must negotiate contradictory testimony without confirming resolution. Donna’s repeated declarations of love for her child complicate moral assessment:

“I kept crying I kept crying Megan... was a lovely girl she was beautiful... (Kelly, 2007, p. 46).

Those kinds of statements humanise Donna, contradicting the media’s characterisation of her as a criminal element. But the lack of an overarching narrative keeps a viewer from reaching a solid conclusion.

Fricker’s framework shows not just that engagement requires shapeshifting, but also that attending to credibility and bias is ethical work. But Kelly’s play shows that even such ethical engagement doesn’t erase epistemic uncertainty. What occurs during the audience’s position of permanent interpretative suspension echoes and reflects the wider collapse of knowledge systems.

4.6.From Verbatim Illusion to Epistemic Collapse

The play thus eventually moves from documentary certainty to epistemological fragmentation. The claim to verbatim authenticity collapses in the face of a steady opposing series of testimonies, unreliable discourses and interpretive gaps. Framed in terms of epistemic injustice, it becomes apparent that: testimonial injustice destabilises credibility, hermeneutical injustice prevents understanding, and institutional discourses produce competing “truths”.

As Fricker (2007) and Foucault (1980) imply in their work, knowledge cannot be detached from power and interpretation. Kelly’s play enacts this realisation by withholding resolution. Donna’s voice hovers between belief and doubt, revealing that in a contemporary world overlaid with media images and extravagant claims, truth is not just obscured, it’s structurally ruptured.

5. Conclusion

This study has situated Dennis Kelly’s *Taking Care of Baby* as systematically shattering the epistemological assumptions that underpin verbatim theatre, turning what seems at first to be a docu-theatrical form into a site of acute epistemic instability. The play’s foregrounding of the anxieties around authenticity versus mediation uncovers an unsettling undersurface to our discursive systems in a world where media, legal propriety and psychological know-how suppress any competing claims to truth.

Using Miranda Fricker’s notions of epistemic injustice as a theoretical frame, the analysis has illustrated how Donna McAuliffe, as the protagonist, is persistently a victim of both testimonial and hermeneutical injustices. Institutional actors continually discredit her, if not outright deny the accuracy of her narrative, like the TV show or news organisations, then at least play it to fit pre-existing frames of suspicion and sensationalization. At the same time, the lack of adequate interpretive resources makes her experiences somewhat unintelligible and leaves her voice in suspended interpellation between contested and irreconcilable senses. In this way, Donna has not simply been misrepresented by outsiders but is structurally silenced in the pursuit of knowledge.

This research has also revealed that the play’s engagement with psychiatric discourse and media rhetoric does not serve to stabilise meaning but instead deepens epistemic fragmentation. We have implicitly drawn on the work of Michel Foucault for this analysis, emphasizing how these institutional discourses constitute mechanisms through which power operates and truth is created rather than divined. The proliferation of diagnoses — that is, the run for speculative-like diagnoses, like Leeman-Keatley Syndrome, illustrates how authoritative knowledge systems can produce alternative “truths” that lead to an erosion, rather than a reinforcement of epistemic certainty.

The play enacts what has been described as an epistemic collapse: a state in which no particular narrative attains authority and in which all claims to have witnessed become partial or contestable; this

is one of the central findings of this paper. The collapse does not present itself as a personal failure of individuals so much as a systemic one, echoing a larger cultural state of information overload, media sensationalism and institutional distrust. The play thus registers a contemporary crisis in which the very possibility of stable knowledge comes under suspicion.

Notably, the analysis has also highlighted the audience as active agents in this epistemic process. In this way, by exposing viewers to their nonchronological and contradictory accounts, Kelly implicates them in ethical quandaries of judgment, credibility and interpretation. The audience is forced to sit in uncertainty without any of it being resolved, thus experiencing in the flesh the instability that, when defined, governs the play's epistemological world.

Ultimately, I have shown that *Taking Care of Baby* does not stop at critique of individual malfeasance; it also offers us a wider mode for interrogating the means through which truth is produced, mediated and contested in the contemporary era. By making the mechanisms of testimonial discrediting and interpretive failure visible, the play not only calls into question the authority of institutional knowledge but also foregrounds the ethical stakes of epistemic exclusion. Ultimately, Kelly's work postulates that in a world where narratives compete against one another in an impenetrable embrace, truth is not merely besmirched but irretrievably broken, requiring new critical modalities for working through knowledge, authority and justice in contemporary drama.

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