

# **Mise-en-sens and Mise-en-scène: The Theatre of Testimony and Its Doubles in Emily Mann's *Annulla (An Autobiography)***

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## **Abstract**

In this paper, I argue that in addition to being a documentary playwright and a director who adheres to present verbatim testimony and tries every possible way to approximate truth and authenticity, in the sense of offering a verifiable account of the Holocaust, the Vietnam war, a murder trial, racism, or homophobia, Emily Mann is above all more an "auteur," a playwright and a theatre director who is regarded as having some distinctively recognizable vision and personal quality in *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène*, than a mere "*metteur-en-scène*," a director whose job is simply to arrange the scenes and oversee the editing of materials without much personal imprint. In the meantime, I point out that Mann's process of "*mise-en-sens*" is more than an act of interview transcription because documentary information needs to go through the process of selecting, condensing, formulating, and artful arrangement. It often involves what I call "*mise-en-temp*," the arrangement

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of history or story in time. To complete the whole process, the play, which is created out of the process of “*mise-en-sens*,” needs to be aided by the stagecraft of “*mise-en-scène*” to be manifested on the stage. For our purpose in this paper, I concentrate on discussing Mann’s first documentary play *Annulla (An Autobiography)* (1977; 1985) rather than giving a survey of the four plays collected in *Testimonies: Four Plays*. By doing so, I hope to give an in-depth analysis of Emily Mann’s theatre of testimony and its doubles—*mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène*—at work in *Annulla*.

**Keywords:** Emily Mann, the Theatre of Testimony, *mise-en-sens*, *mise-en-scène*, *Annulla (An Autobiography)*

## Introduction

I have to talk to people, I have to get it down, to have it in their own words.  
—Emily Mann

Playwright and director Emily Mann is known for her socially and politically committed documentary plays which are based on real people and events, and drawn from primary sources which include public records, personal letters, trial transcripts, entries from personal diaries, tape recorded and transcribed interviews, still photographs, newsreel footages, and video images, and the like.<sup>1</sup> Over the years, Mann has managed to find a unique way to present conflicting viewpoints and opposing value systems with a poised and yet compassionate writing style, and her documentary plays have remained one of the most vibrant and significant contributions to the development of American documentary theatre. Mann prefers to call her documentary plays “testimonies” as shown in her book title *Testimonies: Four Plays*<sup>2</sup> or “Theatre of Testimony” as it came to be called.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, the phrase “theatre of testimony” aptly summarizes her subject matter and her dramatic style.<sup>4</sup> It comes as no surprise that Mann expresses her dislike of the term “docudrama” in the same interview with Savran: “I hate [the term] docudrama. Docudrama means it’s an amalgam of fiction and documentary. I’m very pure with the documentary form. I always have been” (81).<sup>5</sup>

Unlike traditional forms of historical drama, documentary drama, or documentary theatre, Mann’s theatre of testimony brings to its telling of historical or social events a testimonial style, which is unique in its own way. In his *Documentary Theatre in the United States*, Gary Fisher Dawson identifies the work of Mann as a new form of documentary theatre which features plays that draw upon

<sup>1</sup> These documentary plays include *Annula* (1977; 1985), *Still Life* (1980), *Execution of Justice* (1982), *Betsy Brown* (1989; adapted from Ntozake Shange’s novel), *Having Our Say: The Delany Sisters’ First 100 Years* (1995; adapted from the book by Sarah L. Delany and A. Elizabeth Delany with Amy Hill Hearsh), and *Greensboro: A Requiem* (1996).

<sup>2</sup> The four plays—collected in *Testimonies: Four Plays* including *Annula (An Autobiography)* (1977; 1985), *Still Life* (1980), *Execution of Justice* (1982), *Greensboro (A Requiem)* (1996)—testify to the violence and terrors of the Holocaust, the Vietnam war, the Dan White murder trial, and the massacre in Greensboro respectively. They not only reflect Emily Mann’s consistent and persistent interest in history, trials, and documentary theatre but also carve their way into her psyche and life.

<sup>3</sup> In her interview with Alexis Greene, Mann explains that “The late Barney Simon, who co-founded the Market Theatre of Johannesburg, dubbed the plays Theatre of Testimony, because in South Africa, they come out of that tradition” (81).

<sup>4</sup> While Ryan M. Claycomb prefers to use the term “staged oral history” (96) to identify Mann’s plays, Melissa Salz defines the theatre of testimony as “aestheticized documentary drama that dramatizes oral history in the form of fractured and fragmented memory” (3-4).

<sup>5</sup> In her interview with Alexis Greene, Mann also expresses the same faith on the documentary form: “A documentary often has people speaking in their own words. . . . I love how real people talk” (81, 82).

“private oral histories and testimonies that in the process, give platform to larger societal concerns in the public arena” (164). But how does the term “theatre of testimony” differ from the more commonly used term “documentary theatre”? Do they have different focuses? In fact, Mann’s theatre has a long line of antecedents which have taken numerous forms since the appearance of Georg Buchner’s historical drama *Danton’s Death* in 1835. From the works of the agitprop theatre and Federal Theatre Project, the experiments of Erwin Piscator, the Epic Theatre of Bertolt Brecht, to *The Laramie Project* produced by the Tectonic Theatre Project, different forms are given different names such as political theatre, epic theatre, documentary theatre, protest theatre, anti-theatre, or even theatre of the oppressed. Of all these names, documentary theatre is the one most often used to describe this type of socially, historically, and politically committed theatre. Most of the documentary plays rely upon a verifiable reality that calls explicitly or implicitly to the differences between the fictional and the factual and their aim is to capture the unvarnished truth, the unadulterated facts, the “verity” of the spoken words, and the “pure presence” of the event. In reality, some of the so-called documentary plays often mix the factual with the fictional. Their difference is a matter of degree in their verifiable formation.

To a certain extent, Mann merits to be called a “fundamentalist” documentary playwright. She pledges her allegiance to the “pure” documentary form and places her insistent faith in the theatrical presentation of “real” documentary material. In her interview with Melissa Salz, Mann asserts her documentarian’s ethical responsibility in a manifesto voice:

I do think we have an incredible responsibility to do a great deal of study to understand the event, and then show our interpretation about the event, and make no bones about the fact that this is our interpretation. We have a responsibility never to falsify information, never to be revisionist in terms of history, never to bend somebody’s words around to our ends, but to try to show, honestly as we can, what is out there, so that in the end you allow the audience to make its own synthesis. Now certainly one has a point of view, but I think you must reveal your point of view if it is strong, you must admit subjectivity, and then you must try always to tell the truth as you know it and to show a balance to the story. (209)

The word “responsibility” turns out to be not only an important keyword in her life but also a guideline in her art. Time and again, Emily Mann keeps stressing the importance of documentarian’s responsibility. In her interview with David Savran, she expresses her points with a firm voice: “I think anything you put on a stage is a great responsibility because you may have the power to move and change. You can get people marching in goose step. You’ve got to take complete responsibility for both the statements you make and the effect you have on a crowd. A

lot of people argue with me about that. But that's one thing I'm absolutely sure of. Intention is all important" (158). Mann ascribes her sense of responsibility and love of the documentary to her upbringing and to the fact of her being an historian's daughter. Certainly her family background accounts in large part for the formation of her work.<sup>6</sup> As a theatre artist, Mann is very self-conscious about her art; she knows what she believes in and what she writes. Though insisting on her responsibility to the truth of testimony, Mann lays no claim to "objective documentary" or "objective truth." She understands full well that "There's no such thing as an objective documentary" (qtd. in Greene 82). In her 1995 interview with Melissa Salz, Mann addresses the issue of being subjective or objective in writing documentaries:

