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Theatre and Narrative: the Example of Contemporary Monologic Plays

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Introduction

- 1 Recent decades have seen a real vogue for solitary speeches in theatre, with plays that are either part of sets (*Chambres/Rooms* by Philippe Minyana [1993; *Monologues* by François Billeldoux [1996]) or independent works: *La Nuit juste avant les forêts/The Night Just Before the Forests* by Bernard-Marie Koltès (1988), *Le Petit Bois/The Little Wood* by Eugène Iurif (1990), *The Great Disaster* by Patrick Kermann (1999), *Face à la mère/Facing Mother* by Jean-René Lemoine (2006), and *Le Mardi à Monoprix* translated as *Tuesday at Tesco's* by Emmanuel Darley (2009), to quote just a few examples. This interest in theatrical monologue is shared by many directors and actors, who, as described by Hans-Thies Lehmann (2002) about "monologies", favour the monological presentation of classical dramas or narrative texts (Heiner Goebbels, *Prometheus ou le débarquement désastreux/Prometheus or the Hapless Landing* [1993], Robert Wilson, *Hamlet -A monologue* [1994]) as well as the solos performed by actors alone on stage (Philippe Caubère and the 11 episodes of *Roman d'un acteur/Novel of an Actor*, 1993, Robert Lepage, and his five solo shows, including *Elseneur/Elsinore*, 1997). Clearly, these dramatic forms are far from respecting the proper ordering of the "beautiful animal" as described by Aristotle (unity of the plot, ordered and completed progression of the action, chronological temporal development, explicit causality of sequencing). This is because telling your own life story tends to be antidramatic for at least two reasons. On the one hand, based on Aristotle's theory, drama is primarily action and not narration, with characters who act while speaking. On the other hand, putting on this type of play involves an effort in terms of dramatic concentration, making it difficult to extend the diegesis over an entire lifetime, contrary to the novel. One of the solutions to overcoming these

contradictions is for the character to both talk and tell a tale, thereby assuming the double role of “narrating figure” and “narrated character” in the form of the “recollecting character”. In this sense, “monologue plays” are fairly emblematic of texts where the narrative takes precedence over the action.

- 2 In order to better understand the status of these plays, it seems to me that it would be useful to review the characteristics of classic monologues, particularly in tragedies. Without underestimating the changes to the status of the monologue during the seventeenth century, Jacques Scherer (1950) and Christophe Triau (2009), note the following characteristics: informative (providing the diegetic information necessary to understanding the plot), expressive or vocative (lyrical, even pathetic unveiling of sentiment; challenging of an object or a personified feeling), deliberative (exposing an alternative in a so-called “dilemma” monologue), emblematic (character identification with their mythological imago, through either confirmation or transgression), dramaturgical (commentary on the action, transition between scenes). In addition, the monologue showcases the actor's declamatory skills. Finally, I would note that the monologue can be compared, through its internal dialogue, to a tirade, a stanza or an aside. Although the monologue of classical dramaturgy is subject to the requirements of verisimilitude and interlocution, with experiments in symbolism and surrealism through to contemporary plays, the monologue has gradually transformed the modes of composition of the “absolute drama” described by Peter Szondi (1983).
- 3 To show this, I have chosen three phenomena that characterise these plays: narrative, dialogism and poetics. Thus, in the first instance, I will show how these texts are true narratives, since the fable, resembling the novel in this respect, is no longer subject to a strictly chronological temporal development. Through the alternation between narration and monstration, the character is able to travel continuously between different chronotopes, past, present and even future.
- 4 In the second instance, we will see that the character's solitude is not necessarily antidramatic since these monologues are highly polyphonic. Their advantage is to bring many characters to life and this is an indication of a process that has been under way for several years, bringing theatre closer to the novel. The narrating character makes a multitude of voices heard, whether their own at different times in their lives or those of other characters present in their existence. This dialogue may be interlocutory (the character addresses another person or sometimes even the spectator), interdiscursive (the words spoken by the characters during the narration of past scenes) or auto-dialogical (the reflexive loops during which the character returns to what they said earlier).
- 5 Finally, I will show that these three plays, to varying degrees, each have a specific internal rhythm created by the use of repetition, the effects of which are both elegiac and melodic.
- 6 To maintain a clear focus, I have limited my body of work to just three plays: *The Night Just Before the Forests*, *Facing Mother*, and *The Great Disaster*.

Narration

- 7 In terms of their composition, these genres of plays, described by Sarrazac (1989) as “confessional monologues”, are long verbal streams in narrative form (63 pages for

