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The Distance Between the Private and The Political: A Dramaturgical and Historical Exploration

NARRATIVE REPORT
Allan Havis
September 30, 2025

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Portsmouth.

Whilst registered as a candidate for the above degree, I have not been registered for any other research award. The results and conclusions embodied in this thesis are the work of the named candidate and have not been submitted for any other academic award.

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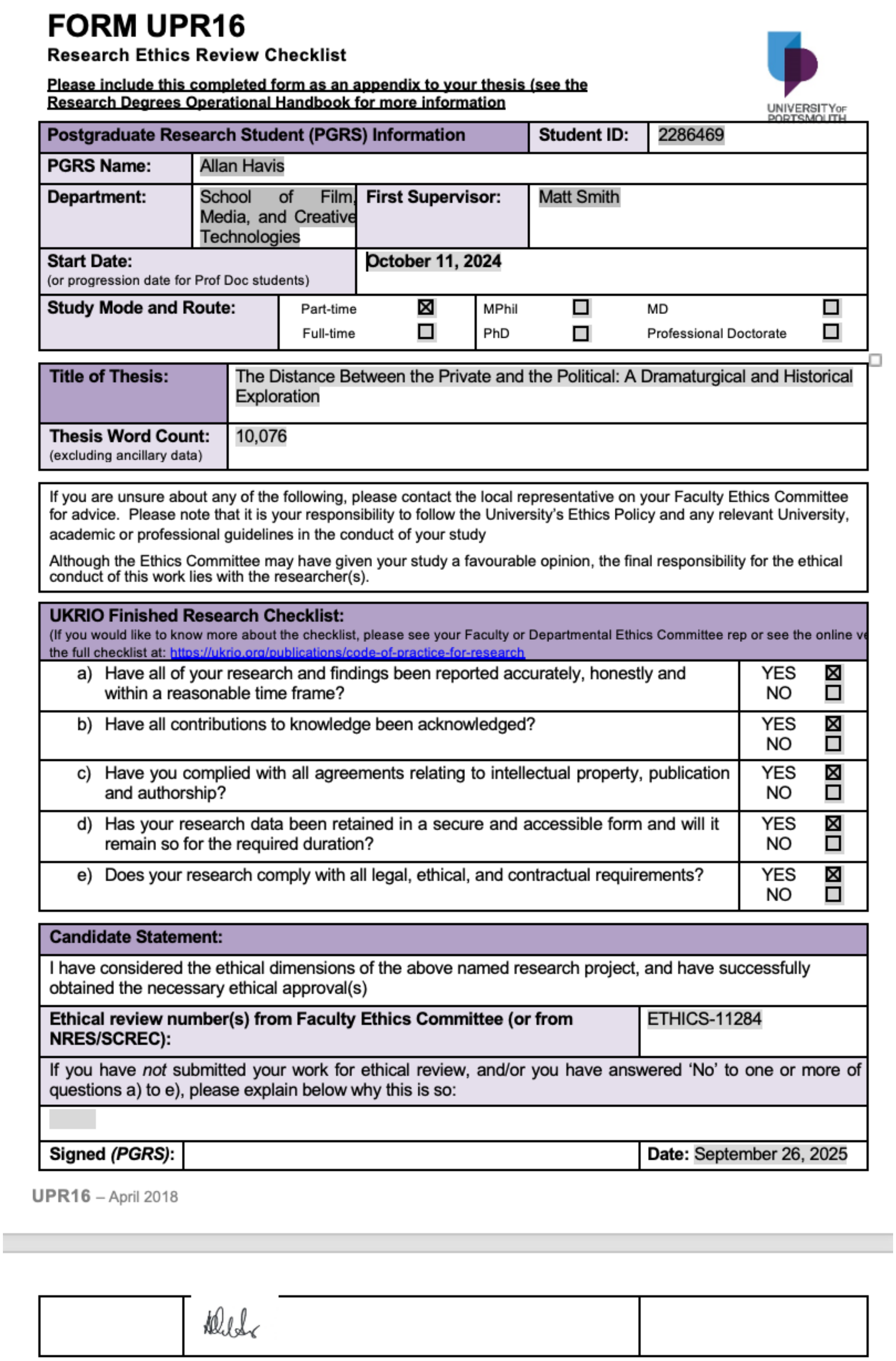

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The Distance Between the Private and The Political: A Dramaturgical and Historical Exploration

Allan Havis

Abstract

This commentary discusses my submissions for this PhD by Publication, situating my play publications within the context of theory and practice, highlighting my contributions to American political theatre. At the time of my entrance in professional theatre in the late 1970s, there were evolving inroads of politically focused playwriting from the experimental works within Off-Off Broadway – a movement which began forcefully in the 1960s and provided a roadmap from stultifying, formulaic commercial theatre. Concurrent with this renaissance from New York's theatre scene, America's regional theatre network took hold. These theatres fostered new literary voices representative of their geographies. I was one of the emerging playwrights from this era. As an author and professor, I promulgated the genre of political playwriting in anthologies celebrating provocative plays. While many of my produced plays adhered to realism, I made forays into subtle, experimental styles that subvert conventions of commercial narratives. These incremental deviations from American realism exhibit aspects of Hyperrealism (silences, voyeurism, indifference to audience gratification) and Neo-Naturalism (grittier, fragmented plots, with minimalist language, violence, and psychic alienation). My dramas avoid entertaining, apolitical writing while skirting polemics. I undertake playwriting to present evidence rather than jury verdicts. Many of my dramas question assumptions of governmental powers and ethics within an imperfect society. These works address examples of racism and antisemitism globally, examining flawed U.S. tropes from American Exceptionalism to Pax Americana — both concepts have inherent problems on empirical truths impacting geopolitical boundaries. The former conveys self-serving praise based on American privilege while the latter suggests a tenuous global peace reliant on U.S. dominance after WWII.

In my corpus, I scrutinize assumptions on societal values, hierarchy, and corruption. I raise concerns how the forces of good inadvertently enables evil. This fascination echoes Hannah Arendt's analysis of the 'banality of evil'. Arendt's phrase suggests both the functional evil of bureaucratic murderers like Adolf Eichmann and the nonchalant, serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer. Less sensationally, my plays frequently explore how dominant power structures, as illuminated by Michel Foucault's studies of discipline and governmentality, can subtly coerce individuals and institutions. These narratives challenge audiences to confront their ethical responsibility towards the 'Other,' a core tenet of Emmanuel Levinas's relational philosophy. My publications field these concerns while broadening the discourse for a more just, tolerant, and egalitarian society saddled by troubled impulses. The submissions pertaining to this PhD by Publication comprise the following plays: *Morocco* (1985), *Mink Sonata* (1989), *Haut Goût* (1987) *Hospitality* (1989), *Lilith* (1991), *The Haunting of Jim Crow* (2015) and *Three Nights in Prague* (2010). The period for these selected stage works represents twenty-five years beginning in the early 1980s.

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Introduction: Cosmology of Approaches in an Uncertain Future

From the 1980s to the 2010s, my plays have engaged with, and contributed to, wider popular and scholarly debates on US politics and political theatre. Whether addressing international relations and terrorism (e.g., *Morocco*, *Three Nights in Prague*), gender politics (*Lilith*, *Mink Sonata*), or race and ethnicity (*Haut Goût*, *The Haunting of Jim Crow*), my work has responded to, and offered new perspectives on, an ever-evolving political landscape. The 1980s were shaped by Reagan-era conservatism, secretive Latin American operations, and the Soviet Union's collapse; domestically, tax cuts spurred growth but increased inequality, while the War on Drugs and AIDS crisis highlighted systemic disparities. The 1990s saw post-Cold War optimism, globalization, and tech supremacy under Clinton. By the new millennium, America was a global hegemon, yet faced rising inequality, nihilistic political division, and the American entitlements as a superpower expanding her spheres of influence economically and militarily (soft power and blunt power).

The summation of political thought in each generation makes room for the contributions of those to come. These plays are acts of national self-examination, driven by moral instinct. While my writing critiques the inflated vanity of American exceptionalism, it simultaneously honors American regenerative strength guided by its Constitution.

My work has been a rethinking of political theatre's scope. Beginning in the mid-1970s, my career ascended when books by Robert Brustein (*Theatre of Revolt*, 1964), George E. Wellwarth (*Theatre of Protest and Paradox*, 1964), and Richard Gilman (*The Making of Modern Drama*, 1974) were influencing serious theatre literature. *Reimagining American Theatre*

(Brustein, 1991, p.11), identified a new generation of playwrights of the 1970s that were upsetting the theatre's status quo and included my name in the grouping.

