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**DOCTORAL THESIS**

The dramaturgy of liminality: from rewriting the ritual to rewriting the play

**SUMMARY**

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My journey related to the topic of this thesis began in 2006, when, after interrupting my studies in theatre directing, I joined the master's program in dramatic writing at UNATC, a program founded and directed by the professors Valeriu Moisescu and Nicolae Manda. In the same year, being one of the winners of the third edition of the dramAcum competition, I debuted as a playwright with two plays: *Sado-Maso Blues Bar*, directed by Gianina Cărbunariu (Teatrul Foarte Mic, Bucharest) and *With a Little Help From My Friends*, directed by Radu Apostol (Iași National Theatre). Then, thanks also to this debut, I joined an honorable line of Romanian directors and playwrights who attended the Royal Court Theatre's International Residency, where I received, in a workshop held by British playwright Simon Stephens, an insight that was to mark my next years of research. Recounting how, having been noticed by the Royal Court Theatre as an emerging young playwright, he was commissioned to write a play which was subsequently rejected on the grounds that it was too well written - in the sense that, letting himself be carried away by his talent for writing very good lines, he neglected the structure and the story - Simon Stephens told us that he had promised himself that for ten years he would write as conscientiously as he could, following all the rules of playwriting. Only at the end of those ten years, he told us, once those rules have become ingrained in his mind and habit, will he allow himself to write spontaneously again, as his unconscious and inspiration dictate, letting the structure that has settled in him do the work of its own accord. For him, at the moment he told us this story, the ten years had just ended - and for me they were just beginning. And they were not ten, but fifteen. I consider this thesis the conclusion of my fifteen years of apprenticeship in playwriting, years during which I learned the structure of the theatre play as it used to be taught and practiced especially in the beginning period to which I refer. My sources of learning were the Royal Court Theatre workshops; the principles of dramaturgy through the directorial eye, as practised by dramAcum directors at the time of my collaboration with them; contemporary manuals of creative writing and dramatic structure (here I would also mention the British: Stephen Jeffreys and Katie Mitchell); classic manuals, with all their normative shortcomings, from Robert McKee and Lajos Egri, to Joseph Campbell and V.I. Propp, going back to Gustav Freytag and to Aristotle; from syntheses and analyses of these dramatic structures and formulas, such as those written by Alina Nelega and Erika Fischer-Lichte.

Out of a need for structure and certainty, I consciously studied these theories, trying to reproduce them in my dramaturgical practice, until I no longer saw their meaning and began to rebel and question myself. I had begun, I like to think, my own period of crossing over,

maturing and questioning ready-made normative structures. Thus, through an artistic crisis of my own, I discovered, first hand, the anthropological concept of liminality (via Arnold van Gennep) and the psychoanalytic concept of psycho-social moratorium (Erik Erikson).

Liminality brought me closer to performance and to the results of the collaboration between the father of performance, Richard Schechner, and anthropologist Victor Turner, performance being a field where liminality became, at some point, quite the norm (Jon McKenzie). Because I had experienced it first-hand in my artistic and personal quests, liminality seemed to me an extremely vivid and powerful concept, and I asked myself: if it had given so much energy to performance, might it not also become a reservoir of energy, life and authenticity for the theatre piece written by an author? I saw myself caught in an impasse - I felt the need to write, as an author, plays that explored the intersection between my personal quests and the social contexts in which they were born, but I was living in a time when the almost normative ascendancy of postdramatic and collaborative practices, and the social turn, so carefully analysed by Claire Bishop, were increasingly questioning the classical play, written by a single author. This kind of play is also disadvantaged in the eyes of young creators and spectators by the fact that many state theatres favour it in a discriminatory and mystifying way, choosing to produce mainly canonical plays and plays written at least a century ago.

The classic conflict between desire (to write, as an author, plays about what I feel) and need (to function in a system that privileged predominantly the postdramatic, the collaborative and social message), led me into this liminal zone of disbelief and constant search, in which I glimpsed the main premise of this thesis: maybe the liminality, that gave so much energy to performance, has the potential to reinvigorate the classical play as well. Was it possible that my desire to be an author that writes at the intersection of the personal and the social, the classical and the postdramatic, could find its fulfilling in a *dramaturgy of liminality*? But what does dramaturgy of liminality mean, and in fact what does liminality (still) mean today? I was also interested to see whether the growing interest in the rewrites of so-called canonical texts could prove that the play written by a single author, and with it a part of theatre in general, is itself going through a liminal period that might promise (with a little help and understanding) emancipation rather than its cancellation and invisibility.