Koltès, 54 pages for Lemoine and 45 pages for Kermann). In all three cases, the narrating character is addressing an interlocutor with a different status. With Koltès, the other character is assumed to be present but remains silent, as shown by the omnipresence of pronouns of address. “You” is used in the opening and repeated continuously thereafter (“you were turning the street corner when I saw you” [p. 7]; “I can see quite well that you’re too trusting, impulsive that you are, you trust everybody” [p. 18]). In Lemoine’s play, the monologue begins with a prologue during which it is explained that the following text is addressed to the author’s late mother, murdered by Duvalier’s henchmen in Haiti. This is explicit at different points in the play: “I miss you, mum, I miss you. I wish you were here” (p. 17), “Mother, I forgive you. And I ask for your forgiveness” (p. 56). But the prologue also stresses – for reasons of meta-theatricality – that the text will be heard by additional ‘receivers’ or spectators (“It took me three years of stillness, three years in a deep coma, before I could ask you to meet me here in this shady place, in front of this silent assembly”, p. 12). In Kermann’s work, in the absence of a direct form of address, the monologue is assumed to be directed towards the additional receiver, although we cannot be certain. In all three cases, the characters are placed in a mimetic present, from which they break off into different chronotopes. For Koltès, the immediate spatio-temporal framework in which the narrating character is located is vague to the point that critics disagree as to where it is. While Sarrazac (1996) and Ubersfeld (1999) lean towards a “street corner”, Benhamou (2001) places the scene inside a “café”. The main tense is the present, establishing a system with the use of temporal deictics such as “now” (13 occurrences) and more rarely “at the moment” and “today”. With “now” the temporal span of reference is of variable length, since it can be paraphrased as “right now” (“now that we’re here”, p. 7) and “nowadays” (“I’m no longer working”, p. 31). Note the significant number of uses of *tout à l’heure*, which can mean “earlier” or “later” in French. It is used six times to refer to either the near past or the near future, depending on the case (“when I was getting washed earlier”, p. 11; “we’ll go and see where it was later”, p. 42). The speaker engages in an intense commentary, expressed not only through the omnipresent of the enunciation (“I’ve got this idea, brother, for those like you and me who have no money and no job”, p. 14), but also through the future and the conditional. The first relates to the speaker’s conjectures on his future, whether in terms of his material living conditions (“the moment we settle down somewhere, I’ll take everything off, this is why I’m looking for a room,” p. 8) or his political projects (“until my idea for an international union has finally won [...] it’ll be the rats’ turn to cum, brother, it’ll be our turn”, p. 26). The second relates to enunciations of the unfulfilled or potential, reflecting reasoning thought. In this case, it takes the form of supposition (“they would give me some kind of cottage [...] when I get in there, me, with nothing whatsoever and in no time”, p. 10), counterfactuality (“it must be someplace else, nobody around, no more this question of money and this nasty rain”, p. 47) or hypothesis (“if only she’d kept her mouth shut, I’d never have known what a mouth like this could spit”, p. 22). Concerning the spatial location, it is mainly referred to through deictics, primarily “here” (18 occurrences) or less often, “there” (three occurrences) : “(if it wasn’t a question of money), and take off and leave this place (if we knew where to go), and be in a room, pal, where I could talk, here, I cannot bring myself to say what I must say to you”, p. 47); “and now that we’re here, I don’t want to look at myself”, p. 7). It is true that the reference differs, depending on whether they are primary or reported enunciations (“you don’t tell her your name, you say to her: where we go? she says to

you: where you want to go? we stay here, right?" p. 34). The deictic "here" is in fact geometrically variable. Depending on the context, it can be inferred to mean the country, the neighbourhood, the street or the café with its basement toilets: "I'm not really from here – they did notice for sure [...] makes you think they're all pricks, those French, can't even imagine", p. 10; [...] even there, it's full of them, like all around here, all the way to the hotels – one hundred thousand mirrors looking at you, you've got to look out for them", p. 8; "it's difficult not to look at yourself, even when you don't want to, so many mirrors are hanging all around here, in the cafés, in the hotels, they must be left behind, like now that we're here" p. 8; "I saw you turn the street corner [...] there's nothing good in walking around here tonight, for you or for me", p. 12; "despite all the pricks left in the street, in the cafés, in the basements of the cafés, here, everywhere", p. 12; "I went up again, just the time to take a piss in my wet clothes", p. 7. Finally, it is true that the speaker helps us to form an idea of the places in question by means of short descriptive segments introduced by the demonstrative: "you and me, walking around in this strange city," (p. 14); "there's nothing good in walking around here tonight" (p. 12); "a night like tonight" (p. 41); "despite the rain, despite this nasty light" (p. 28).

- 8 Let's agree to use the term diegetic time-space to refer to the fictional realities that are not visualised in the mimetic framework and that extend it to earlier, past horizons. In this "narrative theatre", in which narration alternates with monstration (reported dialogues) and deliberation (commentaries), the listener travels continuously in time and space. At the beginning and end of the play, the speaker makes similar remarks about his situation, so we understand that the soliloquy is taking place primarily during a relatively brief encounter ("– in my wet clothes, I'll stay like this until I find a room" [p. 7]; "I need a room so bad and I'm soaking wet" [p. 63]). In the interval, the speaker interrupts himself with a multitude of analeptic returns to different diegetic chronotopes, at varying distances from the present of the enunciation. This is because the speaker is also a narrator, looking back on his past through an embryonic biography. To do this, he uses micro-narratives whose content – resembling "screen memories" – may or may not be real. These narratives are sometimes iterative ("every night" [p. 28], "when I worked" [p. 31]), but primarily singulative ("one night, by chance" [p. 34]). In terms of time, the framework is indeterminate when referring to a distant past ("when I saw her" [p. 30], "when I worked" [p. 31]), but sets fairly precise limits on the temporal sequence preceding the encounter ("during the day" [p. 36], "in the early evening" [p. 56]). At the spatial level, in contrast to the mimetic "here", "there" is the characteristic marker of these different places ("they end up back here and I end up back there, – back there where everything that moves is hiding" [p. 51]). With the exception of the allusion to Nicaragua (pp. 48–52), these micro-narratives concern the past life of the speaker but follow a disordered stream of consciousness rather than being in chronological order. Thus the "city" that can be inferred to represent Paris is mentioned by the speaker when he discusses, in turn, the meeting with the blonde girl in a café (pp. 20–26), his job in the factory (p. 19), the episode involving Mama by the river (pp. 34–36), the whore in the cemetery (pp. 37–38), the red-light district and the whore on the fourth floor (pp. 41–42 and 45–46). Events taking place at different points in the evening are also discussed: the fight with the thugs (p. 56), his wanderings through the metro corridors (p. 60), the rain and the search for a hotel (p. 7), or the crowd in the basement toilets of a café (pp. 7, 10 and 11). Note that the speaker also returns several times to the moment of his meeting with the addressee