In the 1960s and 1970s U.S., experimental groups like the San Francisco Mime Troupe and The Living Theatre produced agit-prop theatre, inspiring social protest. While I admired their highlighting performance over script, my playwriting was partly a response to fringe theatre experimentation and performative protest demonstrations. Through the decades, my playwriting and scholarship mirrored evolving discussions on political theatre, where authorship, identity, and new political directions have loomed large (e.g., Colleran, 2012). Both the plays submitted and my editorship of three political drama anthologies (Havis, 2001, 2010, 2019) have kept me central to efforts pushing political drama in new directions and investing in sophisticated, literate audiences in New York and London.

The following pages explain my conceptual underpinnings, placing my plays in wider context. I begin with my background as a playwright, distinguish my work from other political representations, and challenge assumptions about political drama. Drafting the crisis and not the solution captured my imagination. While Bertolt Brecht pursued said direction, ironically his *Lehrstücke* (learning-play) prescribed "message plays." My dramas avoid moralization and heroes. Commercial "issue" plays showcase social problems and heroes; conversely, Friedrich Dürrenmatt's *The Visit* (1956) portrays a community without any hero, as evil's accomplice. I echo Dürrenmatt and absorbed from Brecht much of his political ardor sans polemics, reflecting the moralist who refuses to moralize.

The writing submitted for this thesis probe conflicts globally and pressed America's issues of imperialism, prejudice, and terrorism. Political theatre offered perspectives on imploding geopolitics and democracy's future. Across the decades encompassed by this thesis, political theatre has shifted—from the overt polemics of mid-century agitprop, through the psychologically inflected realism of postwar American drama, to contemporary forms that embed politics within subtext, structure, and ethical uncertainty.

My work situates itself within an American lineage that includes Elmer Rice's abstract prognosis of modernity's soullessness, Clifford Odets' moral urgency, Arthur Miller's collision of private conscience and public consequence, and later writers such as Tony Kushner, Richard Nelson, and Naomi Wallace who expand political inquiry through scale and historical imagination. My contribution to political theatre can be defined as consistently resisting resolution, positioning the audience not as witnesses to argument but as participants in ethical unease.

I sought nuances of portraiture and story, aiming to upend mainstream drama during America's cultural retrenchment under Reagan. Inspired by regional theatres' maturity, a new cohort addressing form and content entered political theatre in the 1980s, reaching an apex with Kushner's colossal *Angels in America* (1991), produced by San Francisco's small regional stage - Eureka Theatre.

This corpus highlights seven varied plays selected for *sui generis* possibilities from my twenty published scripts that contributed to political theatre's literature, delineating virtue and vice in our evolving, humane polity. In turn, the study breaks down theatre praxis into three movements: flawed but sympathetic Jewish protagonists (*Morocco*, *Haut Goût*), harrowed family dramas entangling lineage with desire (*Mink Sonata*, *Lilith*, *The Haunting of Jim Crow*), and overt political plays highlighting ideological collision (*Hospitality*, *Three Nights in Prague*).

My Jewish characters contribute voice and pathos, rebutting decades of ethnic scarcity on stage. I studied seminal Jewish playwrights like Clifford Odets, who initially explored Judaic themes then abandoned ethnicity, and Arthur Miller's later reluctance to designate Willy Loman a Jew in 1949's *Death of a Salesman* (Matt Lebovic, 2015). Similar to my contemporary Jewish dramatists, Tony Kushner, Wendy Wasserstein, and Donald Margulies, I trafficked in the familiar affluence of New York City's Jewish mindscape. Indisputably, the protagonists in *Morocco* and *Haut Goût* are Jewish, their ethnicity significant to the plot, to their self-awareness, and to a helix of broken philosophy against adversity. Social assimilation is not their design, contrasting with Miller and later Odets. However, *Morocco's* architect and *Haut Goût's* physician attempt a reasonable discretion as American Jews overseas. They are painfully oblivious about the ramifications of a Jewish diaspora as they are centered on their own predicaments.

My family tales explore generational sin and problematic filial intimacy, a legacy from Greek theatre to modern domestic dramas like Friedrich Hebbel's *Mary Magdalene* (1844), Henrik Ibsen's *Ghosts* (1881) and Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night* (1956). *Mink Sonata*, *Lilith*, and *The Haunting of Jim Crow* demonstrate a spectrum from love to suspicion. *Mink Sonata*'s resembles O'Neill's *Desire Under the Elms* (1924) where gothic milieu becomes a crucible for entrapment in taboo desire and filial betrayal; *Lilith* resonates with Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942) through its traversal of temporal and mythic landscapes; *The Haunting of Jim Crow* draws its lineage to Langston Hughes's *Mulatto* (1935) in its portrayal of the tensions of cross-racial desire—embodied in *Mulatto* by the son's conflicted bond with his white father—anticipating the racial conflicts in my depiction of Senator Thurmond.

My overtly political works channel the sinew and tension of dramaturgy from William Archer's realist and morally charged theatre—through collision, contradiction, and spiritual reckoning—while in dialogue with the unvarnished American protest canon of Maxwell Anderson's *What Price Glory* (1924) and Sophie Treadwell's *Machinal* (1928). I credit companies like The Theatre Guild (John Howard Lawson's *Processional* – 1925), The Group Theatre (Clifford Odets' *Waiting for Lefty* – 1935). The Provincetown Players (Eugene O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape*– 1922) and The Federal Theatre Project (Marc Blitzstein's *The Cradle Will Rock* – 1937). *Hospitality* recalls Sidney Kingsley's *Detective Story* (1947) in its confined setting and cross-examination of authority; *Three Nights in Prague* connects to Irwin Shaw's *The Assassin* (1945) in probing political violence through ideology, seduction, and treachery.

My dramaturgy risk unmoored points of view on complex moral predicaments. Whether fragmented canvases or full depictions of flawed conduct, audiences face vexed characters. Breaching theatrical norms subtly was worth the gamble assuming the portraits proved compelling and honest. My oeuvre advances political and philosophic drama by illustrating American life's inflection and memorializing our complicated *zeitgeist*. The American Jewish artists as both outsiders and insiders provide an idiosyncratic window into competing Western values and waning American adulation. A second-generation American, my family history—grandparents fleeing pogroms in Turkey and Russia, intergenerational trauma of oppression, childhood memories of Holocaust footage—informs my political writing. My aim is to make visible recurrent patterns of ethical failure as they manifest in ordinary conduct; the plays do not 'purge' these patterns so much as stage them for critical recognition.

This research practice was designed to explore the following questions:

(1) How can dramatic writing render the private psychological life of characters inseparable from political power structures without resorting to ideological instruction?

(2) How does political theatre operate when it frequently resists moral resolution, instead staging ethical ambiguity and complicity?

(3) How might Jewish identity, diasporic memory, and familial conflict function as dramaturgical lenses through which American exceptionalism, state power, and violence are interrogated?

The findings that emerged across these works suggest that political theatre need not argue positions in order to be politically consequential. Instead, my plays demonstrate that sustained attention to subtext, ethical hesitation, and unresolved moral tension can expose how ordinary individuals become agents—willing or inadvertent—within larger systems of harm.

The original contribution to knowledge lies in articulating a dramaturgical model that integrates philosophical ethics (Emmanuel Levinas), power theory (Michel Foucault), and political responsibility (Hannah Arendt) within American realist and post-realist traditions, while maintaining narrative accessibility and psychological depth.

Approach and Methods: Dramaturgy and Representing the Political Paradoxes

Our training at Yale Drama School in the late 1970s, under Dean Robert Brustein, challenged prevailing commercial theatre aesthetics and sentimentality, exemplified by Neil Simon's semi-anodyne comedies or Norman Rockwell's Saturday Evening Post cover art. Brustein critiqued, with knives out, Arthur Miller's self-conscious, poetic moralism and Edward Albee's later stunted experiments, emphasizing European dramatists, landmark theatre literature, and experimental performances. To paraphrase Brustein in his essay on the *Theatre of Revolt*, the modern dramatist is essentially a metaphysical rebel (Brustein, 1962, pp.10-13).

My dramaturgy can be viewed through a binary lens: a) overtly political and empirical plays, where ideological notions are debated within a recognizably realistic landscape, and b) politically personal plays set within a metaphysical universe, where the drama takes liberties from fixed ideologies and the bounded conventions of realism. While scientific observation distinguishes the empirical from the metaphysical, theatre permits their intersection; empiricists may accept theories that invoke the unobservable, an approach traditionally ascribed to metaphysical thought. This overlap is exploited to stage notable dramatic realities (Ladyman, 2004).