If you are saying you are doing a documentary—now we know that documentary is subjective, all documentary is subjective—you look at an event, and you listen to people, and you will retain, remember and process things differently than I will. Everyone will have their own way as individuals to process any event, so we can't say we are objective. (209)

Though confessing that "all documentary is subjective," Mann keeps professing the importance to have real people as characters and speak "in their own words." In the "Playwright's Note" or stage direction of her plays, she repeatedly proclaims that her plays are composed of authentic materials.<sup>7</sup>

Mann's theatre of testimony always bears a truth claim, which distinguishes her theatre from its closely related kind, especially the docudrama or some documentary plays. Moreover, she invests her theatre with a special kind of testimonial emotional power. Nevertheless, one is bound to ask in what ways her plays are "real" and "true"? And "real" and "true" to what extent? It is true that the characters' names are the names of the real people but they are characters for

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<sup>6</sup> The Young Woman's Voice, which is an agent of Mann in *Annulla*, says: "I have a sense from my—both my father and mother—a sense of responsibility, history. Of course, I am the daughter of an historian, but I think most Jewish children do have this. I look at those old family pictures that people will look at and I know who everyone is. I know where they lived. I know the towns. I know every face" (25). Mann's love of history was nurtured by her father, a distinguished professor of American history at the University of Chicago, and her father's best friend, John Hope Franklin, the famous Black historian during her adolescent years (Richards 5K).

<sup>7</sup> In the "Playwright's Note" of *Annulla* (*An Autobiography*), she writes: "For the most part, these are Annulla Allen's own words told to me during the summer of 1974 in London, and my own words told to Timothy Near over a decade later" (5). In the "Playwright's Note" of *Still Life*, she argues polemically: "The play is a 'documentary' because it is a distillation of interviews I conducted during that summer. I chose the documentary style to ensure that the reality of the people and events described could not be denied" (34). In the "Author's Note" of *Execution of Justice*, she notes: "The words come from trial transcript, interview, reportage, the street" (149). As for *Greensboro* (*A Requiem*), it opens with a slide projection, announcing that "The play consists entirely of verbatim interview material, courtroom transcripts, public record and personal testimony. All of the play's characters are real people" (257).

sure.<sup>8</sup> The “truthful” vision of Mann’s theatre is paradoxical. It is paradoxical not only because in the title “theatre of testimony” the first word “theatre” contradicts the second keyword “testimony” but also because the title, by connecting testimony to theatre, witness to make-believe, word to play, and immediate presence to disguised absence, bears witness to the irresolvable tension and conflict embedded in the genre itself. Quest for verbatim testimony, Mann’s theatre of testimony, thus, always has to wrestle with “moral issues, issues of ethic and issues of ethics in journalism and ethics in art” (qtd. in Salz 209) and struggle with this central paradox—that authentic testimonies have to be framed or housed in a make-believe theatre.<sup>9</sup>

Once realized or presented in theatre, testimonies are already steeped in illusion, existing as the trappings of theatre. In other words, the theatre of testimony often carries within itself the two doubles of theatre—namely, what I call *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène* of theatre—and yet only through the two doubles can Mann’s testimonies be manifested in/as “theatre.” I coin the term “*mise-en-sens*” not only to create a doubling and mirroring effect of *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène* but also to characterize the way Mann constructs her work. While the French word *sens* means meaning and signification, the French noun *mise* has active, participle meanings of laying, placing and putting. Thus the term “*mise-en-sens*” refers to Mann’s arrangement of meaning and language, her skillful blending of documentary and invented material, her art of splicing and reordering source materials from interviews and conversations, and her technique of dramatic composition in general. Through “*mise-en-sens*,” Mann is able to change the pace and the rhythm of the speeches and shape language and emotion by juxtaposing words, meanings, and images. What I mean “*mise-en-scène*” in Mann’s art refers not only to Mann’s direction of scenery, actors/actresses, and actual events on a stage for a theatrical production, but also to her orchestration of diverse theatrical elements to tell a story which addresses public issues through the lives of those who suffered individually and collectively. Thus, when Mann

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<sup>8</sup> When discussing Mann’s *Greensboro*, Christopher Bigsby questions Mann’s assertion that “All of the play’s characters are real people” (257) and argues that “[t]he mere act of placing them on stage, taking command of their speech, determining those aspects of their experience, personality, relationships to dramatise, choosing how, when and with whom to juxtapose their actions or utterances, is a process of invention. They are real in that they had a verifiable existence and may have spoken the words attributed to them but that is the starting point not the destination” (160).

<sup>9</sup> In the case of *Annulla* which deals with the testimony of Annulla Allen, a Holocaust survivor, the question of the verifiability of the testimony is another critical issue that Mann has to wrestle with because as Holocaust historian James E. Young points out, “the survivor’s memory has played little, if any, role in Holocaust historiography, due primarily to the somewhat forced distinctions historians have maintained between memory and history” (27).

states in her interview that “I’m making theatre and I’m making a theatre piece out of what exists, what is out there,” we cannot help asking the following questions: Does Mann’s expression make the making of her art clearer? Does Mann’s theatre of testimony create its effectiveness out of the power of testimonies? Is Mann’s theatre a theatre based on verbatim dialogue alone?

It is true that testimonies and oral history function as an effective means for discovering, exploring, and evaluating the process of historical memory and provide the link between the events on the stage and the great forces active in history. Nevertheless, in Mann’s theatre of testimony, testimonies do not occur in a vacuum; they are delivered in a space-time continuum and context which is theatre itself, and within which message and meaning are generated. Moreover, Mann is not just a transcriber of words and her theatre is not just a “theatre vérité” or “theatre of truth.”<sup>10</sup> As Christopher Bigsby shrewdly points out, “She [Emily Mann] is as concerned for the rhythms of language, for the vividness of character and for the theatrical effectiveness of what she writes as she is for the personal truths which may move her but for which she must discover a dramatic correlative, a means of communicating to the audience” (134).