### **Structure of the paper, methodology and main conclusions**

Starting from Schiller's well-known essay, *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, and following through the discussion of the naïve-sentimental dichotomy by Orhan Pamuk (for the

use of novelists) and Stephen Jeffreys (for the use of playwrights), I set out to seek a balanced, middle or threshold point between these two traditionally opposed poles: a liminal position of the scholar who seeks to remain open to both positions, but unmoored from either. An attitude that resists all other possible dichotomies: closed dramatic structure versus open dramatic structure; dramatic versus postdramatic; visual versus verbal; "for the sake of art" versus a social or political bias/message, etc. The search for this attitude led me, methodologically, towards the transdisciplinarity theorized by Basarab Niculescu and especially the transversality proposed by Félix Guattari. By embracing them, I looked for attitudes and concepts belonging to several disciplines: anthropology and sociology (for the analysis of the concept of liminality), drama theory and analysis (for various theories of dramatic structure and their intersection with Victor Turner's work), performance studies (Schechner's views, and the liminal norm), Deleuzian studies (for the metonymic concept of becoming), psychoanalysis (for the aspects of dream-work theorized by Freud, but also metaphor seen from a Lacanian perspective) and cognitive science (for the new theory of metaphor and conceptual blending). Also, from the area of new dramaturgies, I have taken up Josette Féral's methodological perspective, that theatre can be viewed through the prism of both deductive and inductive analytical theories, as well as production theories, which aim to generate artistic tools of production. I have thus attempted to combine deductive analytical theories from anthropology, classical dramaturgy and performance, to study the intersection of liminality and dramatic writing, coagulating them into an inductive theory (thus defining the dramaturgy of liminality). I then tried to look at it as a theory of production, showing how the aspects of dream-work (theorized by Freud), metaphor (theorized by Lacan, but also by cognitive scientists), conceptual blending (also theorized by cognitive scientists) and metonymy (along the Deleuzian concept of becoming) can be used as tools of production of the dramaturgy of liminality. Ferral's premise, that ideally we should aim for "a theory of fluid groupings" was met, as a methodological attitude, by transdisciplinarity and transversality. On an ethical level, I found the same embrace of fluidity and refusal of the classical perpetuation of dichotomies in the works of feminist theorists Donna Harraway and Rosi Braidotti, who both gave me confidence in my approach to seek a nomadic, liminal route of avoiding dichotomous conflict, as well as in the belief that the rewritings of canonical pieces are a legitimate, important and especially necessary artistic act today, as potentially emancipatory from a feminist perspective and beyond. Their writings have guided me in understanding the positive and affirmative potential of the concept of liminality, as well as in making a, hopefully, deeper analysis of the female characters in the writings and rewritings analyzed.

I also found moral support in Bonnie Maranca's writings, specifically in her attitude of walking, assertively, on the line of the desire aroused by the authors she loves, despite what is fashionable or not. This principle of desire has guided me in choosing the plays and performances analysed in the paper, with the note that, although all were chosen according to my desire, I have sought a balance of genre, era and geographical space for the playwrights selected, precisely to show, as far as possible, that the dramaturgy of liminality is not limited to certain areas or periods. From the point of view of theatre studies and drama analysis, I most closely followed the views of an important theorist interested in liminality: Erika Fischer-Lichte.

As the main objective of this paper, by theorizing *the dramaturgy of liminality*, I wish to promote a transversal, more open and affirmative attitude among the adherents of classical drama, respectively postdramatic and new dramurgies, and to contribute, in general, to the embracing of a more fluid and non-confrontational attitude in all areas of human knowledge and communication - and I find it deliciously ironic that such an attitude could come from drama, traditionally considered to be the art of conflict. *The dramaturgy of liminality*, I have tried to show, is a term broad enough to be found, in larger or smaller chunks, in a very large number of dramatic texts, from different genres and eras, yet with a hard enough core that it can retain its relevance from one situation to another. What I find useful here is the hot core of liminality, which, I believe, can make possible the meeting of the personal and the social, the confessional and the ethical, the anxieties of the individuals and the anxieties of the time in which they live.

Another main objective of this paper is, both theoretically and through the analysis of various texts and performances, to demonstrate that the rewriting of the so-called canonical play is not only legitimate, but also necessary from a progressive, feminist and other perspectives, and that, at a meta level, the increased interest in rewritings marks a new liminal stage in the history of drama.

Last but not least, I have been interested in researching and analysing what I call the tools of dramaturgy of liminality: concepts from psychoanalysis (the aspects of dream-work), Deleuzian studies (becoming) and cognitive science (metaphor and conceptual blending), all drawing on insights that can serve as tools of conscious creative production for the use of playwrights. Without being prescriptive, as many of the classic playwriting tools are, these

tools can help playwrights, in my opinion, to more accurately convey the messages and pass the narratives they wish to.