The stage can provide a space where internal realities – the subconscious, acute psychological states, or elusive memory – are rendered as dramatic forces. This allows the dramatist to explore questions of existence, morality, and consciousness, moving beyond empirical observation by making the unobservable perceptible. Theatre can be a springboard for philosophical inquiry, revealing unseen dimensions of the human condition without transgressing laws of the physical world.

I place value on storytelling, repartee, revelation, catharsis, and the bond between spectator and spectacle. This commitment reflects a sustained drive toward psychological and psychic contest within both personal and political realms, aligning my practice with Robert Brustein's clarion call for serious dramatic engagement. To examine questions of personal power and elevation, I draw on Foucault's theories (1995, p. 187), understanding power not as an imposed force but as something that permeates everyday life and shapes conduct beyond formal institutions. "Passive power" aligns with Foucault's view of individuals as subjects of power and behavior. Foucault emphasized power as ever-present and formless, a "complex strategical situation" (Foucault, 2012, p.93) where shifts in power are crucial to narrative. Furthermore, elements of "passive power" differ from “passive-aggressive behavior.” Stage directors like Les Waters contour active/passive power by assessing characters' scene-by-scene status; a gun doesn't always outweigh a hand on a telephone (Weinert-Kendt, 2018).

This pervasive operation of power extends beyond institutional control, shaping subjectivity through mechanisms Foucault charted in *Discipline and Punish, The Birth of the Prison*. It raises arduous questions about individual autonomy and complicity, particularly when confronting what Arendt termed the “unthought” nature of evil—poor judgment that enables systemic cruelties. In dramatizing characters caught within these matrices of power, my work implicitly foregrounds the ethical imperative to recognize and respond to the face of the vulnerable “Other”, a central challenge in Levinas's philosophy of infinite responsibility transcending self-interest. Born the same year as Arendt, Levinas investigated relational morality and, within Jewish theology, tapped Talmudic tradition to question ethics before and after the Holocaust (Levinas, 1979, p. 43). Like Arendt, his Jewish heritage informed his generous conception regarding a clarion call of the “Other”, his heritage opened doors to the stranger, giving unseen capacities of the Divine.

There is a theatrical vortex colliding Foucault, Arendt, and Levinas’s concerns about the cognizance of power and corruption. This observation struck me later in my career, entering into sharper focus while constructing my doctoral thesis. These thinkers’ confluence inspired a conceptualizing dramaturgy as an ethical proposition rather than a didactic one. Foucault’s understanding and intuition of power as diffuse and internalized provides a framework for examining how characters act within systems they neither fully control nor fully oppose. Arendt’s formulation of the mundanity of hellish cruelty informs my portrayal of harm as the result of ordinary judgment failures rather than monstrous intent. Levinas’s ethical and spiritual demand to encounter the ‘Other’ grounds the plays’ persistent moral tension, particularly when the Other may be threatening, compromised, or morally ambiguous.

Within this framework, ‘good’ refers not to moral purity but to moments of ethical recognition and responsibility, while ‘evil’ denotes the erosion of such responsibility through habit, fear, obedience, or self-interest. This triangulation offers a robustly dimensional method for understanding political theatre as a site where ethics are tested harshly rather than resolved.

For instance, at the end of my play *Morocco*, the wife's use of Arabic demonstrates her subtle defiance, exemplifying a feminine power rooted in discursive control, challenging her husband’s authority and disorienting him as the curtain drops. Similarly, in my drama about biblical Adam’s first spouse, *Lilith*, the contemporary Eve absorbs Lilith’s transgressive energy through a deliberate act of “surrender” and articulates a powerful feminist revolt. In doing so, Eve reveals a killing instinct, redefining domesticity and liberating the constraint of pacificism.

My male characters often align with August Strindberg’s wounded self-surrogates, whose Nietzschean-inspired dramaturgy explored emasculation and power struggles (Brustein, 1962, p.101). These flawed yet highly ambitious male figures ranging from the Jewish professionals in *Morocco* and *Haut Goût* to Senator Thurmond in my historical play, *The Haunting of Jim Crow*, reflect political and existential anxiety, exploring sinister chords enabled by solipsism, privilege, and passive power.

Application of these power dynamics reveals human free will risking undesirable and even “ungodly” consequences, approaching contemporary tragedy and Theodicy. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s reconciliation of evil with a benevolent deity in the "best of all possible worlds" pervades my writing; self-centered personalities can destroy societies despite divine or governmental oversight, in political dramas from Sophocles to Caryl Churchill, and specifically in my characters Senator Thurmond (*The Haunting of Jim Crow*) to Ahmad Al-Ani (my terrorist play, *Three Nights in Prague*) and harkening back to biblical Adam (*Lilith*).

The plays often pair protagonists with charismatic tricksters who magnify hypocrisy or vulnerabilities of high-status individuals. This archetype, in Gogol or discussed by Lewis Hyde (2010, p. 7) ("Trickster commonly relies on his prey to help him spring the traps he makes") and Julia A. Chernenko (2019), has dexterity beyond satire. Female characters can embody the trickster, like Lilith or *Haut Goût*'s voodoo mambo/sorceress — Mati. Across my dramas, female protagonists achieve self-empowerment not through heroic acts of rebellion, but through Foucauldian micro-resistances: subtly altering social contracts, reclaiming personal narratives, and disrupting established expectations within inhospitable environments, challenging patriarchal systems from within the structures they inhabit.

Thomas Hobbes's influence shapes my framework for pessimistic views of human nature as self-interested and conflict-prone, informing dramaturgical choices that depict characters' irreversible ethical lapses without heroic resolution. Further, there are contemporary engagements with Hobbesian thought, in the social contract theory of John Rawls (1971, pp.14-15), the notion of sovereignty in Carl Schmitt (1985, p. 6), and the micro-mechanisms of power of Foucault, all grappling with societal order, security, and flawed humanity. The plays interrogate society's moral decisions amid rapid technological advancement, revealing how individuals pursue veiled forms of adversarial power—such as Foucault's subtle coercion (1975, p.171)—that hinder ethical evolution.

These plays, by highlighting moral choices, the invisibility of certain dynamics, and the "inimical powers chasing disguises," are inherently generating contestation as illustrated by the writings of Jacques Rancière. This would suggest the "system of self-evident givens of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it." (Rancière, 2004, p.9). These dramas force audiences to question the established order of things. *Lilith* by empowering Eve through transgressive means, directly enacts a form of dissensus within domesticity, questioning the "police order" of traditional gender roles and powers in the home. *Morocco*'s ambiguity and interwoven enigmas directly align with this notion. Audiences are forced to be active and think critically, to distinguish the cat from the mouse, to wonder about a "Morocco of the mind."

Elliptical, laconic structures demand engaged audience participation and discomfort. The New York Times (Gussow, 1986) called my work Pinteresque, noting its excavation of menace through inference. Like Pinter, my dramas end ambiguously or terrifyingly (Solomon, 1990); time is a weapon, guilt is potent, with characters confronting bleakness unblessed. A critique is leveled against the "Theatre of Upholstery," a term I have coined to describe the stage comforts flattering the viewer. There is no "upholstery" found within the jagged works of Edward Bond and Sarah Kane. I ironically urge students to write plays that "send them to hell," recognizing not all scripts offer redemption but possible catharsis.

Georg Büchner's *Woyzeck* (unfinished at author's death 1937, published 1875) with its radically staccato modern dialogue, unnumbered scenes, and nihilism, has been a deep influence. Hans-Thies Lehmann's concept of post-dramatic theatre's minimalism—a concentration on text, voice, body, space, and duration to engender a different theatricality from a zero-point rejection of illusion (Lehmann, 2006, p.123)—is applicable.

Luigi Pirandello and Søren Kierkegaard's "self-conscious" existential writings have held long sway and indirectly influenced my dramas *Mink Sonata* and *Lilith* with respect to role playing and meta-reality shape shifting. Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* and *Attack Upon Christendom* argued theatre generates spiritual reflection where church fails. He explored subjective experience and faith over reason, informing postmodern narrative via fragmented identity and pseudonymous authorship, adhering to a secret self while rejecting Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's reliance on the state. Pirandello's disguised alter egos exposing stagecraft disrupted norms, as in *Six Characters in Search of an Author* (1921). Both subverted reality and conformity. Deconstructing literary illusions has political consequences. Their ideas about alienation under oppressive systems prevail.