(pp. 7, 8, 12, 15, 30 and 32) and that he refers in turn to the scheming of the “technical bastards” (p. 19) and to his plans for an international trade union (pp. 26 and 27). The whole is dominated by a dysphoric vision (the night, the rain, the solitude). Note that Koltès seeks to make familiar places seem strange, describing them as the haunts of enigmatic characters living on the fringes of society (the “girl on a bridge” [p. 34] or “that crazy whore” [p. 38]). These diegetic episodes are like verbal drawers expressed in the French by the historic past tense combined with the imperfect (“I had enough money for us drinking beers all you wanted all night long and be OK but they took it from me” [p. 57]). In some of the stories, the facts are told in the form of a hypotyposis in the present narrative tense: “Like that woman who dropped dead alright from swallowing earth, she goes to the cemetery, she digs by the graves, she takes the earth in her hands, the deepest earth, and swallows it” (p. 38).

- 9 In Lemoine's work, the monologue is divided into three “movements” during which the narrator, a man without a surname, looks back on his past. This is illustrated through the many occurrences of the verb “to remember” (“If I remember rightly, it was in a theatre where there was an actors’ workshop” [p. 13], “If I remember rightly, up to the age of twenty, I was your son” [p. 31]). At the same time, the narrator makes allusions to the act of remembrance (“And still the same scene keeps playing in my mind” [p. 43], “Scratching my memory to the bone” [p. 27]). He does this through an effort of memory or by using photographs and family correspondence (“This house was my mother's house, and before that, my grandparents' house. I used to sit on the floor among the relics. Hours went by like so many beads on a rosary, in the uninterrupted discovery of a life from which I was absent. I read the letters and the postcards, I looked at the photos, I went through my grandfather's diaries.” [p. 23]). The author seeks to describe his relationship with his mother through episodes from his childhood and adolescence, as well as through the exile he experienced with his sister and his mother, but without his absent father. Alongside the description he is trying to give of his state of mind since the death of his mother three years previously (p. 12), the monologue is a love song to his mother, tinged with regret at never having found the words to tell her while she was alive how much he loved her despite their differences. Set in a spatio-temporal framework that is not clearly described, the narrator recounts what he has been through since that fateful day (p. 13). From what he says, we understand that he has decided to talk to his mother three years after her death (“It took me three years of stillness, three years in a deep coma, before I could ask you to meet me here” [p. 12]) and we infer that the duration of the mimetic chronotope is three months. The author alludes in turn to summer and autumn (“I am writing to you in the heat of summer” [*ibid.*], “Here, summer is hot and sultry. The days are still, waiting for the storm. I eat white peaches, go to bed late, say little, read a few pages of a novel, sometimes a fly comes in through the window, buzzes around desperately, then flits off again towards the blue horizon” [p. 34], “Autumn has arrived suddenly. The fog sometimes clears. The rains are often torrential. The wind is dying down. Everything is fraying and unravelling” [p. 55]). The present is the dominant temporal drawer, providing the accompaniment for a commentary that is both expressive (“I no longer have a horizon” [p. 29], “I can’t do this any more” [p. 49], “I don't know any more” [p. 23]) and reflexive (“Sometimes I wonder how I endured it. You feel that you can’t go on for another moment, and yet you do” [p. 23]). They all talk about how difficult it is to mourn. There are few spatial deictics (“Here summer is hot and sultry” [p. 34]) or temporal deictics (“I feel very lonely now” [p. 18], “Three weeks went by and then, one day, here

in this theatre, I heard my sister crying, telling me that you were dead” [p. 28]) to configure the mimetic framework. The starting point of the narrative is the moment the narrator learns of his mother's death (p. 13). It continues with recollections of the past that overturn the chronological order of events since they are interspersed with flashbacks and an ellipse of several years. (“Ten years have gone by” [p. 25]). In this way, we witness a number of episodes, including his mother's funeral in Santa Rosa de Lima (pp. 15–17), his childhood in Africa (p. 19), his arrival in Belgium (p. 20), the second part of his account of the funeral (pp. 22–24), the flashback to Haiti ten years earlier (pp. 25–26), his childhood in Belgium (pp. 31–34), the holidays in the Far East to see his expatriate father (p. 35), the subsequent years in Belgium (pp. 35–38), a flashback to the day of the funeral (p. 39), the stay in France (p. 45), the return to Fort-de-France (pp. 46–50), and then to Belgium (p. 52). Events are recounted primarily in the past tense with the French imperfect tense for the backdrop: “We opened the shuttered doors – letting the light flood into the house. The soft morning light lit up the mahogany furniture, forming diagonal lines on the colourful scrolling of the tiles” [p. 21]). In some cases the description is preceded by a singular temporal frame (“One morning, after the funeral”, p. 39; “One day, I can't remember when exactly” [p. 39]), alternating with iterative scenes (“On Sundays, the three of us would go to church, where I would watch you pray, and then you would take us to the pictures. [...] [...] Every term, I would bring you your ration of school reports” [p. 33]) One scene is invented rather than remembered, the one where the character, in total empathy with his mother, imagines how she was murdered. This scene takes the form of a hypotyposis written in the present tense (“And still, the same scene keeps playing in my mind, one that I have recreated, I want to let it drift away, like a cloud in the sky, but it keeps coming back, what time is it? how many of them are there? three, maybe four, they enter the house. She wakes up. She hears footsteps on the stairs. She gets up. They are already standing in front of her [...] they beat her, she fights back, she is tall and strong despite her age...” [p. 43]). Here, Lemoine paints a picture of the dictatorial regime of Duvalier, President of the Republic of Haiti between 1971 and 1986. Finally, in the epilogue, the narrator talks directly to his mother. He appears to gain a sense of peace, becoming reconciled to the death of his mother and accompanying her in thought beyond the grave.