In this paper, I want to argue that in addition to being a documentary playwright and director who adheres to present verbatim testimony and tries every possible way to approximate truth and authenticity, in the sense of offering a verifiable account of the Holocaust, the Vietnam war, a murder trial, racism, or homophobia, Emily Mann is above all more an “auteur,” to borrow a term once again from cinema studies, a playwright and a theatre director who is regarded as having some distinctively recognizable vision and personal quality in *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène*, than a mere “*metteur-en-scène*,” a director whose job is simply to arrange the scenes and oversee the editing of materials without much personal imprint. I will argue that Mann’s process of “*mise-en-sens*” is more than an act of interview transcription because documentary information needs to go through the process of selecting, condensing, formulating, and artful arrangement. It often involves what I call “*mise-en-temp*,” the arrangement of history or story in time. To complete the whole process, the play, which is created out of the process of “*mise-en-sens*,” needs to be aided by the stagecraft of “*mise-en-scène*” to be manifested on the stage. To a certain degree, Mann can be called a “bricoleur” in the Derridean sense because more than doing research and gathering raw materials,

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<sup>10</sup> Here I coin the term “theatre vérité” by adapting the term “cinéma-vérité” from cinema studies, in which it refers to a style of filmmaking, combining naturalistic techniques that originated in documentary filmmaking, with stylized cinematic devices of editing and camerawork, staged set-ups, and the use of the camera to provoke subjects. It is also known for taking a provocative stance toward its topics. The term is French and means, roughly, “cinema of truth” in English.

she needs to work with and weld together bits and pieces of information at hand effectively into a work of art, a “bricolage” or a “constructed” work made from found objects or facts and having no absolute claim to the unity, presence, or truth.<sup>11</sup>

In this paper, I am not interested in examining whether Mann’s interpretation or representation of events is accurate or not. My concern is about the formation of her documentary work. Other than the word “construction,” Mann often uses the word “distillation” to describe her way of editing the raw materials she gathers. What does the word mean and imply? According to Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, distillation means “the process of purifying a liquid by successive evaporation and condensation.” My questions are what is being evaporated and what is being condensed during the process of *purification*, when the “heat” is applied? This heat can be many things. It can be the effect of theatrical lights programmed, or the rhythm, poetry, or music of the script attuned, or the sensation of sound effects added, or the emotional power insinuated, or the theatrical scenes arranged. Thus, in this paper, I propose to explore the following questions: Can the power of authentic speech sustain after the process of distillation? Or can the aura of truth remain uncontaminated? How do we see and assess Mann’s creativity and intervention as an auteur? Do Mann’s *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène* of the testimonies sharpen or hamper audience’s reception? How does Mann strike a fine balance between verbatim authenticity and subjective interpretation? Between life and art? Between testimonies and *mise-en-sens*? Between the real event and the theatrical *mise-en-scène*? And finally between documentarian’s responsibility to show the event as it is and author’s shaping hand? For our purpose in this paper, I will concentrate on discussing Mann’s first documentary play *Annulla (An Autobiography)* (1977; 1985) rather than giving a survey of the four plays collected in *Testimonies: Four Plays*. By doing so, I hope to give an in-depth analysis of Emily Mann’s theatre of testimony and its doubles—*mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène*—at work in *Annulla*.

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<sup>11</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, in his book *The Savage Mind* (1962, English translation 1966), used the word bricolage to describe the characteristic patterns of mythological thought: “The characteristic feature of mythical thought is that it expresses itself by means of a heterogeneous repertoire which, even if extensive, is nevertheless limited. It has to use this repertoire, however, whatever the task in hand because it has nothing else at its disposal. Mythical thought is therefore a kind of intellectual ‘bricolage’” (17). Jacques Derrida, in his essay “Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences,” extends this notion to any de-centered discourse: “What does Lévi -Strauss say of his ‘mythologicals’? It is here that we rediscover the mythopoetical virtue of *bricolage*. In effect, what appears most fascinating in this critical search for a new status of discourse is the stated abandonment of all reference to a *center*, to a *subject*, to a privileged *reference*, to an origin, or to an absolute *archid*” (286).



## I. *Mise-en-sens* at work in *Annulla*

The efficacy of Mann's theatre does not rely on verbatim documentation alone. When interviewed by Gary Fisher Dawson about the form of documentary theatre she practices, she responds: "I go out and I find the event. I go to the place. I do a lot of work on it. I do a lot of research on it. I interview a whole lot of people. I find documents that have to do with that. Then I *construct* (italics mine) a play out of that. I'm working from life and it's very personal."<sup>12</sup> In a different interview also with Dawson, she poses questions about the nature and capacity of her theatre to address and dramatize certain experiences and emotions: "But is it theatrical? What is dramatic? Making a document dramatic is hard. Take a lot of skill. You are *constructing* . . . you are as *a play writing crafts person* (italics mine) as if you are going scratch from fiction. In fact, sometimes moreso."<sup>13</sup> Mann's arts and crafts in "constructing" a play and then a stage production out of documents or testimonies are exemplary of the documentary theatre itself. They demand our special attention and are worthy of a close examination. In this section, I propose to scrutinize the way Emily Mann "constructs" her work in *Annulla*, which is created not out of airy nothing but out of the documents she gathers. Namely, I will explore the workings of *mise-en-sens* in *Annulla*.

What follows is a picture of Mann at work. Surrounded by all sorts of materials—script, notebook, reference books, tapes, and transcripts—littering all over the place, Mann, for the moment, is alone with words, words nothing but words. Creating a script from scratch, she cudgels her brains, trying very hard to grope for an image or a vision to shape and arrange her raw materials. Still to come are weaving and suturing these materials, working the ideas out, arguing them into existence, balancing pros and cons, building up characters, and setting events in certain order. The objective of Mann's *mise-en-sens* is to represent what has been in a dramatic form and in complete honest.<sup>14</sup> The whole process of distillation is,

<sup>12</sup> This passage is quoted in Gary Fisher Dawson's *Documentary Theatre in the United States*, p. 5, from Dawson's interview with Emily Mann, 18 January 1994.

<sup>13</sup> This passage is also quoted in Dawson's *Documentary Theatre in the United States*, p. 113, from his interview with Emily Mann, 26 April 1994.

<sup>14</sup> What is included here is a quotation in which Mann describes the workings of her "word factory" when writing *Still Life* in 1980, a play concerning the tortured memories of a Vietnam veteran, Mark, his abused wife, Cheryl, and respectful mistress, Nadine:

When I did, I found a theatrical voice for each person, distilling each down to its own rhythm and poetry. That took a long time. When I got it down to a three-hour set of highly ordered monologues I had a reading. Everyone thought it was brilliant and I hated it. I thought it was dead as doornail. Then my husband Gerry Bamman asked me, "Why did you put the monologues in that order?" I said, "Can't you see? This

to be sure, a Herculean task. The distilled *Annnulla* is, nevertheless, able to engage audience's interest from the beginning to the end. That said, we will now discuss the *mise-en-sens* at work in *Annnulla* in a more specific and concrete way.

**1. *To be (in It), or not to be (in It): That is the Question:  
A Note on the Metamorphosis from Annnulla Allen:  
Autobiography of a Survivor in 1977  
to Annnulla (An Autobiography) in 1985***

In her interview with Melissa Salz, Mann says *Greensboro* is the first time she has ever put herself in as a character “interviewing Eddie Dawson, the head Klansman, and Nelson Johnson, now a minister, but then a black activist who joined the Communist Party” (209). In the mean time, she also tells Salz that the first time she had a voice in a play was in *Annnulla* but in the first draft she didn't put herself in. She “left it a monologue” (210). Why did Mann decide to put herself in 8 years after the first production in 1977? Why didn't she do so in the first place?