Ludwig Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* applies to stage language untethered to realism. To Wittgenstein, words are tools in "language-games" (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.17), where context and intention steer meaning, or language can be fragmented. This multiplicity is utilized to muddy waters; theatre can be opaque, sentences suggestive. My subliminal language parallels subtext, discarding precise rhetoric. This contrasts with Peter Handke's seemingly incomprehensible work, *The Ride Across Lake Constance* (1973) where language itself ruptures. Dialogue blurs conscious wording with repressed thoughts. Subliminal language parallels subtext, a stylistic choice reflecting strategic political camouflage, masking, and obfuscation. Handke essentially agrees with Wittgenstein in that the play does not communicate the essence of his theatrical concepts by language; instead Handke does it by virtue of structure.

I am a storyteller reliant on utilitarian language with poetic moments, transactional narratives, irrational betrayals, and unseen pitfalls. The phenomenology of language which modulates between realism and dream landscapes impacts storytelling. Wittgenstein's metaphor of language as a fisherman's net, snaring sufficient meaning, while failing all meaning, interlocks with Handke’s discarding realism while testing the idealization of emotive understanding.

Jewish Protagonists: Representation of Judaism and Jewishness

Many of my narratives feature a Judaism leitmotif or a Jewish character; others utilize biographical figures essentially disconnected from Judaism (e.g., Simone Weil, Adolf Hitler, Thurgood Marshall, Strom Thurmond, Arthur Miller, Joe DiMaggio, Mohamed Atta) where context remains vital to Jewish identity and diaspora. Ellen Schiff, in *From Stereotype to Metaphor: The Jew in Contemporary Drama*, notes Richard Cumberland’s 18th-century effort to rehabilitate the Jew's image, moving from an unsympathetic portrayal in *The Fashionable Lover* (1772) to a tolerant one in *The Jew* (1774), reflecting a shift towards "human perfectibility" (Ellen Schiff, 1982, p.16). This shift was revelatory after centuries of cruel stereotypes from Christopher Marlowe to William Shakespeare that "othered" and blamed Jews. Jewish characters gained prominence in late 19th/early 20th-century American theatre, influenced by Yiddish theatre and Eastern European immigration. Schiff’s subsequent work highlights the American Jewish Repertoire, identifying assimilation and "otherness" as key features in early 20th-century Jewish storytelling, with the Shoah/Holocaust looming large post-WWII, showcasing Jewish trauma and resilience.

My Israel/Gaza play, *A Vow of Silence* (1996), is the sole Israel drama in Schiff’s anthologies: *Awake & Singing: Six Great American Jewish Plays*, and *Fruitful and Multiplying:*

Nine Contemporary Plays from the American Jewish Repertoire. When platforming historic Jewish themes, American theatre has largely focused on the Holocaust over Israeli statehood complexities, the former offering a clearer moral framework. The narrative view of Israel is often the "Wandering Jew" returning home, with inherent statehood complexities warding off attacks — many considered antisemitic — addressed at the interpretations of contemporary Zionism. Schiff infers Israel's right to exist, cautioning against its "othering" (Schiff, 1996, pp. xlii-xliii) In my opus on Israel, *A Vow of Silence*, *The Road from Jerusalem* (1984), and *A Jew on Ethiopia Street* (2001), the common underlining premise reinforces the notion that, birthed from the United Nations partition plan and the 1948 war, Israel has braced for periodic abnegation by the United Nations (O'Brien, 1986, p. 273).

Paradoxically, Jewish authors sometimes "other" their own characters. Philip Roth's early novels used satire, drawing criticism for feeding stereotypes, though he later shifted to more dignified portrayals. Woody Allen's neurotic tales offer a different trajectory of situational comedy. My writing navigates between them, leaning closer to later Roth. The emergence of Jewish playwrights Arthur Miller (1940s) and Harold Pinter (1950s) were significant. Miller evolved to write about Jews which Pinter avoided. The adoption of Miller's later Jewish leitmotif is evident, gravitating toward Pinter's tone. In 1964, as both playwrights were prominent, Vatican II absolved Jews for Christ's death, profoundly impacting antisemitic teachings and fostering interfaith dialogue. While not recognizing Israel then, it softened Catholic opposition, eventually leading to diplomatic relations.

Following the generational bridges of last century, Jewish stage life became less sensational. This influenced my drama *Morocco*, which marks an intersection of Yale minimalist scripts and a broader professional career, expanding the canvas in style and milieu. It received honors like a Kennedy Center Award and multiple productions and publications. The play expresses East-West, Muslim-Judeo-Christian, male-female, and traditional-modern conflicts, with an American architect facing his Moroccan "twin," a women's prison head. Inspired by a 1970s *Village Voice* article on U.S. companies shielding Jewish architects in Muslim nations, the subterfuge became critical after Iran's 1979 hostage crisis.

Morocco borrows techniques from my earlier *Interludes* (1978) — quick blackouts, disjointed sequencing, spiraling neurosis — breaching naturalism with Pinteresque tonality (*One for the Road,*1984). Surreal dreamscapes support exposition, leaving dramatic ideas fragmented. The three-act play uses cinematic tropes and ten brief scenes, reflecting North African post-colonial complexities and Edward Said's critique of Western "Orientalism"—its arrogant, distorted perception of the East (Said, 1978, p. 10). The architect's conflict with the Moroccan tests Said's propositions. His Spanish Arab wife, a banker charged with prostitution, is an amalgam of East-West values. The colonel's shifting tones unsettle the architect.

When the colonel later says, "We are all children of Abraham," audience and protagonist share confusion and recognition. The colonel's declaration can be interpreted as an olive branch or a witticism deploring how Abraham favored Sarah over Hagar in the future inheritances impacting Islam and Judaism. In Act Two, the married architect masks his impotence through neurotic suspicions reminiscent of Strindberg's psychological intensity (e.g., *Miss Julie*, 1888), heightening familial tensions via fragmented dialogue and psychic alienation.

Act Three returns him to Fez to wound the colonel and test his fidelity. The architect confesses an imagined uxoricide, revealing an intimate knot between the two men where private and political merge. The drama equitably distributes envy and distrust across Jew/Arab and male/female relations, forming an abstruse, private universe.

This protagonist’s dilemma, navigating Morocco’s legal system while his wife's fate hangs in the balance, brings into sharp relief a Levinasian encounter with the absolute alterity of the 'other.' The colonel's shifting demands and the wife's inscrutability present faces that resist comprehension, compelling the protagonist and audience into a profound ethical relation prior to any political calculus. This vulnerability and demand for radical hospitality, rather than transactional exchange, challenges the architect's Western rationalism, echoing Levinas's philosophy of ethical responsibility before ontology. Simultaneously, the play examines how colonial legacies and entrenched status dynamics, even in a post-colonial setting, shape individual agency and moral choices. The characters, though ostensibly free agents, remain subjects caught within strategic configurations, revealing the subtle ways their choices are constrained by commanding forces.

American Theatre Magazine critic and editor of *New Plays USA 3* James Leverett called *Morocco* "an Orient of the mind...a parable of East-West relations...[refusing] to divulge a moral" (Leverett, 1986, p. xi). Premiering first as a one act in 1984, *Morocco* had major productions and propelled subsequent 1980s dramas on cultural clashes and xenophobia, showcasing protagonist insecurity and breaking narrative structure, as Robert J. Andreach noted its creation of "non-naturalistic theatre" (Andreach, 2012, p.105). *Morocco* could be seen as my most distilled, efficient, riddled structure intimating an array of sexual, religious, and international problems balanced by the simplest human equations.

Graham Greene’s novels informed my ideas on expatriate rootlessness and the self-questioning Jewish professional abroad, similar to his lapsed Catholics overseas. *Haut Goût*, like *Morocco*, features an American Jewish professional, Dr. Gold, shedding identity abroad amidst half-truths and political complications. Gold arrives with good intentions, but the play questions if his presence reinforces neo-colonial attitudes, despite Judaism’s *Tikkun olam* (repairing the world). Gold’s interactions mirror aid/intrusion tensions. Haiti was a strategic choice, reflecting CIA interference in the region and the power vacuum after Duvalier’s 1986 flight.

Gold, a secularist married with children, leaves his New York practice for infant milk trials but faces tragedy when babies die. State Department operatives offer cover if he aids an ailing despotic General Le Croix, who fancies Jewish doctors. America, fearing Le Croix’s newly detected ambitions, directs Gold to kill him via injection, with the CIA ready to extort Gold’s silence. Like *Morocco*'s architect, Gold has standards in a pragmatic world but quietly follows a non-religious, ethical Judaic edict. As both protagonists lose faith in their flawless careers, they become surreptitious, trapped by nightmarish circumstances, useless passports, and a disengaged deity.