- 10 In Kermann's play, the title (*The Great Disaster*) refers to the sinking of the Titanic “on 14 April 1912 at 11.40 p.m.”, as specified by the narrator, Giovanni Pastore, who went down with the ship. In this monologue from beyond the grave, Pastore tells us about his childhood in the mountains of Friuli and the difficulties of his life as an immigrant looking for work in France, Switzerland and Germany. After sneaking on board the Titanic as a stowaway, he washes dishes before going down with the ship in the “glacial waters” of the North Atlantic, which are also those of the “selfish calculation” described by Brecht in his well-known quote. Kermann takes this event, which was global news at the time, and turns it into a libertarian fable, in which it is confirmed that “History is first and foremost the history of class conflict” (Brecht again). Unlike in the two previous plays, Kermann's monologue can be considered an “epitaph play” (Sarrazac, 1989) or a kind of haunting, given that the narrator is dead at the moment of speaking. Further, one of the essential qualities of ghosts is their knowledge of the past, their mastery of memory and remembrance.

I wasn't quite ten when she left the village for the city
we'd go back together sometimes because we lived higher up in the mountains

she used to wear a blue skirt in summer

I remember. (p. 34)

I Giovanni Pastore, I remember

not my fault

– Giovanni has a phenomenal memory, the priest said to Mamma, if only he would take a little trouble he remembers everything but not what he should. (p. 14)

- 11 The character's faculty of recollection enables him to remember events in the slightest detail, as illustrated by the long lists in which he counts and calculates, not without a certain black humour at times, the dead and the survivors or, on several occasions, the supplies and foodstuffs carried by the Titanic, this "luxury liner", thus fulfilling his testimonial function:

So

I remember the 29 boilers

the 800 crates of nuts

the 5 grand pianos

the 8 dozen tennis balls intended for R.F. Downey and Company

the 15,000 bottles of beer

the 7.7 tonnes of tomatoes

the cask of porcelain for Tiffany's in New York

the trousseau of Eleanor Widener who was going to get married in the States

the small metal box belonging to Major Peuchen (already married)

the 35,000 fresh eggs (what an omelette)

the ice-making machine on deck G

Ryerson's 16 trunks

the wicker armchairs from the Parisian Café

the 180 crates of oranges and 80 crates of grapefruit

etc. (p. 15)

- 12 Another characteristic of the traditional ghost is its power to bridge the distance between past and future and to predict events to come. This is why Giovanni who, remember, died on 14 April 1912, has the gift of clairvoyance and foresight. He knows that Gatti, a restaurant manager on the Titanic, who hired him for the crossing, escaped the shipwreck and settled in New York:

Because Mr. Gatti came out of it alive

I hear he even has a pizzeria on 10th Avenue

it's better to die a manager (p. 13)

- 13 Giovanni announces the end of the boom years of the *Belle Époque* and warns that the triumph of capitalism will lead to the butchery of World War One and the horror of the concentration camps of World War Two:

After the war to end all wars we said

no we can't go on like this

thousands and thousands of soldiers in the mud

legs shattered, guts spilling out

damaged lungs

trenches full of corpses

quickly close them up

and in '45 when they came back

some

skeletal

emaciated faces

numbers tattooed on their arms

with empty eyes that had seen what nobody could ever have

imagined seeing

horror and worse than death
 the end of an era
 finally
 this is what I Giovanni Pastore dream of
 because sometimes I dream
 of past things
 of things that have yet to come
 I dream
 vestiges of my childhood in the mountains looking after
 the ewes
 straight away I start dreaming dark dreams
 that I can only talk about at night.” (p. 10)

- 14 Giovanni also foresees, such is his power of veridiction, the rise of fascism in Italy and its continuation with the terrorist attack on Bologna railway station (1980), attributed to a neo-fascist group.

Even Marcello
 when he went into the mountains to join the resistance
 he shot and killed three Germans as they were packing their bags.
 it made up for the Agnelis denounced by Roberto for
 antifascist activities
 [...]
 Marcello's son
 Giovanni like me
 he's part of national history
 Bologna railway station
 dozens dead, injured people everywhere
 he was there
 he has a plaque too. (p. 37)

- 15 The immediate spatio-temporal framework in which the monologue takes place is more or less deterritorialised (“a voice from the bottom of the ocean”). We have to recognise this is a “ceremonial space” that cannot be realistically represented by the actor playing this role. The present is the reference tense for this personal enunciation (“I Giovanni Pastore, I love numbers”; “I, Giovanni Pastore I remember”). Referring to diegetic time-space, we can see that the character travels continuously between different chronotopes. Kermann has planned his play in 10 sequences that largely correspond to the tragic night of the shipwreck. The event is narrated in the historic present tense with scenes sometimes expanded in the form of hypotyposis:

But I Giovanni Pastore was there
 saw everything heard everything
 the dull rumblings
 the passengers falling over
 the pushing and shoving, the punches and pistol shots
 and the whole ship tipping into the sea
 the smokestack snapping in half in a cloud
 of sparks
 no time to sing
 the din and the creaking
 men throwing themselves into the lifeboats
 the bubbling and swirling sea
 the Titanic standing on its head, ass in the air. (p. 44)

- 16 During his narrative, the ghost narrator proves his extrahuman omniscience by showing that he has the ability, like the hero of *The Devil Upon Two Sticks*, to diegetise

different parts of the ship to listen in on passengers' conversations or even to penetrate their minds.