The play, originally produced in 1977 at the Guthrie Theatre's Guthrie 2 as a two act, one-woman show called *Annnulla Allen: Autobiography of a Survivor*, was developed from transcripts of an interview Mann conducted with her college roommate's aunt, Annnulla, a 74 year old Eastern European Jewish woman who secured the release of her husband from the Dachau concentration camp and then, with some twists and turns, managed to arrange his escape to England (LaPlant 60-61).<sup>15</sup> In this first version, Mann left it a monologue because “[she]

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relates to that, and that thing relates to this.” He literally handed me scissors and tape and said, “Why don't you put them closer together?” I started to do that and it was like I was on speed or I was tripping, I couldn't stop. I stayed up for two straight nights with clipping all over the room. It took two weeks of insanity to do. I really thought I was going crazy, because there were all these wild images—there was a reason why I put those things together. I had the cellophane mess of the pages, all scotch-taped. I just Xeroxed them and invited friends over to read it to me. And it went off like a shot, it was like being in the middle of a music machine—you had to play these notes and if you did, you started to gyrate. The next step was refining that. I knew there were some sections that didn't electrify. Sometimes it was a matter of making it less cut up. I just kept having it read to me. I had to hear it. One night after a reading, I had gotten drunk and I called Greg Mosher at 3:00 A.M. and said “You have to do this.” He laughed and said okay [laughs] and in fact, he did. (qtd. in Savran 154-155)

Through the passage quoted above, we can catch a glimpse of Mann's *mise-en-sens* at work. During the process, Mann distills some 800-page transcript into 90 pages. Exhausted and traumatized, Mann cried not to do it again. What repaid her labor is that *Still Life's* New York production in 1981 won her six Obie awards, including Best Play, Direction, and Production.

<sup>15</sup> In my discussion of Emily Mann's *Annnulla (An Autobiography)*, I am deeply indebted to Donald David LaPlant for his inspiring and insightful reading of the play from the perspective of metahistorical theatre. For a detailed account of his reading, please see Chapter III “Emily Mann's Documentaries

wanted the audience to be [her]" (qtd. in Salz 210). She made the change in 1985 because of *Annnulla's* director Timothy Near's suggestions. Near made suggestions to Mann in an encouraging manner: "I think you should be in this. I think of all the stories you told me. I want you in it. I want to interview you" (qtd. in Salz 210). After the process of selecting and editing, the new version ended up a more interesting and moving one. The new one-act version of the script, re-titled *Annnulla (An Autobiography)*, was produced in 1985 at the Repertory Theatre of St. Louis, following the "real" Annnulla's death, and featuring a significant revision: the incorporation of voice-overs transcribed from director Timothy Near's interviews with Emily Mann. The play had its New York première in 1988 at the New Theatre of Brooklyn. My discussion of the play *Annnulla* is based on the text included in Mann's *Testimonies* anthology. This new version has created a series of ripple effects in terms of *mise-en-sens*, which are discussed in greater detail below.

## 2. *Mise-en-temp* in *Annnulla*

### *The Voice in Perspective & Time vs. Annnulla's Life in Disorder & Driven by Time*

By adding the young woman's Voice in the new version, the most immediate and noticeable effect is that the play is no longer a monologue. And yet it doesn't make the play dialogical because it is not presented in the form of a dialogue. In other words, there is no true dialogue or interaction going on between the two characters, Annnulla and the Voice. Mann also gives us a telling explanation in her interview with Salz, "I had enough distance I guess. It was the older me looking back at the younger me, needing to talk to Annnulla, so there is something very interesting about that. It wasn't me asking Annnulla questions, it was me looking back at the event. It went through time, and Annnulla was moving through time and facing her own death, and I was facing the passage of time and my own feelings about death" (210).

The Voice, reflecting, commenting, and supplementing Annnulla's life story with events from her own background and life, has helped abandon the pretense of impersonal objectivity in the older version. By juxtaposing Annnulla's words and the Voice's reflections in a so-called "testimonial style," Mann creates a critical distance between the Character Annnulla and the Voice. This arrangement allows the play a greater freedom to present a shifting multiplicity of times and locations, particularly the dynamic dialectic not only between the two characters but also

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and Metahistorical Theater" in his dissertation "Metahistorical Theater: Recent American Approaches to the Dramatic Presentation of Historical Material," 53-83.

between the narrated past and the reflective present—the 1974 Annulla recalling events from 1940s while the 1985 Emily Mann recalling the 1974 interview of Annulla and her visit of grandmother's village in Poland. Edward Isser, in his book *Stages of Annihilation*, argues that Mann, by creating a sense of alienation in the 1985 version, “compels herself and the audience to confront Annulla's story in a critical manner” (77). Isser also suggests that this structural arrangement creates a dialectic between the Voice and Annulla which allows the “details of Annulla's life and her attitude toward them [to be] filtered and refracted by the presence of the author, who places the old woman's recollections into a contemporary perspective” (77).

Indeed, the presence of the Voice shows that the 1985 *Annulla* is being filtered through Mann's eyes. The immediate effect is that instead of concealing herself Mann acknowledges her own role as a shaper of Annulla's life story and exposes the “constructedness” of the play itself.<sup>16</sup> When the so-called “authentic” testimony, after editing and distillation, is framed and interrupted by the Voice, its authenticity becomes a re-interpreted or re-constructed one. Furthermore, the presence of the authorial Voice highlights the differences between the traditional historical drama or docudrama and the metahistorical theatre of testimony.

Mann does not edit the interview transcripts in a linear, chronological fashion. Rather, the time/space frame of reference frequently shifts as the narrative turns. As a result, the play is punctuated by different time points which in turn are often entangled or entwined with the shifting moods and locations. While Annulla's traumatic memory of the Holocaust is punctuated and driven by time—the historical time and the inner feeling of time, the Young Woman's Voice is literally set in a steady flow of time, the happening present tense of time, because in Timothy Near's production, the sound of a ticking clock accompanied the Voice all the time (Mann, *Annulla* 5). The frame of reference of Annulla's time reflects her inner turmoil. She mentions about committing suicide three times over the course of the play and constantly complains about her sister Ada's demands for assistance: “I think I will someday commit suicide. My sister thinks I should be at her *beck* and *call* since her accident. I am a woman who never has any time” (8-9).

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<sup>16</sup> As James E. Young, a scholar of Judaic Studies, remarks in his essay “Toward a Received History of the Holocaust,” “Instead of striving to expunge all traces of themselves and the present moment from their writing, thereby making their historical narratives appear wholly neutral and transcendent, such historians choose to reveal their writing hand, to acknowledge their own roles as shapers of any given written history” (33-34).

As chaotic and out of order as her unfinished manuscript, Annulla reels wildly from time to time, from event to event, as well as from place to place,<sup>17</sup> giving us the impression that she is racing to tell as much as she remembers before her time runs out and faces her death. Her narrative trails after the unpredictable course of her memories, creating a narrative structure more moody and emotional than thematic and chronological. Take page 24 for example. This typical page starts with the Depression in Germany after WWI which contributed to the rise of Hitler in 1923. It then rewinds the time frame back to 1917, the starting point of the Depression. She mentions the food shortage and the malnutrition that her 15 year old Aryan girl friend had suffered. She then shifts her topic to her family and uses her cousin's move to buy property for practically nothing to illustrate the sentiment of anti-Semitism at that time. Her narrative about Hitler induces her to bring up the topic about her intent to found her Women's Party in 1939.