Haut Goût deviates from *Morocco* with more radical stylistic shifts, tangential violence, and a stark political finale. Gold’s psyche shatters post-Haiti. The suburban New York epilogue reflects this maelstrom as he realizes government used him. The title (high taste before rancidity) brands Gold’s fate. He and Le Croix share ironic racist quips. Le Croix’s mute assistant, Mati, is a menacing presence. When Le Croix and Mati appear resurrected in New York, it’s supernatural revenge; snow falls as they consume poisoned snails, Le Croix’s hand reaching for Gold.

Despite the opening scene’s patina of boulevard comedies, a la Oscar Wilde, Noël Coward, and Philip Barry, *Haut Goût* becomes a political thriller, echoing Graham Greene’s *The Quiet American* (1955). Its dramaturgical center is a flawed existential superiority. Haitian voodoo tests Western medical science, with interstitial realities teasing empiricism. Amplifying Said’s critique of colonial indifference, it confronts Haiti’s plight. Gold’s life fits Bentley’s "bourgeois tragedy" (Eric Bentley, 1987, p. 61). An affluent, fallen figure, his hiatus from religious observance and family costs dearly. This self-induced tragedy of altruistic overreach is redoubled by U.S. machinations. The Jewish concept *Anivus b'rachok, achzariyus b'karov* (kindness afar, cruelty at home), echoed in Talmud Bavli, Yevamot 63a's warning against misplaced kindness, applies. Painfully, this presents a profound paradox of the forces of good undermined by the vanity of performing benevolence.

Haut Goût clouds audience sympathy for Gold. The General's resurrection exalts Haiti. Citing Eric Bentley on anti-naturalism, its blended styles smooth tragedy's arc: "The anti-naturalists always get the credit for originality. Actually, the naturalists were just as much in revolt." (Bentley, 1987, p.249). Revolt is core: Gold against abundance, Le Croix against bourgeois rules; surprisingly, the General's contrarian flare defeats his HIV-2. The Jewish physician in Haiti struggles to wed two powerful interlocking commandments: his Hippocratic Oath, "first, do no harm", and his Judaic foundational concept *Tikkun Olam*, "repair the world." Both *Haut Goût* and *Morocco*'s protagonists proceed in mid-career to make their mark overseas ethically as American Jews but are tarnished by unconscious guilt and insecurities intensified by isolation.

Critiquing U.S. cultural assumptions of exceptionalism—defined as self-serving privilege rooted in post-WWII dominance—functions as a key dramaturgical driver in the modern tragedies of *Morocco* and *Haut Goût*, where Jewish protagonists' obliviousness to diaspora ramifications heightens their personal, political, and spiritual predicaments.

My plays break with traditional Jewish stage representations by shifting the focus from historical trauma, such as the Holocaust, or themes of assimilation, to a nuanced portrait of the contemporary American Jewish professional. Unlike the Jewish protagonists of earlier playwrights who grappled with invisibility or conformity, my characters are American born, educated, and privileged figures who are nonetheless tarnished by unconscious guilt and insecurities. They confront the paradox of their own virtue, where their ethical aspirations—such as *Tikkun Olam*—are undermined by personal hubris and the cultural complexities of their position. By exploring these contemporary Jewish figures on the cusp of "two misaligned worlds," my work contributes a voice to political theatre that examines the evolving Jewish diaspora's relationship with prejudice, the moral complexities of Israel, and a more challenging, less sensationalized, representation of Jewish identity.

Family Dramas: Distance in the Personal

Family drama has been a cornerstone of American theatre for over one hundred years, dating back to Eugene O'Neill's first full-length play, *Beyond the Horizon* (1920). Acknowledging the genre provides an intimate microcosm of societal and cultural issues in transition, as these filial stories resonate in the hearts of American audiences. From the 1950s to the 2010s, television relied on family comedies as its mainstay (Scharrer, 2001). So, it is not surprising that our leading playwrights targeted the American family as a vehicle for themes of identity, love, power, sin, race, betrayal, and generational divide.

Scholars from Elinor Fuchs to Christopher Bigsby have noted American theatre's enduring fixation on family drama. Arthur Miller's highly quoted Harvard address and subsequent *Atlantic Monthly* essay, "The Family in Modern Drama," examines how family reflects societal breakdowns and the individual's struggle for identity. He stated: ". . . what we call vaguely the Poetic Play, consists of forms which express human relationships of a particular kind, each of them suited to express either a primarily familial relation at one extreme, or a primarily social relation at the other." (Miller, 1956)

Family dramas on stage, screen, and television in the 1980s reflected the era's mores, and plots often touted conservative family values espoused by the Reagan Administration (Feuer, 1995). *The Cosby Show*, from 1984 to 1992, embraced an upper-middle-class Black-American family. *Cosby* and series from *Full House* to *Everyone Loves Raymond* reengineered the 1950s family sitcom, promoting middle-class accountability and parental authority (Gray, 2004). This pervasive cultural output solidified the American family as an idealized, self-sufficient, and moral microcosm, tacitly defining normalcy and success.

In opposition to this cultural slant, my dramas were not keying into the genre's commercial friendliness and escapism but aligned with liminal, darker, psychodynamic domestic perspectives. Parental authority was depicted as deeply flawed in my canvases. Sexual drives were a core signifier in my portraits of American families. Sigmund Freud’s work on sexuality and latency within family dynamics has bearing; he postulated a theory of intense sexual excitement and its inhibition. The latency period (roughly ages 6–11) has considerable impact: “It is during this period of total or only partial latency that are built up the mental forces which are later to impede the course of the sexual instinct and, like dams, restrict its flow—disgust, feelings of shame and the claims of aesthetic and moral ideals” (Freud, 1905). Freud punctuated the Oedipal complex as core to children developing a healthy sexual identity and navigating family dynamics. The traces of incest themes and filial boundary complications filter through many of my works, adumbrating political consequences originating in the realm of the private. Such stories, however disparate, prowl subterranean regions of libidinous impulsivity. These complications affect equally families with children, offspring past puberty, and adult offspring, as these plays pull away protective curtains, violating long-standing theatre etiquette.

Mink Sonata

Mink Sonata initiates my full length, family dramas with preoccupation for dynamics in contemporary marriages. The play features three actors playing four characters, reflecting dissonant variations. Its premise examines Roberta, a bipolar female cellist unable to live alone, revealing stark family patterns. Themes of incest and emotional abuse, mined in previous Yale briefer plays like *Sister and Brother* (1977) and *Interludes*, are central. The masks within *Mink Sonata*, literally and figuratively, evoke Pirandello's dramaturgy on artifice and O'Neill's experimental *The Great God Brown* (1926).

Specific to *Mink Sonata* is the cold, matronly Catherine, who is the one unmasked character enabling father-daughter incest through "improvisational" role-playing. The daughter Roberta invents an alter-ego, an intern Blake. *Mink Sonata* plies psychosexual scaffolding to encompass family madness, rewarded by complicity and self-deceit. Roberta's creation of Blake and her climatic, visceral cello solo manifest a subterranean feminine power, acting as a psychosomatic resistance against familial crimes and the silencing of her trauma. Applying Freudian theory to the extreme transgression held in secret by Roberta and her parents might explain the family tragedy but cannot easily heal the trio. This sordid sexual drama graphs aspects of ego duality disintegration expressed through language's limitation and cloaked erotic impulsivity.

Writing about functional madness was inspired by Pinter's *The Lover* (1962). where a man's trysts are with his wife. I envisioned a domestic comedy turning to the horror of incest, led by a father promoting politicians' careers while his wife fights boredom. The family's ritualistic actions, as indecipherable code, comport with Wittgenstein's language games. Their family psychosis requires voyeurs. The father is a dominant liar; the women comply. Their gifted musical daughter bleeds, literally and figuratively, desperate for rescue but unable to communicate, suffocating as semiotic death approaches.

The play's language was described by *The New York Times* as a "literate excursion into schizophrenia" (Gussow, 1990). *Mink Sonata* avoids indictment of father-daughter incest. She's accosted by hands through drapery and masked figures. At her psychotic brink, she performs a solo while her cello's endpin bleeds surreally. Whether this is one person's madness or the family's is unclear. I directed *Mink Sonata* and the cast's bracing acting style tilling the text's subterranean turbulence. Before *Mink Sonata*, I read Franz Xaver Kroetz's *Stallerhof (Farmyard* 1971), which illustrated bitter realism in a sexual tale of a farming couple and their disabled daughter. Kroetz's brutality was vivid. His dramas, described by Arthur Holmberg as "constituting a drama of the inarticulate" (Holmberg, 1984), showed an unsettling symmetry with *Mink Sonata*, despite different milieus. Perhaps *Mink Sonata* aspired to be a darker sequel to Public Broadcasting Service's episodic *An American Family (The Loud Family)* set in 1970s California. *Mink Sonata* crystalized the "documentary" family scandal into a staged tone poem and transposed the suburban West Coast paradigm to urban New York.