And on the top deck
I can see them
party dancing music light
soon geschlossen
bedtime for everybody
no matter who with or where
and hey waiter more champagne
- allow me miss let me assure you that
it's the very best of champagnes no after-effects in the morning isn't that true
Charles. (p. 8)

17 (When the ship hits the iceberg):

some heard something but what exactly
a strong tremor thinks the head baker as he prepares the
cream puffs for next day
a little bump like the boats docking on Lake Zürich
imagines Miss Marguerite
Frolicher, who is accompanying her father on a business trip. (p. 9)

18 The story of the shipwreck is interspersed with short analeptical digressions, going back to the euphoric world of Giovanni's childhood in the mountains of Friuli (sequences 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9 and 10), to his travels through Europe in search of work (sequence 5) and to the day when he boarded the Titanic during its stopover in Cherbourg (sequence 2). They are expressed from an enunciative standpoint by the French past tense and imperfect:

I Giovanni Pastore
one day I came down from my mountain
from my green pastures with their snow-covered peaks
I Giovanni Pastore spent twenty years of my life
growing up amongst the wild grass
fishing in the stream for silver trout
running after butterflies with their blue wings
listening to the east wind that brings the rain clouds
twenty years [...]. (p. 21)
Mamma I'm leaving Mamma I love you
so she gave me a hug.
[...]
and I left
without looking back
[...]
I took my stick and walked
from town to town
more and more people on the roads
[...]
so we kept walking
our steps guided by rumours
in France yes in France there is work
[...]
not in Switzerland either
just passing through
that moustache looked just too dirty
I shaved it off
[...]

Gatti told me in Cherbourg
 man to man
 – Giovanni I admit it won't be easy but I believe
 that you could achieve something particularly there where
 there's still so much to be done.
 (pp. 22, 23, 24 and 25)

- 19 The micro-narratives, some of which are repeated over and over again, are expressed through an intense commentary, allowing the narrator, for example, to take a humorous approach to his tragic fate, since he is becoming part of posterity by hitting the headlines and, at the same time, making his Mamma proud (p. 16).

But what reassures me is that in all this
 only Giovanni was the victim of an iceberg
 a little ice cube of nothing at all
 quite a story
 in which I Giovanni Pastore play the leading role.
 people everywhere were talking about it
 and Mamma who always said
 Giovanni you are my youngest
 I love you my Gianni
 but I know you'll never come to anything
 [...]
 ah if only she could see me now
 on the Titanic going down into legend
 she would be proud of her little
 son Gianni on the White Star Line going to the States.

Dialogism

- 20 The solitude of the narrating character, both “listener” and “speaker” as described by Samuel Beckett in *Solo* and *That Time*, does not stop him from making a multitude of voices heard, whether his own at different times in his life or those of others. Thus, in all three plays the dialogical aspect (Bres, 2005) is important, with the character providing many instances of “discourse other” (Authier-Revuz, 2004) heard, combining them with the continuous flow of the speaker's voice. This heterogeneity is both shown through other people's discourse in different forms and “constitutive” in the sense that all verbal production can be crossed by words or thoughts that are ‘other’. The speaker is not necessarily aware of the existence of these voices (individual or collective) of which they are the ventriloquist spokesperson. It is in this sense that Jean-Marie Piemme (1994) rightly says: “You can never reduce the monologue to someone speaking alone. The actor is certainly alone on stage, but their discourse is dialogical. They are either talking to another person or assuming the words of others”.
- 21 In Koltès's play, concerning the dialogism that is “shown”, it is interlocutory in the first instance, with the remarks made directly to the interlocutor (“say nothing, do not move, I look at you, I love you, brother”, p. 63). We shall take a closer look, however, at the interdiscursive dialogism in the form of representations of statements reported by the speaker, whether referring to his own words or echoing the words of other characters (“I turn around and say: – OK don't be pricks”, p. 58; “she says, leaning over the river: I never leave it, I go from one bank to the other”, p. 35). The characters involved in these voices are anonymous, whether individual (the addressee [p. 7]; the “bitch” [p. 20]; “mama” [p. 34]; the “crazy looking whore” [p. 42]; the “thugs” in the