Annula's discussion of all these events and times shows the whimsical and disjointed nature of her narrative and life. As Annulla herself confesses earlier, "Oh, really, you know, my life is in terrible disorder. And this is so tragic, really I have so much to do" (8). Annulla's fast-reeling moods and thoughts quickly set the tempo of Annulla's life and establish Annulla as a person who is fickle and driven by time. They correspond to Mann's descriptions of Annulla as a woman who never walks but always runs (6) as well as a person who is equipped with multilingual ability and quick to adapt to different environments. Using a somewhat sympathetic and ironic tone, the Voice recounts the history Annulla picks up her seven languages:

Well, who knows if she would ever have been a writer or not, she was constantly interrupted—she was an immigrant from the earliest time in her life. She left Lvov in Galicia in her early teens, where her first language was what? Polish? Right. Then German. And then-and then Ukrainian. Then French with her governess, also Ruthenian...Then she went to Vienna, where she started using her German. Then to Germany. From Germany to Italy in her thirties. She learned Italian, and then escaped to England. Her seventh language is English. She loved England. And she thought it was "*the* civilized place to live." Prides herself on the fact that she has perfect English, which we know, of course, she doesn't. And then she tries to learn how to write in her seventh language. . . . (15)

Annula's multilingual ability represents her migrant and diasporic life, a life constantly interrupted and driven by outside events. As demonstrated in the above quoted speech, the Voice offers us additional information about Annulla's

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<sup>17</sup> In the play, Annulla recounts her migration across Europe, traveling from Poland, Germany, Switzerland, Ukraine, Italy, to England.

life, questions the validity of her claim, and pokes fun at her vain dream but it never disputes or challenges the historical events Annulla characterizes or addresses. In general, the Voice's expressions are more orderly and focused in terms of narrative style and more limited in terms of length and breadth. The Voice only talks about herself, her family, and the fate of her relatives during World War II momentarily. For the most part of her narration, it focuses on her 1974 research trip to England to meet and interview Annulla.

### 3. *The Voice as a Framing Device and The Effect of Doubling*

Through the opening narration of the Young Woman's Voice, Mann informs the audience that in the summer of 1974 she left college and went to England with her closest friend Irene. They were awarded a grant to do oral histories of Irene's family and she herself had a special mission, that is, to find her grandmother's native village, Ostroleka, in Poland. They met and interviewed Annulla, Irene's aunt, in London (*Annulla* 7). This opening establishes young Emily's credibility as a reliable Voice character and narrator, and therefore a trustworthy recorder of the oral history. Revealing the detailed factual circumstances surrounding the interview which is about to unfold, the Voice is presented as an oral historian rather than a playwright. Later in the text, the Voice repeats her intention that the interview and her trip are driven by a desire to understand her own history and roots and motivated by a sense of responsibility to understand the larger picture of Jewish fate and the impact of the Holocaust (*Annulla* 10).

Very much like an establishing shot, this opening narrative informs the viewers about the basic information of the play, which includes the characters (Emily, her college roommate Irene, and Irene's aunt Annulla), the main action (the collection of oral histories), the time (the summer of 1974), the place (a flat in Hamstead Heath, London), and the purpose (to understand family history) (*Annulla* 7-8). It serves at once as a meta-historical and meta-theatrical framing device, which not only calls our attention to the authorial presence and its 1985 viewpoint but also makes Annulla's testimony the play within the play.<sup>18</sup> As a result, the Voice,

<sup>18</sup> In his seminal *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, Richard Hornby offers us a list of the possible varieties of conscious or overt metadrama, which includes "1. The play within the play. 2. The ceremony within the play. 3. Role playing within the role. 4. Literary and real-life reference. 5. Self reference" (32). The adding of the Voice character in *Annulla* certainly makes the play an overt metadrama. With regard to the play within the play, Hornby suggests that there are two general kinds: "in one, the 'inset' type, the inner play is secondary, a performance set apart from the main action. . . ; in the other, the 'framed' type, the inner play is primary, with the outer play a framing device. . ." (33). It is clear that Mann's *Annulla* is more prone to "the framed type." But in reality, *Annulla* is more a variation of the framed type because the outer play of the Voice is inextricably intertwined with the inner play of Annulla.

other than occasionally intervening to provide commentary or supplement Annulla's testimony with her summaries of background information she learned from Annulla, often refers back to her own life and her act of writing, and serves as a constant reminder of the author's role as shaper of the text. As the play progresses, the Voice veers further and further away from Annulla's story as she begins to reassess her own life, especially those of her great-grand-father, grandmother, and her mother, in view of the survivor's experiences.

At first, her grandma was not very supportive of her interest in traveling to the Polish homeland and learning about the family's Holocaust past: "When I asked my grandmother about it she'd say, 'Why do you want to go there? They killed us there. Why—what do you want to know about that place?'" Nevertheless the young Emily Mann was determined to quest for her family roots on her own: "But now I was on my own. I was young—And I wanted to know" (*Annulla* 13). Near the end of the play, the Voice tells the audience that she returned from her trip just before her grandmother had died and recounts Grandmother's reaction to the news that she visited the old Polish village: "I think she was actually glad" (*Annulla* 29). The Voice's reconnection with her Polish ancestry is a typical meta-dramatic self-referential act because it is, as Richard Hornby writes in *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception*, "an example of real-life reference, or more specifically, real-life acknowledgment, since the 'backstage' reality of the play as an artificial construct is acknowledged whenever the play refers to itself" (104). The Voice character returns to the immediate present when she announces that "It's been fourteen years since I visited Annulla" (*Annulla* 30). At this moment, when the audience watches Annulla at a loss, tentatively and vulnerably heading for the exit, saying her goodbye to the 1974 Emily Mann, the meta-dramatic frame is effectively closed, bringing the audience back to the present and to the end of Emily Mann's presentation both of Annulla and herself (*Annulla* 30).

The Voice's or Mann's voice-over testimonies frame and punctuate Annulla's already fragmentary memories and testimonies. They are meta-historical and meta-dramatic/theatrical in nature, weaving themselves into the texture of Annulla's life as a Holocaust survivor. Emily Mann, through re-presenting Annulla's narration of her traumatic memories and the Voice's description of Annulla's life events, makes her quest for her ancestry's past and her dramatization of Annulla's testimony the duo perspectives on the study of the larger event—the Holocaust. In other words, Mann's intention to tell the story of a Holocaust survivor and her own quest for her family past are in the end inextricably intertwined, doubling the stories and doubling the traumatic experiences of the Holocaust in a doubly stranded dramatic structure, which in turn exerts the immeasurable double effect on the audience. One particular moving moment which exemplifies the unnerv-

ing doubling effect in the play is that while the Voice starts to recount the atrocity done to her relatives by the Nazis in Ostroleka, Annulla is listening to Heifetz on the radio and is alarmed by the word “Nazis.” Annulla’s next line responds and satirizes human being’s indifference and alienation to his fellow humankind during the war:

Annulla: . . . (*Annulla puts on the radio; we hear Heifetz*) Ah-Heifetz.