With *Mink Sonata*, my dramaturgy departs from the sanitized, idealized family sitcoms of its era, instead aligning with the tradition of O'Neill and Pinter to stage a darker, more psychodynamic reality. The play advances the family drama genre by deconstructing an upper-middle-class facade to expose the functional madness and psychic decay enabled by incest and emotional abuse. Through its use of masks, role-playing, and a fragmented narrative, the play positions the family as a voyeuristic theatrical space, where the private horrors of a contemporary marriage are transmuted into an indecipherable ritual. *Mink Sonata* is a domestic drama of the inarticulate, where a daughter's mental and physical bleeding becomes a psychosomatic act of resistance against a family's deep-seated complicity, challenging the audience to confront the subterranean corruption beneath a veneer of respectability.

***Lilith* – supernatural archetype entwining feminism**

In 1986, a friend had me research Lilith—a legend predating Eden's Eve — as a play for his theatre. That year, "Lilith Sternin" (Bebe Neuwirth) premiered on *Cheers*, her Emmy-winning role as an intellectual feminist. I researched YIVO's Judaic Archives and the play's structure surfaced immediately. The drama occurred before Adam and Eve; Act One's humor mirrored Elaine May/Mike Nichols routines, the Garden of Eden's marriage strained by power plays. Act Two jumps to New York: biblical names change, a child is abducted, and Eve battles Lilith.

A year after writing *Lilith*, Adrian Lyne's 1987 film *Fatal Attraction* featured Glenn Close's femme fatale, dramatizing adultery, kidnapping, and a murderous finale — details representing Lilith. Both film and play addressed the zeitgeist as feminism entered its third wave, when Susan Faludi's *Backlash* (1991) critiqued stereotyping of career women. My approach to Lilith applied a disputation from three vantage points: challenging realism by jumping time and toggling literal/interpretive canvases; applying contemporary language in biblical settings; and using intimacy to force audience discomfort. The storytelling's subjectivity mirrors Rancière's idea that politics happens when the invisible becomes visible and dominant meanings are violated. This disruption, or 'dissensus,' is a deliberate dramaturgical strategy designed to make audiences active participants in questioning the established order and the existing distribution of the sensible.

Such strategies with *Lilith* were poetically utilitarian, beginning with a divorce hearing. Dominant dynamics between Lilith and Adam demonstrate his inadequacies and Foucault's power reversals, revealing institutional weaknesses (God's angel). The second half in New York, "Eve" investigates Lilith, learning amulets will defend her family. The first half's intellectual vaudeville shifts to disquieting horror of the succubus's unmasking. Is Lilith a victim or monster? *Lilith*, starring Allison Janney, charted new territory towards fabulism and feminist themes. It dissected a virile male who is morally spineless; Adam is the paragon of male impotence, an inadequacy Rancière might frame as a disruption of sensible order.

Lilith's archetype is seen in "defiant women" Hollywood films. After *Fatal Attraction* came *The Hand that Rocks the Cradle* and *Single White Female* (both 1992), erotic thrillers with dangerous ingénues infiltrating homes. Nine years later, James Mangold's *Girl Interrupted* featured a nonconforming "Lilith" matching Robert Rossen's *Lilith* (1964) — the archetype in psychiatric hospitals. Hollywood's variations on Lilith tottered on domestic horror while awkwardly commenting on third-wave feminism. Cinema and television became accessible to Lilith's myth.

One might conject that Ibsen's Hedda Gabler and Tennessee Williams' Blanche DuBois are emblematic of a partially defanged Lilith. In Strindberg's *The Road to Damascus* (1898), "The Lady" represents a siren drawing the male protagonist toward madness. Strindberg shows his fear of feminine dominion. Equally damning, is Strindberg's paranoia about paternity concerns in an age before DNA testing. Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's *Faust* (1808) has Mephistopheles introduce Lilith as "Adam's first wife," a dangerous modern woman. Judith Plaskow's "The Coming of Lilith" (1972) reinterprets the archetype as a feminist icon seeking sisterhood with Eve and envisions Lilith as a soul who was wrongly persecuted.

Ostensibly complicating Plaskow's interpretation, my play *Lilith* hints that contemporary Eve must absorb Lilith's transgressive powers, thereby enacting a Foucauldian transformation that operates within the mundane confines of middle-class, domestic power structures. Drawing on Foucault's concept of productive power, which posits that power does not merely repress but actively shapes bodies and subjectivities, Eve's evolution illustrates resistance emerging not through outright rejection of these norms, but by mastering and subverting them from within. For instance, the play's contemporary "Eve" warns her husband that Lilith may kidnap their boy, and adds, "Anything's possible. You must make a clean break and do it quickly. Tonight. Or bring in the police. If you want, I'll be there as a witness." This reflects Foucault's emphasis on resistance as immanent to the very relations of power it opposes, rather than existing purely outside it, offering a perspective on feminine agency within patriarchal systems.

Building on Foucauldian framework, Verónica Gago's concept of *potencia* (feminist potency) offers a critical lens eyeing Eve's assimilation of Lilith's transgressive energy as transformed into domestic subversion. Gago defines *potencia* not as power-over, but as a collective capacity to act, create, and desire from below, operating outside traditional political sites (Gago, 2020, pp. 2-3). In *Lilith*, Eve's "absorption" signifies a domestication of Lilith's raw defiance into a form of embodied *potencia* that strategically redefines boundaries and expectations of her middle-class household. Rather than overt rebellion, Eve's newfound agency manipulates existing domestic and legal structures, making visible the unseen forms of power at play in social reproduction and asserting her territorial claims over her body, spirit, and home. *The New York Times* contextualized this approach as Strindbergian: "Havis weaves an intricate web of lustfulness and deceit..." (Gussow, 1991).

Twenty years later, I returned to Lilith with opera composer Anthony Davis. Our operatic interpretation of the myth necessitated a distinct poetic approach, where music becomes paramount in conveying the interplay of power and resistance, transcending dialogue and visual language. Through expressive panoply of the score and vocal embodiment of characters, the libretto explored the subjective realms of desire, control, and transformation, allowing for richer emotional impact and abstract probing of the play's core concepts of erotic blasphemies with variation of eternal recurrence — the regeneration of future Liliths.

Lilith's libretto generated more structural complexities than the play. A salient feature was the vocal competition between "Lilith" and "Eve" starting the opera—a stark departure to spotlight their rivalry. The libretto was flexible to musical strategies, to support Davis's freedom modulating jazz, blues, classical, and Duke Ellington styled rhapsodies. We accepted eclecticism, offsetting conventions to hasten the opera's dark domestic dream. Strindbergian overtones were embroidered. Lilith's divine punishment and retribution remain ever-present, her tribulation like Greek tragedy rooted in the family.

***The Haunting of Jim Crow* – filtered Southern Gothic narrative**

In 2003, UCSD and California Western School of Law discussed events for the fiftieth anniversary of *Brown v. Board of Education* and commissioned me to draft a play. News then broke of Senator Strom Thurmond's mixed-race daughter whose mother worked in Thurmond's household. Essie Mae Washington-Williams, a teacher, revealed her father's identity after his death at 100. He was 22 when he fathered her by 16-year-old Carrie Butler. The Senator's daughter told the media she was protecting him; he paid her college tuition and visited occasionally. This was amazing, considering Thurmond’s infamous 1948 quote about needing the Army to enforce segregation (Noah, 2002).

The chasm between Thurmond's private and political life intrigued me. Portraying an iconic Southern politician and his Black daughter was new terrain. From Congressional records, I discovered Thurgood Marshall-Strom Thurmond exchanges. The play unearthed two timelines: Thurmond’s political rise and fall, with scenes with his daughter; and Marshall’s journey to the Supreme Court (the first Black justice). A fictional teacher guided historical jumps.

I drew Thurmond sympathetically despite distaste for his politics—a counterintuitive approach supporting Essie Mae’s compassion. Emotional shifts uncover Thurmond’s internal fight and his daughter’s love. Essie Mae wields a telling moral force, asserting agency over her story by choosing the timing of her revelation, forcing a posthumous re-evaluation of her father's persona and challenging his legacy from a position of lived experience, forgiveness, and dignity.