metro [p. 57]) or collective (the “French pricks” [p. 11]; the “clan of cheats” [p. 19]). In any case, as we have seen, they are not strongly indexed. To give them speech, Koltès uses different forms of reported discourse. Firstly, he uses direct discourse extensively. He creates an enunciative heterogeneity based on alternating planes of enunciation (people, time and space) between reported speech and reporting speech. Depending on whether the speaker is narrating, commenting or conjecturing, we find the following configurations in the French tenses: narrative present + present (p. 58); imperfect + present (p. 11); past tense + present (p. 31); present + present (p. 39); imperfect + future (p. 23); future + future (p. 27); conditional + future (p. 47). But the work of Koltès shows little linguistic heterogeneity insofar as the linguistic register of the speaker is the same as that of the characters whose words he reports. As a result, it is sometimes difficult to distinguish between levels of enunciation (dialogue or commentary), as shown by the following example: “I thought they were invisible, hiding up there [...] the little clan of technical bastards who decide everything: to the factory and be quiet!, (and the factory, me, never!), to the factory and shut your mouth! (and what if my mouth, I open it?), to the factory, shut your mouth, and we get the last word, the small group of fuckers deciding for us” (p. 19). Direct discourse is most often introduced by a verb of speech (“to say”, “to ask”, “to shout”) with a preference for the verb “to say” placed before or, more rarely, after the reported words (“I turn round and say: – OK, don’t be pricks, you will be my guests” [p. 58]; “the new power, we’re it, she said to me” [p. 23]). There are just as many reported thoughts and representations of inner speech introduced by the verbs “to think”, “to tell oneself”, “to wonder” and the expression “to have the idea of”, whether they concern the speaker (“I was thinking: mine is from someplace else and I must hide it” [p. 30]; “I said to myself: every other place is the same” [p. 51]; “I have an idea to tell you ...: [...] no money, no job, this doesn’t make things easy” [p. 13]) or other characters (“even whores are becoming risky, everybody’s thinking” [p. 43]; “where to go? where to go? says everyone to himself [...] where to go, now, where to go, that’s what they’re all wondering” [*ibid.*]). Direct discourse can also be shown by indicators present in the cotext (mention of a human presence, implied or presupposed in the act of speech, mention of verbal or non-verbal behaviour... (“and I could hear them [...] - what’s he doing” [p. 11]; “the little clan of technical bastards who decide everything: to the factory and be quiet!” (p. 19); “and when I approached her: you have a light” [p. 21]; “who gave her the recipe: you go to the cemetery” [p. 46]...)). To introduce other people’s discourse in direct speech, Koltès does not use typographical quotation marks. In most cases (but not always) he uses a punctuation mark, either a colon or hyphen: “I said to myself: there’s nothing easier than feeling to which direction blows the wind” (p. 29); “they don’t say anything like they didn’t see me, – OK, don’t be pricks, you give me back my cash [...] and we’ll keep it going together –, they keep looking at each other” (p. 59), or a combination of both: “I turn round and say: – OK, don’t be pricks, you will be my guests [...] we won’t get bored to tears” (p. 58). It is not uncommon for the dialogue to be reported without an introductory verb, in the primary enunciation (“I’m all for getting some and then take off: does that work for you? Correct!” [p. 39]) or in dashes (“she still didn’t recognise who I was in that strange café – come with us, kitty – and I’d have gone with her” [p. 24]). Last, we can find a few echoes, whether they are consensual (“and: correct? correct!” p. 41) or dissensual (“to the factory and shut your mouth! (and what if my mouth, I open it?)”, p. 19).

- 22 Sometimes the speaker uses direct dialogue in the form of true dialogical scenes, as found in conversational narratives:

They start talking louder and louder for everybody to hear, still not looking at me: what is it he wants this guy? he's got beef with us or what? what kind of a guy is this? why's he turning into a pain? – they push me against the door; we take this fag down at the next stop and smash his face –, so me, I say to them: OK, give me back my cash, then, we're all good – but they say: this fag, let him wait, then, we'll smash his face – nobody reacts. (p. 58)

- 23 In all cases, these reported statements or thoughts are essentially based on the character's diegetic past. Alongside this reminder of previous discourse we must add the 'discourse other' of the speaker, expressed in the form of factual and counterfactual statements. Factuality refers to the discourse corresponding to mimetic statements, in response to simulated words attributed to the addressee (“maybe you think: not me, but then, let me tell you: maybe I'm the one”, p. 15) or to a diegetic speaker (“to the factory and shut your mouths! (and what if my mouth, I open it?)”). Also factual is the proleptically projected discourse whose content is modalised as being possible, or even certain. The speaker imagines what he will say when is at the head of his union. “it'll be our time for not holding in any longer, brothers: skin them, now, get hard and cum, all you can” (p. 27). Counterfactuality refers to the discourse presented as hypothetical (“if you touch him, he asks you for a mile long if you're touching him for real”, p. 42), potential (“if they ask you: who's the foreigner with you? you answer: I don't know, I don't know, and if they insist, you say: I don't know him”, p. 28) or untrue (“I act like I don't understand [...] I'm for getting some good: is that cool? OK! –, and then take off, at ease, just before the big sentences, besides, one time is enough to know all there is to know”, p. 39). As we saw earlier, these simulated dialogues are used to support an argument or to give concrete form to an explanatory rationale linked to the communication objective of the monologue.
- 24 We can also see a few cases of indirect discourse and narrativised discourse: “if you touch him, he asks you for a mile long if you're touching him for real, before he smashes your face”, (p. 42); “they talk to me about a general with his soldiers circling the forest, back there, taking potshots at everything” (p. 50). Their effect is to linearise and homogenise the speaker's words by bringing together reported and reporting speech, contrary to the sharp cuts of reported discourse.
- 25 Ultimately, we can say that this dialogue adds momentum to the monologue, creating a tension between the centripetal force of the immediate interaction generated by the narrator's desire to find shelter in a room and explain himself, and the centrifugal force of interdiscursivity, opening up the account to other words spoken in other contexts.
- 26 At the same time, the “constitutive” dialogue takes into account the fact that the speaker is also the person speaking with the words of others. These more or less discernible reminders take the form of an allusion to a statement, whether or not the source is identified, or to data (facts, ideas, values) associated with words. In this way, a historian will detect, for example, that the play is written in the context of the protests of May 1968 – echoing the radical positions of the situationist libertarians (“it'll be our time for not holding in any longer, brothers: skin them, now, get hard and cum, all you can” p. 27). He will also note the adverse presence on the political spectrum of extreme right-wing movements, whether they call themselves “Occident” or “New Order”, and

their attacks on immigrants, which have lived on in the collective memory, as we saw in the previous chapter.