In terms of structure, the present work attempts to adapt my ambitions towards fluidity and form, combining a closed structure with elements of an open structure, and zigzagging in the spirit of Rosi Braidotti. The five main sections try to mirror the classical form of a three-act play: a prologue, or an introductory part setting out the area of research, methodology and objectives (very briefly reproduced above in the abstract), a first substantial theoretical chapter, perhaps a bit too expository from a dramatic perspective, but necessary, I believe, for understanding all the aspects of liminality, its intersection with dramatic structure and the shaping of what I call the *dramaturgy of liminality*. The second chapter, or Act II, is a detailed analysis of what I call the tools of the dramaturgy of liminality, viewed both theoretically and through the perspective of case studies on plays that I believe successfully use these tools, while at the same time, through elements of structure and especially through thematics, falling within what I have defined as the *dramaturgy of liminality*. Act III, or the third chapter, is, according to the classical rules of dramatic writing, shorter, much more concentrated, closing with a resolution all the open threads, and closing with a denouement (as Freytag says the comedy ends) - and not, I hope, a catastrophe (as Freytag says tragedy ends). Concretely, this last act contains three case studies, analysing three contemporary theatre shows which, I believe, contain liminal elements strong enough to argue for the validity and actuality of *the dramaturgy of liminality*. The conclusion section functions as an epilogue, highlighting the results and, I hope, the usefulness of this approach to defining and analysing the dramaturgy of liminality, as well as uncovering its tools of production. In terms of open structure, or elements of zigzagging, I thought it appropriate to insert my case studies into both the second chapter (play analysis) and the third chapter (performances), believing that both types of analysis demonstrate the vitality of the proposed concept, in paper, reading and analysis, as well as on stage.

The first act, or the main theoretical chapter, entitled *From Ritual to Drama and Back. The dramaturgy of liminality*, aims to define this concept, to present its usefulness and relevance. The first two sections outline my inductive theory from the perspective of deductive analytical theories, i.e. combining concepts from anthropology, performance studies, psychoanalysis and feminist studies. The first part of the chapter presents the genesis and meanings of liminality, a term pioneered by the Dutch-German-French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep at the beginning of the last century with his book *Rites of*

*Passage*, a structural analysis of archaic rituals. The term was revived in the Anglo-Saxon - and cultural - world only after the middle of the same century by the anthropologist Victor Turner, who places the term in the broader context of social structure, which is the true normative author of the ritual script. Through Turner's collaboration with Richard Schechner, the term found new life in performance studies. And not only has it found new life there, it has even become a norm in performance, as Jon McKenzie points out. Before Turner, liminality had been linked to theatre indirectly, through ritual: Aristotle let us know, in what has been handed down to us from the *Poetics*, that tragedy was born out of ritual, and the Cambridge ritualists, led by Jane Harrison, set out to demonstrate this through archaeological evidence and analysis on dramatic texts and beyond. Their ambition to link theatre to ritual was matched only by Passolini, who, in his brief but intense campaign to revitalise theatre, analysed the kinds of ritual that underpinned different kinds of theatre, arguing in favour of theatre as CULTURAL RITUAL.

Returning to Victor Turner, he has extensively and enthusiastically theorized the term *liminal*, as well as his own proposed twin-term, *liminoid* (an artistic, subversive concept befitting the hippy revolution during which it was created). The (dichotomous) balancing of the two terms reveals a highly relevant distinction for the creators and their relationship to social structure and norms, as well as Turner's enthusiasm for the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s. Also, his concept of *social drama*, based on field observations and ethnographic and historical readings, a concept consisting of four steps: breach (violation of a norm), crisis, redress, and either redress or recognition of schism, is a model that, Schechner points out, can be found in many plays, whether open or closed in structure. In this first part of the chapter I analyse both the points of convergence and divergence between the two collaborating theorists, and also review the main criticisms of Turner's theory. The first belongs to Professor of the History of Religion, and founder of the interdisciplinary field of Ritual Studies, Ronald L. Grimes, an advocate of the importance of ritual in our lives who has done important work to emancipate our perception of ritual from the simplistic and normative "three-step" conception. One of Grimes' important criticisms, namely the almost exclusively male perspective in Turner's analyses of ritual, opens the discussion to the wider critique of Turner from a feminist perspective (by Carolyn Bynum), but also, conversely, to Barbara Babcock's advocacy and later even use of the concept of liminality in feminist studies by Carolyn Heilbrun, Donna Harroway and Rosi Braidotti. Other related concepts visited in this section, useful to theatre makers, are those of *aesthetic drama* and *restored behaviour*, belonging to Richard Schechner, that of liminal norm (Jon McKenzie), and concepts related to liminality in depth psychology

(Jung's *individuation* and Erik Erikson's *psychosocial moratorium*). The section ends with a visit to contemporary studies of liminality, namely the concepts of *limivoid* (anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen's term suggesting the contemporary compulsion towards a (meaningless) liminal state, like *bungee jumping* imitating ancient rites of passage and fertility), *white space* (belonging to anthropologist David Le Breton) and *permanent liminality* - a concept belonging to Hungarian sociologist Arpad Szakolczai, researcher of this contemporary type of liminality, which makes us so vulnerable to charismatic trickster leaders, who accumulate public trust and lead the masses towards extremism, precisely because of a permanent ethical and existential uncertainty and confusion. Finally, from a psychosocial perspective, I pursue the term *affective liminal technologies* theorized by Paul Stenner, thus moving closer to the intersection of narratives and liminality.