In rehearsals, his contradictions fascinated the cast. He represented Southern gentility, yet I painted him warmly—a variation of Lilith’s Adam, a privileged white man cloaking sexual drives. His posthumous exposé mimicked Pirandellian masquerades and Kierkegaardian sins of withholding. With this drama, I returned to mainstream storytelling, implementing an accessible structure, and journalistic fidelity to an infamous biography seen against America’s incremental rejection of centuries old segregation (Welsh, 2005).

Political Dramas in the Age of Terrorism: Blurred Lines and False Futures

Bruce Hoffman’s *Inside Terrorism* traces the word “terrorism” to the French Revolution, where Hoffman states it had a “decidedly positive connotation” (Hoffman, 1998). Terrorism went global, per Hoffman, on July 22, 1968, with Palestinian hijacking an El Al jet. We then entered the age of terrorism. This realization preceded the Al-Qaeda attack September 11, 2001, but reenforced by the Oklahoma City bombing on April 19, 1995, resulting in 168 fatalities, including 19 children, and injured over 680 people, making it the deadliest act of domestic terrorism in U.S. history. These flash points of terrorism entered my dramaturgy accelerating the need to write the Mohamed Atta drama.

Twenty years ago, New York Theatre Workshop cancelled the dramatized journal entitled *My Name is Rachel Corey* (2005) after powerful protests regarding Israeli Palestinian issues. Terrence McNally's *Corpus Christi*, depicting Jesus as gay, was postponed in 1998 by Manhattan Theatre Club after bomb threats and condemnation from the Catholic League. New York City's Shakespeare in the Park production of *Julius Caesar* in 2017 sporting a Trump lookalike Caesar sparked outrage. *Three Nights in Prague*, though enticing literary theatre managers and a point of focus by several scholars in their publications, remains unproduced due to fears of violence.

After September 11, 2001, the reality of U.S. vulnerability to global terrorism became apparent. Previously, focus was on domestic militias and white nationalists. Journalism and television had momentary paralysis. A *cris de coeur* from cultural elites like Graydon Carter and Roger Rosenblatt called for an "end of irony." Such self-imposed censorship is emblematic of Foucault's concepts of power: "Discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart'" (Foucault, 1998, pp. 100-101).

Political theatre and activism share a duty to preserve democracy and free speech, though some protests are antidemocratic. Producers rely on musical blockbusters, and post-Covid, government arts sponsorship has seen retrenchment. Sophisticated, literate audiences perhaps seek complex political theatre, yet commercial pressures and conventional industry assumptions undervalue it, prioritizing formulaic narratives over experimental, opaque forms. Will the next generation of playwrights and audiences redouble their commitment to staging political plays? Will there be an uncensored theatre to expose our blemished societal features?

Besides writing plays I was a curator, editing three political play anthologies due to a dearth of such collections. The second anthology used 9/11 as a marker for a new epoch; the third book identified America in the Age of Terrorism. These volumes established a niche for three decades of political playwrights. Each anthology summarized historic horizons, harkening to Elmer Rice's prophetic *The Adding Machine* (1923). In the second book's essay, I argued that it is axiomatic that political theatre plays a secondary, yet indisputable role in American self-awareness and accountability.

After *Morocco* and *Haut Goût*, I tried a different political tack, drawn to interrogation dramas from surreal (Dario Fo's *Accidental Death of an Anarchist* —1970, Harold Pinter's — *One for the Road*) to realistic (Arthur Kopit's *The Questioning of Nick* —1965, Ellen McLaughlin's *Days and Nights Within* —1985). I explored detention narratives with contentious ideologies, testing American agents protecting domestic security. What if one agent's abhorrent actions destroy his partner's loyalty? This calculus arose from a New York airport incident: Patricia Lara, a Colombian journalist, was detained and expelled for alleged subversive actions (UPI, 1986).

Research on Lara led to the 1952 Immigration and Nationality Act. Under Reagan, this law targeted "leftist agitators." Assistant Secretary of State Elliot Abrams claimed Lara was "heavily engaged" with Colombia's M-19 terrorist group; Lara faulted Abrams for endangering her. This material formed *Hospitality*. As a counterweight to the Colombia complication, I added a militant former Knesset member resembling Rabbi Meir Kahane. *Hospitality* was a return to linear plotting. *Hospitality*'s political intricacy arises not from unresolved mysteries but from unmonitored abuses of authority in a confined, institutional setting, dramatizing Foucault's governmentality through interpersonal power shifts.

Logan, the U.S. agent and tragic figure, is recognizably American and a precursor to MAGA zealots and false patriots. *Hospitality* prefigured domestic terrorism experienced in Ruby Ridge (1992) and the Waco Siege (1993). These tragedies fueled by inept governmental responses, sparked 1990s plays (*A Vow of Silence*, *Three Nights in Prague*, *The Tutor* —2008) and my edited anthologies. *Hospitality* engendered political statements sans a Jewish protagonist, depicting governmental crimes and incompetent, undemocratic actions.

Hospitality's Washington official, Monteith, pitted agents against each other, embodying Arendt's categorical evil. Logan's suicide concluded a demoralizing incident. The play's interstitial politics became revealed by characters' ironic rhetoric. Arendt notes: "Wherever the relevance of speech is at stake, matters become political... for speech is what makes man a political being" (Arendt, 1958, p.3). The story's chilling pessimism lingers. With *Hospitality*, the variation of the Ugly American fell ironically on native soil and not abroad, bearing a theme of cruelty to foreigners at the port of entry. Further, the repellant actions were sanctioned and institutionalized by bureaucratic overseers. In post-show discussions, audiences asked if I am antisemitic and anti-American. Such questions raise a deeper concern: how do audiences overlook or misread the play's political irony? With *Hospitality*, I reimagined the 'Ugly American' by bringing the archetype home—a strategy that depicts governmental cruelty, arrogance, and incompetence not abroad, but on native soil against an alleged 'foreigner'."

Three Nights in Prague **– a prelude to the World Trade Center attack**

A year before *The Haunting of Jim Crow*, I was intrigued by William Safire's *New York Times* essay, "Mr. Atta Goes to Prague" (Safire, 2002). Mohamed Atta, the 9/11 lead terrorist, was reportedly met by Saddam Hussein's Embassy henchman, per Czech intelligence. Atta's cold eyes and publicized headshot were haunting, symbolizing an insidious spirit. His unmasked absolutism captured our imagination. Safire speculated that an Atta-Iraqi link would be *casus belli*.

Atta's tortured mindset became *Three Nights in Prague*'s power loci. Atta, an Egyptian engineer, stood apart from other hijackers. Vice President Dick Cheney seized on Atta's travel reports to link Bin Laden and Saddam Hussein, leading to the Iraq invasion. Estimates of war expenditure exceeded one trillion dollars, with thousands of U.S. and hundreds of thousands of Iraqi deaths. No weapons of mass destruction were found. I envisioned Atta obsessed like a Fyodor Dostoyevsky character; Atta anticipated martyrdom's paradise. I conjectured Atta meeting Pavel, a clever Czech chauffeur for Iraq's consulate. The play utilizes two human triangles: Atta, Pavel, consulate official Al-Ani, and Atta, Pavel, Dolni — Pavel's transgender offspring, whom Atta hires for sex, mirroring reports of hijacker activities and rumors of Atta's homosexuality/paternal issues (Yardley, 2001).

The play bends chronology and morality taking the risk of platforming a terrorist protagonist. Atta murders Pavel. Dolni alerts police but lacks credibility. Atta vanishes. Had police investigated, the 9/11 key player might have been arrested. Atta orchestrates layered, triangular negotiations of ideology, commodities, and seduction, creating liminal tensions that expose ethical vulnerabilities in cross-cultural encounters.

Atta unifies bartering triangles, engineering interstitial tensions. The structure defies Aristotelian unities, transgressing notions that villains cannot be protagonists. Foucault's "self" as a work of art, performing internally on passionate contingencies, not for heroism but as a figure of power, applies to Atta. This is my first drama anchored on a terrorist; earlier plays had terrorists as secondary characters. Jeanne Colleran's *Theatre and War* notes:

> Havis's 2003 play, *Three Nights in Prague*, attempts to understand how a young person chooses to become a suicide bomber... [depicting] a mind that becomes so saturated with a religious/political viewpoint that it is impenetrable, even to itself (Colleran, 2012, pp.107-115).