- 27 There is another form of constitutive and latent dialogism, relating to ‘multi-lingualism and the resulting plurivocality’ (Bakhtin, 1978), which is inherent to whole sections of the lexicon, in the sense that the words we use generally carry within them the meanings and contextual connotations of their use. Thus, in observing the vocabulary lent to the narrator, we can see the stylistically constructed representation of a type of popular ethos in the form of a male speaker who transgresses the limits of legitimate language as evidenced by the crude tone used (“shut the fuck up or I’ll smash your face”, p. 24) and the swearing (“but shit like an idiot I waited for one night”, p. 36; “but shit, she didn’t come, and she wouldn’t come anymore”, p. 37). Add to this the whole range of “familiar” or “unconventional” (Lodge, 1992) phrases such as “bawling”, “I’ve had it up to here”, “what I’d got myself into”, “a beautiful chick”, “strolling around,” etc., as well as the use of pejorative names (“pricks packed behind my back”, p. 10; “the worst kind of bastards”, p. 18; “fucking intersection”, p. 12; “the clan of technical bastards”, p. 19). The shared feature of these expressions is to denigrate the objects to which they refer and, through them, directly or by implication, the designated characters. The crude language draws upon the carnival forms (Bakhtin, 1970) of lower-body expression through obscenities that are primarily sexual (“get fucked over”, p. 25; “beat the crap out of us”, p. 20; “the small gang of bastards with faces of gang-bangers”, p. 22; “that’s when they watch us and come to fuck us over”, p. 26). Popular language is evident again in the display of “virile dispositions” (Bourdieu, 1983), whether illustrated by a penchant for verbal violence – as we have just seen – or physical violence (“back home, we throw a punch on the spot, no yelling, we’re not the type to be shy”, p. 42; “I want to throw punches, the woman up there hanging to the rail [...] and the Arab singing his thing just to himself, I want to punch him”, p. 61) or by a marked sexism. In this way, with the exception of the unknown girl on the bridge, women are referred to in pejorative terms (“bitches”, p. 26; “whores”, p. 41) or praised for their physical attributes alone (“I’d have said to her what she wanted to hear [...] because she was beautiful like it ain’t possible”, p. 25; “I’m the guy, me, instead of talking, to follow a pretty girl”, p. 55).
- 28 This “signum of class” (Guiraud, 1965) converges with the fictionalised thematisation of the situations (emigration and life on the fringes of urban life), the activities (nocturnal wanderings [p. 41], the allusion to drugs [p. 38]) and the behaviour (racism [p. 11], homophobia [p. 59]) with which the narrator is confronted.
- 29 The same phenomena of dialogisation can be found in the other two plays. I will therefore refer to them only briefly.
- 30 In *Facing Mother*, the dialogue is primarily interlocutory, since the narrator is talking continuously to his late mother (“Is it you haunting me, occupying the crossroads, the interstices of my existence, or is it me keeping you a prisoner in the net of memory, not letting you move on to a hypothetical resting place?” p. 29). In many of the instances of reported discourse, the dialogism is essentially interdiscursive. At several points, the narrator reports the discourse or writings of others using a direct style (“Cédoine came to open the gates, shouting – they’re here, they’re here!” p. 25; “I read the letters, the postcards [...]. Suddenly, after a series of blank pages, this sentence – yesterday I returned from Fort-Dimanche where I was imprisoned for five days”, p. 23). The author also uses an indirect style (“A brother came in and told me that I was wanted on the

phone”, p. 13), or even narrativised speech (“We chatted as if we had seen each other only the day before”, p. 40). Auto-dialogism is present continuously, expressed in the comments and remarks that the narrator makes to himself:

Am I making all this up?
Am I telling the truth? (p. 32).

- 31 Kermann’s play is a polyphony from beyond, corresponding to a great extent to the voices of the victims of the Titanic. However, this polyphony also resonates in the diegetic narratives, creating the effect of a real presence and leading us to forget that the people speaking are dead. To achieve this, Kermann makes extensive use of direct reported speech with the help of an introductory verb of communication (say, add, answer) but without speech marks.

- 32 Sometimes, Kermann also uses an opening hyphen or a series of hyphens to indicate a number of people speaking in turn:

Papa said
– Giovanni come and have a drink you're old enough now
don't believe what the priests say
I shook my head. (p. 22)
– a little champagne
– thank you
– did you see that Royal Dutch shares are going back up
– oh yesterday I bought five thousand shares in Guister good return
– did you know that some factories are on strike
– ah well
– doesn't matter, it won't affect the share price. (p. 30)

- 33 The ghostly voice of the narrator raises the anonymous voices from the seabed, mixing crew and passengers in a kind of murmur. This orchestration of multiple voices is similar to the “whispering silence” described by Emmanuel Levinas (1982), when you hold a shell to your ear, all symbolising the “negativity of voices”.

The gym has just closed
and it skims the flat surface of the sea
a gentle caress
gaining speed
twenty-one knots now
soon a change of watch
time for the workers to rest
warm up
more coal
chok
– the mail's sorted boss
– the bar is closed ladies and gentlemen
chok
– no sorry we're emptying the pool
– where will we live in America mama
and faster. (p. 7)

- 34 We can also note the presence of auto-dialogical passages in the form of reflexive loops that return to what the narrator says or external monologues that provide access to his stream of thought and consciousness:

When she turned round I said
yes I Giovanni told Mamma
I have to leave now. (p. 22)

So when they walked in I thought oh no what do they want
 can't they let me finish in peace
 particularly as we're about to sink
 for good. (p. 36)