In the next two sections of this first chapter, I focus on the inductive theory-building of liminal dramaturgy, drawing on concepts of structure from classical drama and drama theory, and from canonical and contemporary manuals of dramatic and creative writing. Liminality and the four-step social drama will be the filters through which I will revisit and analyze Aristotle's statements about plot composition from *Poetica*, Zeami's concepts of *jo*, *ha*, *kyu*, Scribe's structure of the well-written play, Freytag's pyramid, Joseph Campbell's *hero's journey*, as well as more or less normative insights from playwriting and screenwriting manuals by Lajos Egri, Stephen Jeffreys, and Robert McKee, respectively. A very important operational distinction also comes from Richard Schechner, with his theory of closed and open structure plays, respectively, both of which echo the status elevation rituals, and respectively inversion rituals identified by Victor Turner. I also look closely at the structure of some dramas that Erika Fischer-Lichte considers liminal (Euripides, but also *commedia dell'arte* and Shakespeare's comedies, as well as *King Lear*), and briefly visit liminal elements identified in post-dramatic theatre theory (Hans Thies-Lehmann) and new drama (Marianne von Verkhoven).

In the last section of this first chapter, relying heavily on Ronald Grimes' concept of *passage narratives*, as well as all the above concepts and structures, I attempt a definition of the dramaturgy of liminality, providing examples and elements through a short and subjective compendium of dramatic texts, chosen from the perspective of different liminal situations classified by anthropologist Bjørn Thomassen according to the subject of the liminal experience (individual, group, social category, etc.) or its moment (clearly delimited moment, situation, epoch, etc.).

Thus, I define *the dramaturgy of liminality* as an *affective liminal technology* (Paul Stenner), i.e. a *fabricated liminal experience* (which, however, can narrate or fictionalize a



spontaneous, real liminal experience). *The liminal play* is a *fabula* (Aristotle) dramatizing a *liminal experience* (Arnold van Gennep, Victor Turner) or a *passage narrative* (Ronald Grimes) beginning with a *breach, as in social drama* (Victor Turner) or with an *inciting incident or event* (Robert McKee, Katie Mitchell). *The drama of liminality* can dramatise, depending on the chosen protagonists and moments, a very wide range of *liminal situations* (Bjørn Thomassen), in which subjects undergo an *identity transformation* (Erika Fischer-Lichte). The experience itself can also be liminal for the viewer (Erika Fischer-Lichte). My premise is that this experience can also be liminal for the playwright or for the dramaturg (Marianne Van Kerkhoven, Valentina Valentini), who, using *restored behaviours* (Schechner) or *autobiographical particles* (Falk Richter) as well as production tools such as the aspects of dream-work, metaphor, metonymy and conceptual blending (developed in the second chapter of the paper), invests herself and can go through a transformative experience during the writing of the play. The liminal experience can be a classical one, in the traditional style of authentic transformation, as in the play built on *ritual structure* (Fischer-Lichte), or it can be an *anti-idyllic* one (Alina Nelega). It can also have both a closed structure, traditionally built on the *life-career* (Richard Schechner), and an open structure, built on the *life-rhythm* (Richard Schechner), as in the theatre of the absurd, in post-dramatic (Hans Thies-Lehmann) or in the "new dramaturgie" (Marianne Van Kerkhoven), in which case liminality itself can be questioned as being in crisis, illustrating the *limivoid* (Bjørn Thomassen), *white space* (Davin Le Breton) or *permanent liminality* (Arpad Szakolczai).

The plays briefly discussed in this section cover a wide range, from the so-called canonical plays (from Chekhov to *Krum*, by Hanoch Levin) to contemporary plays from our cultural space, written by Alina Nelega, Gianina Cărbunariu, Csaba Székely, etc. I have also listed here some of my plays, such as *With A Little Help From My Friends*, *Sado-Maso Blues Bar*, *Love Thyself* and *Our Little Centenary*, trying to show both my long-standing interest in this type of dramaturgy, and also the fact that the dramaturgy of liminality is not a recipe or a template that risks leading to plays following the same recipe, not even within the work of the same playwright.

At the same time, the plays are chosen in order to highlight various ritual elements, of varying degrees of magnitude within the piece - elements selected from a list compiled by Professor Ronald Grimes precisely in order to take ritual out of simplistic "three-step" recipes. Among these ritualistic elements are the relationships with mentors and spiritual fathers (William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* or Eugen Ionescu's *The Lesson*); the obligation to show respect, humility and obedience to the leaders of the group (Maria Manolescu's *Sado-Maso*