Colleran suggests Atta is an "altruistic suicide." Dr. Noha Farouk Abdelaziz writes "my Atta" is a product of a "culture of cruelty," manipulated by religious leaders (Abdelaziz, 2014, pp.255-268). Dr. Hossam Mahmoud Alashqar argues I contribute to negative Western attitudes towards Islam post-9/11, framing Muslims as "enemy within," reiterating Said's *Orientalism* (Alashqar, 2024, pp.256-281). This defense of Islamic culture against reductions is understandable, especially after Trump's travel ban.

My intention was not to stereotype Islam or reduce Muslim characters, but rather to dramatize the intersection of ideology, state power, and personal vulnerability. By staging Atta as a figure caught between systemic failures—Bush's misguided war in Iraq, the loosening of security protocols under Obama, and the manipulations of religious zealots—I sought to interrogate how political choices and cultural narratives can converge to produce violence, rather than to reinforce Orientalist caricatures.

Three Nights in Prague followed *The Haunting of Jim Crow*, a pendulum swing from a domestic locale to foreign, affirmation to nihilism. Their commonality is secrecy and sexuality: Atta's closeted lust and Thurmond's. Prague's international characters are prone to violence. Atta's published shapes his character. Having no American characters, events adumbrate

America’s 9/11 targeting. Al Qaeda’s mission was a major U.S. intelligence failure. Appraising the attack ahead of time through speculation and cultural prisms are eye-opening; dissertations from Egypt, Belgium, and the U.S. respectfully question the fairness of the play’s portrait of a terrorist (Arnsperger, 2013; Maertens, 2017; Muhammadi, 2019).

Conclusion: Political Writing through the Paradigm Shifts

The contributions articulate a dramaturgical model reflecting existential restlessness that has accompanied my writing for more than five decades. This discomfort has continually compelled me to ask why individuals who consider themselves decent repeatedly participate in, excuse, or enable systemic harm. Events, political shifts in the excessive Trump era, and personal experience have intensified the urgency of these questions without resolving them.

I remain fixated on the manifestations of political malfeasance and evil—within our cultures, and across our national identities. I am persistently beset by a moral paradox: how the forces of good so often enable the forces of evil. This concern is not merely contemporary; it is a timeless philosophical dilemma, dating back to Socratic inquiry, particularly the notion of virtue ethics. The Socratic paradox proposes that wrongdoing arises from ignorance of the good—that if one truly knew what was right, one would have no reason to choose evil (Smith Pangle, 2014, p.10). Political theatre invariably stages this tension between moral clarity and moral collapse—whether at the Shakespearean level of grandeur or in the compressed intimacy of the chamber play.

In recent years, universities have increasingly introduced courses explicitly dedicated to political theatre—Lancaster University’s “MA in Theatre for Social, Political and Environmental

Change," Princeton's "International Theatre: Plays and Politics," and the University of Chicago's "Eight Great Political Plays" stand as notable examples. Nonetheless, these offerings remain relatively niche—typically housed within specialty programs or as elective modules. The broader theatre curriculum, as evidenced by dramaturgy minors at institutions like NYU Tisch, continues to foreground social justice themes—race, gender, LGBTQ+ performance, and activism—rather than political drama in its stricter sense: Cold War conflicts, authoritarianism, capitalism, environmental crisis, and labor struggles. These domains frequently intersect—questions of race, gender, and sexuality inflect labor, environmental, and authoritarian struggles—yet curricula tend to compartmentalize them as distinct categories of study.

Regrettably, there appears to be a retrenchment of free speech in America impacting theatre's voice. With Trump's second presidential term, U.S. media and cultural institutions have assumed an alarming defensive crouch. At the end of 2024, ABC TV settled with Trump on litigation. CBS TV followed suit settling with Trump after a *60 Minutes* broadcast. The national climate has been bruised in the cloaked civil war over cultural values. The National Endowment for the Arts continues to be attacked by Trump and his proxies (Bowley, 2021). Further, Trump overhauled the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts' board, assuming the chair's role and altering Smithsonian exhibitions on slavery plus his two impeachments.

Across the arc of my theatrical writing, I have advocated for individual liberties and rights. Additionally, I have promoted a durable concept of feminism—led by the play and opera *Lilith*, and reinforced by female-centered dramas such as *Saint Simone*, *Private Parties*, *Ladies of Fisher Cove*, *A Daring Bride*, and my opera *Lear on the 2nd Floor*. In each, I track women who enact self-empowerment in the face of systemic opposition and inhospitable environments.

Within this dramaturgy, the Jewish protagonist and the female protagonist share a profound commonality when confronting adversarial environments.

My plays exploring Jewish rooted identity, and secondarily the Jewish diaspora's connection to Israel, position me as a Jewish American dramatist. My Jewish protagonists by and large are American-born advantaged and highly educated. It is an open question whether my stage work ultimately supports or disrupts Jewish cultural and ideological narratives in the U.S. Far more disturbing is the rise of antisemitism both domestically and globally since the outbreak of war in Gaza in 2023. Jewish security is once again under moral scrutiny in the early 21st century, as pundits and generations grapple with whether Zionism is synonymous with Judaism—or merely a linked symbol, like a matching cufflink.

As I finalize this document, I return to a question that underlies my submitted works: have I been comprehensive and cogent in dramatizing explosive political ideas while preserving sufficient ambiguity to tell stories without neat resolution? Through this thesis, I examine the roots of my ongoing inquiry into why ostensibly virtuous individuals commit irreversible, harmful choices, linking personal restlessness to broader dramaturgical explorations of Arendt's unthought evil. The mystery underlining this quest coincides with a hunger for live drama. The mystique of theatre is found in the stage's impermanence, which mirrors our short life span we are given. Serious playwrights revere temporality of stagecraft which matches the everchanging winds of our political and existential crises.

There is, inevitably, a degree of journalism in political playwriting. The playwright assembles dramatic evidence while striving to remove overt editorializing—leaving the audience to assess the case. If my plays have highlighted political inflection points as constellations of light, then perhaps their collective impact speaks to a body politic still arguing for a more secure and tolerant world. I am aware that any perceived epiphany in this work may be challenged—or misaligned—by critics, artists, and fellow dramaturgs.

In closing, the body of work I have presented engages, and at least implicitly condemns, racism, sexism, religious bigotry, and social injustice. My published writing advocates for a moral universe, however tenuous that tilt may seem amid the growing infection of evil. Much like quantum mechanics proposes duality between particle and wave, the moral essence of civilization modulates constantly between good and evil. The body politics of my work responds to intolerance and antisemitism I have encountered across four continents. These ethical dilemmas are inherent to human psychology, manifesting as self-reinforcing cycles of complicity—analogous to Arendt's concept of modern evil—that my dramaturgy externalizes through character conflicts. Damaged souls caught in that crossfire have seared their imprint onto my theatrical imagination.

In the national compendium from St. James Press, *Contemporary American Dramatists,* theatre critic M. Elizabeth Osborn summarizes five Havis plays in her essay on my theatre profile, and in her second paragraph she states:

> Havis is a cryptic storyteller. Critic James Leverett wrote of one play that characters ‘encounter one another in circumstances that are fraught but far from clear.’ This is generally true, and the playwright’s elegant and elliptical language resists reduction to straightforward meaning or moral (Osborn, 1994, pp.252-255).

Osborn’s remarks point to this dramaturgical truth I continue to rediscover in recent years. Despite my serrated characterizations and opaque finales, *Anivus b’rachok, achzariyus b’karov* informs each dramatic canvas. As a dramatist, I aspire to narratives that envision ethical sanity amid geopolitical madness; unchecked future trajectories of division and technology could undermine societal sustainability, as probed in my plays.

Political philosopher Hannah Arendt serves as a North Star in understanding humanity's capacity for banal evil: *"The sad truth is that most evil is done by people who never make up their minds to be or do either good or evil"* (Arendt, 1971, p.181). Her insights, especially through the Eichmann analysis, have seeped into my dramaturgy—initially by osmosis, and later through conscious study. Just as indispensable is Emmanuel Levinas, whose philosophy of ethical encounter has shaped the core dynamics of oppositional stage characters. Levinas advances an ethical vision in which encountering the 'Other' reveals infinite moral responsibility beyond self-interest, a principle I actively apply when dramatizing relational responsibility within political conflict. Levinas, in alliance with Martin Buber's metaphysical dialogue in *I and Thou*, affirmed a vision that sees moral potential in the "other." While the "other" may terrify us—whether it be Lilith haunting Eve, or the Moroccan colonel tormenting the Jewish architect—we can still choose to respond with integrity, decency, and human wisdom.

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