Voice: The Nazis (Annulla is stopped by the word “Nazis”) came into Ostroleka and they said they wouldn’t harm people if they would point out the Jews. So the neighbors who’d lived side by side with them for ever and ever, harmoniously, saved their own lives, I guess, and pointed everyone out. They were all herded into the town square. My great-grand-father unfortunately was a much-loved elder of the community, so he was . . . you know . . . taken by the beard and made to eat grass before they killed him and then the entire community was shot. And my mother remembers when my grandmother got the letter in America—telling her. . . .

Annulla: Do you know that during the war people did nothing. They saw evil all around them and they didn’t do anything. . . . (*Annulla 25*)

In the form of the double meta-historical and meta-dramatic/theatrical self-reflexivity, the Voice serves to remind readers and audience alike that Annulla’s autobiography is being told and remembered by someone in a particular time and place. The fact that the words—(*An Autobiography*)—in the title page of the play are put in brackets indicates that Annulla’s autobiography is a product of the playwright Emily Mann’s hand and also part and parcel of her traumatic recollections of the Holocaust. In other words, Annulla, framed by the Voice, becomes a memory within a memory. Investing the narrated past with the affective and therapeutic power of the talking cure, this dramatic form not only reveals momentary and perspectival reflexes of the two characters but also evokes associative power, provokes intellectual reaction, and arouses affective response in the audience all at the same time.

#### ***4. Role-Playing, Perspectivism, and Transvaluation of All Values***

*Annulla* is both a meta-dramatic and a meta-historical work because the protagonist Annulla is at once a role-player and a product of the grand theatre which is European history itself. She was born a superb role-player in her own life drama.<sup>19</sup> In order to survive as a Jew in Nazi-occupied Europe and as a rescuer of her husband, she was forced to present herself as what she was not and had

<sup>19</sup> According to Richard Hornby, role playing within the role is a common element in metadrama (67).



to disguise herself all the time, even to the degree that people might think the role she played was her real identity. All of her survival feats depended on her success as a role-player. Born in L'vov in Galicia, which was first Austria then Poland and finally Russia, she spoke Polish and then German before Ukrainian, French and Ruthenian. The family then moved from Austria proper to Germany, to Italy, and then England. Along the way she picked up a handful of further languages (*Annulla* 15). Who, then, was she? Those around her assumed she was Czech. She presented herself as being Aryan. Forgetful of her childhood days, raised in a country whose identity and language changed, she strewed myths and vagueness around herself as a protection and continued to inhabit one role after another. Annulla, who once wanted to be an actress, became precisely that, not just an amateur but a professional in real life. While disguising her Jewishness, she also concealed her motives and feelings. She flirted with a German officer to get her way and became a coquette to protect and rescue her husband. She became a mask, a persona, and above all a role player who risked losing her life playing the roles she adopted to meet each occasion's need. As she confesses, "I was really ignorant of the horror that could befall me because I had to be" (*Annulla* 11). Juggling her roles as she juggled with the necessity of forgetting and remembering, Annulla the role-player has shown us the necessity of role-playing as a rightful strategy to survive the horror of the Holocaust.

Annulla's role-playing can be understood as a form of perspectivism, which is a self-appointed radicalism and position of marginality. Perspectivism seldom assumes actual political positions, nor is it usually aligned with any ideology, either of the right, left, or center for it is relational, relative with regard to main stream ideas, and may represent any theoretical or ideological position. In this way, role-playing is as shifting and ambiguous as any unanchored sign. It is wholly unpredictable and therefore subversive and dangerous. It is a strategy Annulla employs vis-à-vis the danger and violence imposed by the Nazi. It is, therefore, a struggle of/with power or a play of power relations, which is best exemplified by Annulla's disguise as an Aryan to fool the Nazi and her use of flirtation to trick the Gestapo into releasing her husband from Dachau. While symptomatic of her personal traumatic experiences, Annulla's role-playing or perspectivism comments on the grand historical narrative.

Emily Mann, in hoping to change the status quo, always wants to use theatre to evaluate and then transvaluate all current values.<sup>20</sup> In her interview with Alexis

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<sup>20</sup> "The transvaluation of all values" is a concept from the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. As Mann writes in *Still Life's* Playwright's Note, "I have been obsessed with violence in our country ever since I came of age in the 1960s. I have no answer to the questions I raise in the play but I think the

Greene, she expresses that “I want to give people stories they haven’t heard before and information that they didn’t know about before. I’d like to be challenging to a set of already held beliefs” (87). Mann’s first play, *Annulla*, like her other plays, dramatizes the complex reality of the Holocaust and shows that there is no moral high ground and that all are implicated in the workings of power and human relationship. For her, there is no easy escape from the encroaching of violence and yet we can always re-evaluate the past and attempt to make changes.

### 5. *Annulla: An Unreliable Narrator but An All-Too-Human Character*

Fluent in seven languages, Annulla is a remarkable woman who survived the Holocaust. But is she a reliable narrator or witness of the Holocaust? Is her personal memory and testimony trustworthy? Frequently contradicting herself and somewhat emotionally unstable, she is “plagued by the memories that she is unwilling or unable to articulate” (LaPlant 78). As a character, Annulla tends to speak hyperbolically and exaggeratedly. As Donald David LaPlant points out, her comments about and responses to her sister Ada “frequently serve to undermine audience’s faith in Annulla’s reliability as a narrator” (78). Her treatment and resentment of her ailing sister is confirmed by the Voice’s assertion that “Annulla was serving her in an absolute rage” (*Annulla* 22). In addition, her relationship with other women is rough. She regards that her mother is destructive while her sister Anna, who she describes as gruesome, baffles her. Her friend Lydia, sister to Boris Pasternak, who also lives in England, rejects her notion of a Women’s Party. While repeatedly expressing her emotional and antagonistic responses to her sister Ada and other women, Annulla continually asserts her belief about the natural compassion of women. She proclaims her feminist utopian vision at one point of the play: “You see, only women know mother-love. It is the most powerful response in the world of a positive kind. Men have strong feelings too, but they are violent. They should not be allowed to rule. A woman’s *natural* instinct is loving” (*Annulla* 26-27). Meanwhile, Annulla is convinced that her play will change the world: “if the women with their hearts would start thinking, we could change everything within a year” (*Annulla* 14). Judging from Annulla’s incongruent expressions, people might question her memory’s reliability and her oral history’s validity. Her narration or oral history, according to what

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questions are worth asking. The play is a plea for examination and self-examination, an attempt at understanding our own violence and a hope that through understanding we can, as one of its central figures, Nadine, remarks, ‘come out on the other side’” (34).

Walter Benjamin maintains in his essay “Theses on the Philosophy of History,” is not a “sequence of events like the beads of a rosary” but merely a “constellation of events” (265). It bears no truth claim whatsoever but forms only a collage of fragmented memory.