*Blues Bar*); going through strategic deceptions, set up by the elders of the community (*The Pillow Man*, by Martin McDonagh); a process by which initiates receive sacred, sexual or cultural knowledge (*Shopping and Fucking*, by Mark Ravenhill); the importance of sacred objects (*American Buffalo*, by David Mamet); access to some secrets (*Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare); revelations that reveal their true nature (*Oedipus Rex*, by Sophocles); keeping secrets from novices (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*); separation or isolation (Gabriel Pintilei's *Elevator*; Samuel Beckett's *Happy Days*; Gianina Cărbunariu's *Kebab*; Alina Nelega's *Hess` Decalogue*); overcoming pain and fear (William Shakespeare's *King Lear*); culinary, sexual, behavioural taboos (*Blasted* by Sarah Kane), regression to childhood states (*A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen); induction of a distorted perception of time, space, causality, identity (as in many of Beckett's texts, and in theatre of the absurd in general); questioning, destroying and then reconstructing the value system, but also giving up some addictions or (self)destructive behaviours (Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*); dream and imagination (Martin Crimp's *The City*), strong identification with a group (Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*); the special significance of bodily signs (such as the sign of Oedipus); receiving a new name (such as Rafa in Maria Manolescu's *Love Thyself*); giving and receiving special gifts (such as the poisoned veil and crown sent by Medea through her sons); acquiring and mastering difficult skills (such as the breathing that Amalia finally learns in Alina Nelega's monodrama); attending festive dinners and other festivities (*Hamlet*, *Titus Andronicus*, and many other Shakespeare plays, as well as *Three Sisters*, the moving finale of *Shopping and Fucking*, *Krum*, and many, many, many other plays); the telling of stories about initiatory experiences (the element on which Bertold Brecht's play *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, or Georg Büchner's story of the Grandmother in *Woyzeck*, is entirely built). By paying attention to the diversity of these ritual elements, I aim not only to map a possible territory of the dramaturgy of liminality, but also to map as many zones and paths as possible, in order to avoid, as best I can, the risk of normativity that can lurk in such an approach.

The second act, or practical-theoretical chapter of this work, is called *The Tools of Dramaturgy of Liminality* and is made up of four main sections, each devoted to one such tool and to the analysis of one or more dramatic texts. In the spirit of the zigzagging inspired by Rosi Braidotti, I inserted in this chapter one performance analysis, thus foreshadowing the next chapter.

The first section is devoted to the aspects of *dream-work*, theorized by Sigmund Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. The premise I start from, based on my own experience as a playwright and on the insights gained in my own work processes, is that the four processes -

*symbolisation, condensation, displacement and consideration of representation* - are not only mechanisms used by the dream, but also by creators (including playwrights) at work. Before elaborating this premise, I put into context the importance of Freud in narratology, and the two dichotomous perspectives that psychoanalysis casts on plot (*the Freudian masterplot* analysed by Peter Brooks, and the emphasis in narrative on the *principle of repetition*, advocated by Susan Winnet).

Then, detailing the four aspects of the dream-work from Freud's perspective, I examine how they function in the construction of two plays that are very different in structure, geography, era and the genre of their authors: Chekhov's *The Seagull* and Caryl Churchill's *Top Girls*. These dream factors, as cognitive scientist George Lakoff points out, are in fact precursors to the concepts that cognitive science identifies as underlying everyday unconscious thought: conceptual metaphor, conceptual blending, and conceptual metonymy (plus irony, as inversion).

The next three sections of this chapter contain the study of three other tools, two from the cognitive sciences, and one from philosophy. The first tool is *conceptual metaphor*, theorized by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, authors of the new theory of metaphor. I begin the analysis by contextualising studies of the metaphor-metonymy dichotomy, starting from Roman Jakobson's famous article - aiming to turn against the dichotomy at the end of the chapter, showing that both tools can be used to create the drama of liminality. I also dwell a little on the role played by metaphor in Lacan's theory of desire, demonstrating, again with the help of Victor Turner, why, or how exactly, metaphor is related to liminality. I then summarise Lakoff and Johnson's new theory of metaphor, showing how *structural metaphor, ontological metaphor and orientational metaphor* work, their intertwining with the way we perceive the world being amply demonstrated by the authors. I consider of a great importance for the authors both the equation of structural metaphor (in the authors' example, LOVE AS A JOURNEY) and the whole map of correspondences derived from it (LOVE AS A JOURNEY, RELATIONSHIP AS A VEHICLE, COMMON PURPOSE AS A DESTINATION, etc.). All this detailed mapping of structural metaphor can, I believe, lead to a more precise and conscious use of metaphor in dramatic writing. The authors of the theory also point out the potentially problematic messages the metaphors can hide. For example, the metaphor WORK IS A RESOURCE, used by several extremist dictatorships, concealed the horror of the real costs of that work; or the honorific metaphorical title „ARTIST OF THE PEOPLE“ concealed precisely by using the mask "people", which in fact covered a small group coagulated, in fact, by economic and political interests. I have analyzed this metaphor in an article about my ancestor,

the actor Ion Manolescu, who received this honorary title in 1953, and, precisely because I love the structural metaphor and believe in its power to make us follow it, I think it is important to understand its dark side for the use of the control of art and artists. For, after all, what are the awards and honorary titles bestowed on the artists, if not a kind of structural ritualistic passage through which the system enshrines them and tries to control them? In this section, I analyse a dramatic text that, as I try to show, is based on structural metaphor: Martin Crimp's *The City*. This play is built, in my view, on the metaphor of THE UNCONSCIOUS AS A DESTROYED CITY. I begin by placing this play in the context of Crimp's work, demonstrating his abiding interest in metaphor, then I identify the metaphor at the heart of the text, and analyse the liminal elements of the play. In addition to the highly particular structure, referring to the liminality of the dream, the play deals with the liminal condition of the creative woman, educated by male masters, whose gaze she has internalized. There is thus, in addition to the liminal structure and situations, in addition to the confessional mode (the creator's insecurity), an ethical mode, which communicates, in the present work, with other plays and rewritings that deal with the condition, as a creator and not only, of the woman.