Of poetics

- 35 All three plays are structured by the rhythmic movements of thematic and formal connections. For the character, they correspond to a train of thought that is a cause of suffering, since they return to traumatic events, or obsess over them. Concerning the authors, the repetitions reflect a desire to give their text a pace and stylistic orientation that is close to poetry.
- 36 In the play by Koltès, for example, the repetitions take on a compositional and musical function through the return of similar or identical syntagms in connection with the dominant isotopies of the text. When there is no distance between an occurrence and the repeated segment, the repetition of a word often has a function that is either expressive (“fucking neighbourhood, fucking habit”, p. 12; “where to go? where to go?”, p. 45) or impressive (“and that’s exactly when: sister! sister!” p. 22). When identical or similar structures are repeated at medium or long distances, however the repetition resembles a sort of pattern extending throughout the text. This is the case for the negative allusions by the narrator to those “French pricks” and their inability to tolerate any form of difference (“down there are the pricks” p. 7; “pricks packed behind my back”, p. 10; “those French pricks would keep wondering”, p. 11; “those French pricks with no imagination”, p. 11; “pricks packed behind my back” p. 11; “all these French pricks”, p. 32; “all these French pricks”, p. 54; “like all those pricks outside”, p. 55).
- 37 Among the variety of repetitions, Koltès has a preference for rhetorical anaphora. From a formal standpoint, they may concern a word, be extended to a phrase or repeat a syntactic structure: “while those from here, they’ve got nothing at the back of their minds, ready for happiness, ready for fun, ready to come all over anything” (p. 53); “I’ve had it up to here, this time that’s it, I can’t hold it in any longer, I’ve had it up to here, me, with everybody, here, everybody with his own little story in his own little world, and all their faces, I’ve had it up to here with everybody, and I want to throw punches [...] I’ve had it up to here with their faces and all this wreck” (p. 61). The anaphoric repetitions have diverse functions and are used, first and foremost, to underline the narrator’s proactive ethos: (“I’m the guy, me, instead of looking at a pretty girl [...] but, with you, it’s not the same” [p. 56]). Secondly, the rhetorical anaphora have a function of argumentation. Thus, the anaphoric repetition of “area”, apart from its virtue of specification, plays on the process of accumulation, the speaker’s denunciation of his exploiters’ plans: “all the series of areas that the bastards have traced for us, on their maps [...] the areas for work during the weekdays, the areas for the bikes and those for the flirt, the areas for women, the areas for men, the areas for the fags, the areas for sadness, the areas for chit-chat, the areas for heartbreaks and those for Friday nights” (p. 44).
- 38 Lemoine’s play includes many repetitions whose effects of lyricism and pathos are undeniable. In some cases, an emotion is expressed (“We opened all the shutters and the light flooded into the living room... We opened all the shutters and the light flooded

into the living room. The soft light of the living room”, p. 21; “my sister was there, they were all waiting for me there, and the tears, the tears, the tears...” p. 14). Most often in the form of a leitmotif, the repetition reflects the narrator's feeling of abandonment after his mother's death (“I miss you, mum, I miss you. I wish you were here”, p. 17; “I miss you” p. 24; “I miss you, I miss you, I wish...”, p. 52; “My horizon has gone. My horizon has gone”, p. 29). Conversely, other repetitions, underlined with capital letters, show the narrator's desire to continue to the end of his sad story (“Take a deep breath”, p. 34; “TAKE A DEEP BREATH”, p. 36; “TAKE A DEEP BREATH”, p. 38). In Kermann's play, the repetition is limited to occurrences of the same formula with a dislocation through a pronominal repetition of the theme in the rheme. This turns the spotlight on the narrating character and brings the dead person back to life. (“I Giovanni Pastore love numbers”, p. 11; “I Giovanni Pastore remember”, p. 14; “Giovanni Pastore, one day...” p. 21; “I Giovanni Pastore chose the teaspoons”, p. 26; “I Giovanni Pastore went down”, p. 32; etc.).

Conclusion

- 39 From a generic viewpoint, all three plays in the corpus fit the paradigm of contemporary monologue plays, in which an ordinary character, often inspired by a topical news item, looks back at their life from the promontory of separation, or even death. What they have in common is to belong to what Sarrazac (2012) called the “theatre of life”, as opposed to the traditional “theatre in life”. The idea is no longer to emphasise a special moment in a character's life, but to give an account of their very existence. To compress an entire life into a single performance, these plays reject the dramatic forms of “theatre in life” (action in the present tense, temporal and causal succession, dialogues) to significantly modify the modes of dramatic composition with a domination of the intrasubjective over interpersonal relationships.

This results in movements of retrospection (the character recounts episodes in their life), or even anticipation (they project themselves into the future). In addition to this, they include lyrical effects that cause Lehmann (2002) to describes these plays as a “poetic-epic reconsideration”.

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ABSTRACTS

Recent decades have seen a real vogue for solitary speeches in theatre (monologues or soliloquies) spoken by a character speaking and telling stories, alone on stage. These long verbal streams throw into question the main principles of dramatic plays (unity of the plot, ordered and completed progression of the actions, chronological development and explicit causality of sequencing). In the first instance, I will show how these texts are indeed true narratives since the fable, similar in this respect to fictional works, is no longer limited to a temporal development that is strictly chronological. In the second instance, I will show that the solitude of the character is not necessarily anti-dramatic because these monologues are highly polyphonic, bringing many different characters into play. This is a sign of a process that has been under way for several years, bringing theatre closer to the novel.

Depuis quelques décennies, on assiste à une véritable vogue de la parole solitaire au théâtre (monologues ou soliloques) sous la forme d'un personnage, seul en scène, qui parle et raconte. Ces longues coulées verbales ont pour effet de remettre en cause les grands principes des pièces dramatiques (unicité de l'intrigue, progression ordonnée et finalisée des actions, développement temporel chronologique, causalité explicite des enchainements). C'est ainsi que dans un premier temps, je montrerai en quoi ces textes sont de véritables récits, car la fable, proche en cela des fictions romanesques, n'est plus soumise au développement temporel strictement chronologique. Dans un second temps, on verra que la solitude du personnage n'est pas forcément antidramatique puisque ces monologues sont très polyphoniques en faisant advenir de nombreux personnages et c'est là un indice du processus de romanisation que connaît le théâtre depuis plusieurs années.

INDEX

Mots-clés: monologues, narration dramatique, dialogisme

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