Though an unreliable narrator for LaPlant, Annulla, for me, is a “sincere” character with her true nature and color. What fascinates me most is her “all-too-human” personality, which follows its natural course without hypocrisy. She describes her traumatic experiences with heart-wrenching candor and explains in detail about her need to disguise herself as an Aryan to avoid being captured while her husband Gustav was confined in Dachau:

I lost myself. I couldn't work. I got those crying fits. You know, they are called schriekrampf, screaming spasms. I suddenly screamed without any reason. I would be doing something normal, something ordinary, like ironing a shirt, and then suddenly I would get the screaming fit. The grief was so deep. Because I never believed that he would come back. (*Annulla* 15)

Worrying hysterically about her husband's fate, Annulla sank into another wave of psychological fits—what she called “anxiety neurosis”—several years later in 1940, when she learned that her husband had missed the British ship to flee from Dunkirk to England: “This was not the screaming. Anxiety neurosis is a terrible illness. You are afraid, but you do not know what you are afraid of. You can't eat, you can't sleep. I saw letters upside down. I had illusions. It is horrible” (*Annulla* 28). Her neurosis was cured by her son's return in 1942. And yet her misery was far from over. She was afflicted by horrible recurring nightmares from time to time. Not surprisingly, at her husband's funeral, her screaming fits returned (*Annulla* 28-29).

Indeed, our awareness that we are dealing with affect rather than historical facts freights our responses with pity, guilt, horror, and despair. I want to argue that the real value of Annulla's often self-contradictory and fragmentary traumatic memories lies not in anything else but in its pure affective power. This affective power is what Mann has distilled from her raw materials through her *mise-en-sens*. Mann's *Annulla* is not intended to reconstruct the factual reality of Annulla's past but to capture Annulla's affective interpretation of her past. In conclusion, the power of the play is not derived from the credibility of her testimony but from the affectivity of her words.

## II. *Mise-en-scène* at work in *Annulla*

The term “*mise-en-scène*” normally translates into English as a combination

of what we mean by staging and setting. It is used often in the fields of fashion and interior decoration, and by extension, to make a *mise* of a *scène* is to lay the scene out, to give it a style, and to display it with certain mode or fashion. Speaking cinematically, “*mise-en-scène*” is a common French term for film directing.<sup>21</sup> “*Mise-en-scène*” also describes directing as the placing of a script into the scene, onto a stage—staging or translating or realizing it, if speaking theatrically.

As many critics have pointed out, Mann’s theatre of testimony, in terms of *mise-en-scène*, has its roots in the 1920s theatre work of Bertolt Brecht and, more directly, Erwin Piscator, whose epic theatre tactics used “film, music, epic successions of tableaux and the immediacy of news coverage [to invigorate] the stage with new techniques while simultaneously calling for social action” (Salz 2). In the plays like *Execution of Justice* and *Greensboro*, Mann’s “*mise-en-scène*” fragments the life event and creates a polyphonic montage of voices, “redefining traditional narrative of life by shifting its focus from a linear subject-oriented trajectory to a multi-voiced community-oriented one” (Claycomb 97-98). In the case of *Annnulla*, the play’s “*mise-en-scène*” presents a kitchen stage set, in which Annnulla and the Voice, one physical and one audio, present their contemplation of their life. What is lurking in the background is the Holocaust per se.

### 1. *The Kitchen Stage Set, the Direct Address, and the Feminist Perspective*

In spite of the audio representation of the Young Woman’s Voice, which is selected from segments of Timothy Near’s 1985 interview with Mann, Annnulla and her kitchen are the visual focus of the onstage presentation.<sup>22</sup> Mann gained the idea of using a kitchen scene from an oral history of a Czech woman who had been interviewed by her American-born daughter. As Mann notes, “They had talked in the mother’s kitchen, and it was one of the most extraordinary mother-daughter scenes I have ever read” (“The Female Gaze” 78). “Unlike *Execution of Justice* and *Greensboro* which, according to Mann’s notes, are both to be presented on a bare stage allowing rapid transitions from one theatricalized location to the next, and unlike *Still Life* which places its actors at a conference table facing the audience from an undefined, formal location, *Annnulla* takes place in a single, realistically presented room” (LaPlant 62-63). The kitchen setting in which the character Annnulla performs is a highly realistic space, relying on theat-

<sup>21</sup> The special cinematic usage of “*mise-en-scène*,” originated from Andre Bazin, means directing within the shot by moving camera, actors, and focus, as opposed by cutting film, called montage.

<sup>22</sup> In reality, Annnulla’s London kitchen was where Emily and her best friend Irene interviewed her “while she was making chicken soup” (Mann, “The Female Gaze” 78).

rical design to place the action within an illusionistic frame. As Richard Kramer writes in his review of the 1988 New York production, “The setting for *Annulla* is more confined and naturalistic than those of Mann’s other plays” and presents a kitchen which “is specific and real” (289). This naturalistic set helps flesh out the character of Annulla, while the quiet and somewhat reminiscent sound of the Voice takes us outside the realm of naturalism.

Altogether, Mann has set two plays in kitchen: *Annulla (An Autobiography)*, and *Having Our Say* (1995), which is about two African American sisters, both of whom are over one hundred years old. Mann uses this traditional female setting self-consciously. “In each play,” explains Mann in her essay “The Female Gaze,” “the characters cook and prepare food while talking to the audience” (78). While both plays are set on a single representational kitchen, Mann’s production of *Having Our Say* also featured prominently another theatrical element—projection screens—which is common to Mann’s productions but absent from that of *Annulla* (LaPlant 63). The absence of either slide or video projections from *Annulla* excludes any external visual evidence which may supplement or cancel out the claims made by Annulla or the Voice, forcing the viewer to concentrate on the words expressed by the two characters. In her interview with David Savran, Mann suggests the slide projections in her plays are intended to provide an interpretive context because “they’re a shot of reality” (155). Nevertheless, in the case of *Annulla*, I do think the absence of projections is a better *mise-en-scène* decision because the so-called “interpretive context”—the Holocaust—might divert the audience’s attention from Annulla’s rich and complex monologues as well as the Voice’s contemplative reflections. In addition, Annulla’s personal narration doesn’t need the slide projections to help juggling with multiple perspectives and giving a shot of reality because the shot of reality is substantially furnished by the naturalistic kitchen set and props instead.

The kitchen stage set, while characteristic of her clustered and yet de-centered life, is expressive of Annulla’s ransacked memories and disturbed mental state. As Kramer describes the 1988 New York production, “The set is a clustered, functional kitchen, with cabinets and shelves overstuffed with the detritus of Annulla’s daily experience. The Kitchen table, occupying the center of the floor, overflows with papers—Annulla’s manuscript among them—and other paraphernalia” (288). This kitchen stage set follows Mann’s stage direction closely and puts emphasis on themes central to Mann’s script. In the script of *Annulla*, many of Annulla’s testimonies are told as she busily prepares homemade chicken soup for her ailing sister Ada. While Annulla is revealing bits and pieces of her tragic family life, which includes her marriage life, her hatred toward her parents and her sister Ada, the diaspora of her family members, the effect of anti-semitism on her

childhood, and the eventual death of her family members, we see her skinning chicken (14, 16), chopping onions (18) and scraping carrots (19). In terms of *mise-en-scène*, as LaPlant perceptively points out, “the minor violence involved in the food preparation subtly underscores the violence described in her narrative and at the same time provides a striking contrast, juxtaposing quotidian household chores with the recitation of a sequence of horrific and traumatic life events” (64).