As for metonymy, in order to cover the whole spectrum, I considered that its intersection with liminality could be discovered in the metonymic philosophical concept of *becoming*, theorized by Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Their concept of becoming-woman inspired Rosi Braidotti's studies of *metamorphosis* and *nomadism*, as well as psychoanalyst and painter Bracha L. Ettinger's concept of *met(r)amorphosis*, all of them extremely useful tools for analysing Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, one of the most powerful dramas of becoming woman, inspired by a real-life drama of a woman not at all content to become a character condensed and masked – if only minimally – in the puppet released by the master puppeteer-playwright. The liberation of the doll and her becoming-woman did not happen in real life, at least not for the true protagonist of the story; this real drama is important to comment on, I think, in the context of the ethical use of the tools of fictionalization that I propose in this chapter.

In the fourth section, I return to the cognitive sciences, looking at the theory of *conceptual blending* developed by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner. This theory has implications, as I will show, both for theatre in general and for the rewriting of the play in particular – by definition a meta situation of conceptual blending. I will investigate my hypothesis by looking at several rewritings. Firstly, a famous performance rewriting (or ritually tearing apart, as Erika Fischer-Lichte points out) a play that has been dissected over and over again to find in it the missing vertebra that shows the transformation of ritual into tragedy. This

is Euripides' *Bacchae*, and the rewriting produced by Schechner, a theorist often mentioned in this work, through his anthological performance *Dionysus in 69*. Because Euripides was a playwright fascinated by liminality, himself with a biography bordering on marginal liminality, I thought it interesting to add an analysis of two contemporary rewritings of *Medea* from a female perspective: *Medea, a new version*, by British writer Rachel Cusk, and *By the Bog of Cats*, by Irish playwright Marina Carr. Through all of these analyses I have set out to demonstrate both how the principles of conceptual blending work, and how they can be used as writing and rewriting tools by playwrights, and why I see these texts as belonging to the dramaturgy of liminality. My demonstration is supported, in the case of Marina Carr, by an extensive study by Róisín O'Gorman on liminality in this play as an artistic expression of specifically Irish liminality. As for Rachel Cusk - a writer concerned with the liminal condition of the jilted contemporary woman, caught in tension between the so-called independence gained by women and the emotional and social reality in which they live - I draw on insights from philologist Timothy Bewes' most recent book on the *free indirect* and how it works in the novels of some contemporary writers, including Rachel Cusk). Also, from a broader perspective, and inspired by Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto*, I will show why I see rewrites as hugely important, with emancipatory potential, both from a feminist and a broader progressive perspective. As Haraway points out, rewriting is the liberating story through which the feminist hybrid being (the cyborg of the manifesto's title) reconstructs her story and becomes, this time, what she wants to be. I think Haraway's claim is exemplarily supported by both rewrites of *Medea*, as well as other rewrites of the play that I will refer to in short. Even if not all of these plays have the affirmative and positive character of the manifesto, with the protagonists more or less missing liberation/emancipation, their stories are necessary and they further support the desperate need of women (and other categories placed, by the normative system, in positions of forced permanent liminality) to rewrite the story again and again, as a ritual of liberation that will one day succeed.

The third act, dedicated exclusively to case studies, will bring together all the theoretical concepts and tools discussed above in the analysis of three contemporary productions: *In My Room*, by Falk Richter, staged in 2020 at the Maxim Gorky Theatre in Berlin, *Bacantele (fără mască)/Bacchae (without mask)*, my rewriting of Euripides' tragedy, staged by Dragoș Alexandru Mușoiu in 2020 at the Teatrul de Nord Satu-Mare, and *Visul (The Dream)*, by Alexa Băcanu, directed by Dragoș Alexandru Mușoiu, a production of Reactor de Creație și Experiment (Cluj-Napoca, 2022). In addition to the concepts and tools discussed, in this chapter I use in the analysis insights borrowed from the dramaturg and theorist Maaïke Bleeker,

among which an important role is played by the use, as a tool for analysing the performance, of an important article by Elinor Fuchs called *EF's visit to a small planet: some questions to ask a play*. A powerful and liberating tool, based on a structural metaphor (THE PLAY AS A PLANET), which invites us to look at each dramatic writing as a world of its own, created according to its own rules and needs, which it would be more honest to look at by focusing on its internal laws, and not on general structural criteria that would make it just another variation of a normative recipe.

The first such planet to be visited is Falk Richter's show, with an all-male cast, and with the theme of the coming-of-age narrative of boys belonging of multiple generations and ethnic identities, from World War II Germany to the present day. Combining a closed structure with an open one, and elements of classical dramaturgy with bits of performance - including live music - and postdramatic fragments, Richter's show is a fluid one (covering even the theme of gender fluidity, through a poignant drag show) that deals with multiple levels of liminality: That of the transition from boy to man, both during the Nazi period, and today; That of war; That of gay couples facing intolerant, homophobic times and attitudes, or, conversely, times when they risk adopting, through mimicry, heteronormative views of living together as a (conventional, hetero) couple; That of Turkish immigrants in Germany; That of political unrest caused by trickster, far-right leaders. Finally, the show itself deals with the idea of a rite of passage seen in an ironic key, thus placing the production at the extreme pole of *liminoid*, as theorized by Victor Turner.

My own rewriting, which is the basis of the performance *Bacanthé (without mask)*, analysed in the last chapter, was developed in parallel with researching this thesis, being my own laboratory for research and practical testing of the tools of the dramaturgy of liminality. If, looking back, I can show that all my plays contain elements of liminality and ritual in them, I chose this play, though less personal, because it is more recent and because it is a rewriting that I fully assume in all that it as, and is also constructed with insights from conceptual blending theory. The play is a test of my hypothesis that a play revived and rewritten (or dismembered, as Fischer-Lichte points out) at so many crucial moments (political and theatrical as well) could also support a personal commentary on the pandemic times, in which trickster politicians, as Arpad Szackolczai pointed out, keep the masses in a zone of permanent liminality, confusion and hate-inducing fear, speech and behaviour of the far right.

*Visul/The Dream*, the performance at the Reactor for Creation and Experiment, based on the text written by Alexa Băcanu and directed by Dragoș Alexandru Mușoiu, part of a larger project called "Safety Zone", is a performance in which, as in *In My Room* and *Bacchae*

(*without mask*), the use of ritual by the dominant power structures to preserve the status quo is questioned and ironized. While the first two performances analysed were making a statement about the wider social community, manipulated by tricksters who hold political power, *Visul* dramatises the passage narratives of the students' transition to theatre, 'initiated' by a teacher-master, also a trickster, who builds his power on the structural metaphor of the ACTORING CLASS/GROUP AS (THE ONLY ADMITTED) FAMILY. The Master "initiates" the students, charismatically creating a false sense of *communitas* (exploiting their need for belonging, community and shared values, grafted onto personalities still in the making), and, like any abuser, isolates them from the outside world, initially convincing them that the acting group is a family (with him as Father), and then convincing them that the group is the only admitted family, more important than real families, or individual needs. At the same time, the performance dramatizes the authentic, real and undirected coming-of-age narrative of students forced to find the courage to break the traditional chain of silence and to denounce the abuse. As I show in my analysis, this performance is extremely valuable (both artistically, socially and ethically, but also in terms of the theme of this paper) not only because it deconstructs the political mechanisms behind the narratives of passage (the manipulative ones, versus the emancipatory ones), but also because it invites reflection on what kind of liminality and transformation do we want for Romanian theatre, and, more broadly, for all the power structures in our society today?

In choosing the dramatic texts analysed in this work, I took into account several criteria: first of all, I was interested in following a logic of desire: they had to be texts or performances that, having read them or seen them staged, I wished to have them revisited, analysed, understood, and above all written myself. I have sought to ensure that they all have an important liminal dimension, initially only intuited, which I have tried to demonstrate in each case according to the characteristics I have attributed to this type of dramaturgy. Then I was interested in a greater diversity of authors, transcending the dramatic/postdramatic, female/male dichotomies. The texts I have chosen are written by both women and men - and by women who rewrite men's work (as in the case of the rewrites of *Medea*, my own rewrite of *Bacchae*, or Alexa Băcanu's writing, who builds the play, as play containing the play, around her own rewrite of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*). All the texts are written both by canonical authors (Euripides, Ibsen, Chekhov) and by contemporaries known in our cultural space to a greater (Falk Richter, Lucas Hnath) or lesser extent (Marina Carr, Rachel Cusk). I was also interested in covering a wider range of liminal situations (of those theorized by Thomassen) or ritual elements (of those listed by Ronald Grimes) precisely to highlight the diversity of

situations, themes, elements, styles and tones that can be covered by what I call the *dramaturgy of liminality*.

Setting out with this aim and these objectives in mind, I believe that this work makes as an original contribution primarily the cross-cutting concept of the *dramaturgy of liminality*, a concept broad enough to be non-normative, and tight enough to contain a red, taut thread on which both the personal and the social, both the confessional and the ethical pole (Tom Driver), or the sensory and the ideological pole (Victor Turner) can meet. The meeting of the private and the political plane on the threshold of passage narratives can also, I think, generate that tension between the artistic and the social to which Claire Bishop referred.

A second original contribution I consider to be the identification and analysis of some tools of production, which I call the tools of the dramaturgy of liminality. I believe that they can help authors and playwrights construct more precise and clear passage narratives in their dramatic texts, better mastering the messages, as well as fictionalizing restored behaviors and biographical or autobiographical particles in a more conscious and controlled way that serves the narrative and does not hurt or have other harmful ethical consequences. A more intense concern with the process of fictionalization and its impact might also contribute to better control of the productive aspects of the tension between the artistic and the social to which Claire Bishop refers. Understanding these tools I believe can also have an impact on our own lives: How the metaphors we follow can emancipate us, or, conversely, lead to discrimination by obscuring important truths; how we can use the insights of psychoanalysis, focusing instead on the affirmative aspects of the unconscious, rather than the dark ones that psychoanalysis has traditionally focused on; how becoming can be seen as a voluntary, free and positive attitude, a choice of free people, or, conversely, a trap of marginality, in which you are pushed by others to become more and more liminal, like Hester in Marina Carr's rewriting; finally, the way in which conceptual blending can select out those noxious things (including in terms of the reactionary potential of ritual), or nostalgically reproduce them (including in terms of the same reactionary potential of ritual) - all of which can help us, I think, to better understand not only the narratives, dramatic or otherwise, that we write, but also those that we perform, i.e. live. In the same way, liminality itself can be seen in the broader context of its intentionality. Depending on to whom its script belongs, on the intentions - normative or emancipatory, voluntary or involuntary - of the authors of liminality, this instrument of personal and social transformation can be viewed and used with greater care and responsibility to generate stories, both fictional and real, of change for the better.



I have also aimed, through my close analysis of the dramatic texts and performances in this paper, to inspire students and MA students of theatre to read the dramatic texts more closely and to analyse more deeply the passing narratives in them and the tools used in their writing. I also hope to contribute to an interest in a more fluid reading of drama, to open up a taste for a wider range of playwrights: women and men, ancient and contemporary, canonical and lesser-known, all can offer us transformative liminal experiences, important in both their similarities and differences. I also believe that a closer look at liminal situations in the lives of playwrights can nuance the eternal dilemma of 'the artist or the work'. From this perspective, liminality would be both a Third included in the author-work dichotomy and a lens to nuance the discussion, all the more so as an author is never a single author, having no fixed, immutable identity, just as in fact neither does his work.

By paying attention to rewrites and analysing in detail the way some more or less known rewritings have been constructed, as well as by putting together several rewritings of the same piece, I hope to contribute to legitimising this genre in the eyes of theorists, practitioners or audiences who sometimes hesitate in the face of an act that is perhaps perceived as sacrosanct. To those who might wonder why we should bind ourselves to canonical authors, or who might forget that Shakespeare also rewrote the narratives written by others, I wish to show them not only the legitimacy of the endeavour by which an author rewrites, under his own name, a classical text, but also the love and respect that can guide this cultural enterprise, both for the canonical authors who have been rewritten and for the audience who can find an emancipatory impulse in the ethical, confessional and performative dimensions of rewritings. Reimagining a dramatic text is, I believe, not only a path to re-education and liberation for women (hybrids, cyborgs), as Donna Harroway points out, but also for those who want to emancipate themselves from many other limiting perspectives. I believe that rewriting is a necessary manifestation of the freedom to reinterpret our cultural, political and personal lives. By analyzing different rewrites from the perspective of liminal dramaturgy and its tools, I hope that this work will inspire playwrights to lean into rewrites with more courage, more freedom, and at the same time more structural rigor.

In terms of the tangency of this work with dramatic and creative writing textbooks, I set out to bring my own cross-disciplinary, transdisciplinary and non-normative perspective to this category. While most of the older manuals, in the area of classical dramaturgy, offer categorical and absolute advice, I wanted to offer a much more fluid perspective, while insisting that each of the chosen paths (for example, closed dramatic structure, open dramatic structure, or a combination of both of them), should also be seen in conjunction with a

production tool that can support it. The production theory of liminal dramaturgy is not a three-step recipe for writing a text one way or another, but an open, modular structure whose elements, like the ritual elements, can be used according to the needs, desires and ethical, confessional or performative concerns of the playwrights.

In the broadest sense, I have set out, through a radiography of liminality in dramaturgy from the advent of tragedy to Falk Richter, to present a vast and changing landscape of theatre, the contemplation of which, I hope, will remind readers how generous this art is, an art in which so many of us fit, regardless of the modes, themes, values, instruments or forms of expression we favour at one time or another in our artistic journeys. I believe that today, post-pandemic, the Romanian theatrical climate is excessively polarized and conflictual, and I hope that a brief and subjective reminder of the many different ways in which drama itself can transform, and the different liminal situations through which drama itself has passed over time, can be a meta argument for the transformative power of theatre, starting with its own field and representatives.

In continuation of this idea, and in conclusion, I hope that *the dramaturgy of liminality*, both as an inductive analytical theory and as a theory of production, will show its versatility, transformative and emancipatory capacity, inspiring or helping us to discover, consider or reconsider powerful, surprising and innovative dramatic texts or rewritings as diverse as possible. And not just in their entirety: I believe that even a single scene, a line, a metaphor, a situation, a story, a theatrical image, or simply the insight that the performer experiencing an emotional shift - each of these theatrical particles can become a meta-threshold, liminal, over which to step beyond, out of the puppet house of traditional and patriarchal theatre, that many of us have perhaps ritually learned in universities or state theatres.

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