To set the play *Annulla* in kitchen is a deliberate choice of Mann. It is her strategy to lower audience’s defense mechanism regarding the topics of the Holocaust, anti-semitism, and diaspora, addressed in the play, and is also a structural element of the play. Mann states her rationale in her interview with Salz:

And most people have that experience. You let down with women in a kitchen, right? So, that was the strategy. We meet, we get to know each other, we get to know each other better in the kitchen. . . . It was very simple. So that was the basic structure... [you could] talk about real horror and terrifying events in a kitchen and not sound didactic. Even talk about Auschwitz while you’re making chicken soup and it becomes part of life. (213)<sup>23</sup>

The domestic and banal kitchen activities tone down “what could easily become either a guilt-ridden, self-pitying confession or a heroic, self-congratulatory survivor story” (LaPlant 65).

It is clear that Mann’s attribution of value to personal testimony within the context of the domestic sphere typifies her feminist perspective. She even confesses that she herself has “learned more in the kitchens of wonderful older women that [she has] known as a child from her grandmother, her aunts and neighbors than [she] learned at Harvard” (qtd. in Salz 213). For Mann, the kitchen setting is what she was most familiar with. To have *Annulla*, alone by herself, address to the audience is, then, her strategy to communicate with the audience because she believes the audience can experience something direct and straightforward simply through the act of listening. As Mann says in her interview with Kathleen Betsko and Rachel Koenig, “Most of what I know about human experience comes from listening. That’s why it’s very natural for me to believe in direct address in the theatre. It is an extension of listening. When I put these stories on stage, the audience experiences a direct interaction which is in the

<sup>23</sup> In her essay “The Female Gaze,” Mann makes similar expressions: “Cooking in a kitchen, or watching someone cook and talking to them as they prepare food, is a familiar and often comforting activity. A kitchen is usually an unthreatening location to the people in it and, in a theatre, to the audience watching” (78). In her interview with Alexis Greene, Mann also argues that “in domestic situations, people will listen” to terrible things “[m]uch more than if you put [them] in a more austere setting where people put up their guard. People’s guard comes right down in the kitchen” (94).

moment” (281). Mann’s self-conscious use of kitchen space and direct address<sup>24</sup> has helped “show the effect of the violence rather than stage it” (Betsko and Koenig 285) and put Annulla, the “speaking (as) woman,” in an avowedly feminist subject position.<sup>25</sup> In a word, Mann’s *mise-en-scène* in *Annulla* is deeply rooted in women’s experience.<sup>26</sup>

## 2. *The mise-en-scène of the Manuscript*

The mammoth manuscript, which Mann refers to in her stage direction, is an unfinished draft of a six hour long play entitled *The Matriarchs*. Having been dropped and scattered on the floor just before the interview begins, the unnumbered manuscript is “half typed/half written, and in terrible disorder” (*Annulla* 7). It is at once an extremely important and highly symbolic *mise-en-scène* stage set and a sprawling feminist utopian work, demonstrating that a global matriarchy will conquer evil and save the world:

I am really very glad you came here for tea today, really. I expect it’s because you have heard about my play. Here it is. It is called *The Matriarchs*. I have boiled it down to just over six hours, but they tell me it has to be a bit more condensed, but you know I am a woman who has never any time. . . . If there were a global matriarchy, you know, there would be no more of this evil. I have all the answers in my play! I wanted to read you some of my play. The pages are not numbered. Just before you came I dropped it. . . . It’s all out of order. It’s too much of a mess now, maybe later I will read parts of it to you. (*Annulla* 8, 9-10)

Though packed with ideas and characters, the manuscript of *The Matriarchs* is not a direct account of Annulla’s Holocaust experiences. On the contrary, the play offers solutions to cure the evil human nature and holds on to a feminist utopian vision. In a Lysistrata-like voice, Annulla pronounces if the women would start thinking and taking action, they could change the world within a year (*Annulla* 14). Covering “the kitchen table stage center” (*Annulla* 7), the manuscript has become a transference or a displacement of Annulla’s Holocaust memory. Unnumbered, unstructured, incomplete, and hopelessly disorganized, the scattered manuscript is an embodiment of Annulla’s scattered brain and disordered life.

<sup>24</sup> Melanie Smith points out in her essay, “Total Denial: Emily Mann’s Feminist Techniques in the Context of Popular American Entertainment Culture,” that “Mann’s use of direct address figures prominently in her documentary style” (134).

<sup>25</sup> For me, Annulla embodies Luce Irigaray’s “speaking (as) woman” (*parler-femme*). As Irigaray writes, “The problem of ‘speaking (as) woman’ is precisely that of finding a possible continuity between the gestural expression or that speech of desire . . . and a language, including a verbal language” (137).

<sup>26</sup> For Edward R. Isser, both Mann’s *Annulla* and Barbara Lebow’s *A Shayna Maidel* are “the first American dramas that offer a feminist perspective on the destruction of Europe’s Jews” (76).

Once and again, Annulla's attempt to carry on her discussion of the manuscript, which is often accompanied by her constant fumbling for the right page, is either interspersed with her telling of her extraordinary survival tales or interrupted by her other businesses, such as sorting the manuscript, skinning the chicken, preparing the soup, and on and off typing and reading activities. As demonstrated in the scene quoted below, the scattered manuscript and all the other activities mirror physically not only "the scattered quality of her narrative" (LaPlant 66) but also the fragmented nature of her life:

Annulla . . . (*Sorting the manuscript, she shuffles through the pages*) Here I will read a bit. Oh, really I can't find anything, it is all out of order. Ah? Here is the beginning. Oh, no, what, what, what? Ah, here is something. No, it is really not applicable. Excuse me. (*Angry*) I have to start skinning this chicken for Ada's dinner. (*Puts books on one of the chairs. Takes out a chicken, a board and a very blunt old knife, and starts to skin the chicken, standing behind the table*). I shall send this play off to the producers after I have edited a bit more, but I am a woman who never has any time, and sometimes I don't know why I bother. (*Throws down chicken, goes to her desk, piled high with papers. Types. Then reads*). (14-15)

For LaPlant, the business-laden *mise-en-scène* of this scene suggested by the stage directions "has the power not only to establish Annulla's thematically-important concern with time, but also to subtly call into question Annulla's credibility as a narrator" (66). As for me, the main purpose of the scene is not to "call into question Annulla's credibility as a narrator" but to point out the fact that Annulla is practicing some kind of writing cure, trying so hard to restore herself to health from her Holocaust traumas: "I have so much time now, I am alone. I write all of the time. That is why I make up every day" (*Annulla* 29).

## Conclusion

Emily Mann went into the theatre not only because she was deeply moved by people's touching stories but also because it was a forum for ideas and viewpoints, a place to challenge stereotypical thinking and to provoke further arguments and debates, as well as "a way for members of a community to get together and face each other" (qtd. in Savran 159).<sup>27</sup> She has suggested that part of her attraction to the documentary form may have something to do with being female:

<sup>27</sup> In her interview with Alexis Greene, Mann expresses that she wants her work "to be challenging to a set of already held beliefs," and to challenge "people's points of view" (87).



Women sit around and talk to each other about their memories of traumatic, devastating events in their lives. Even women who don't know each other well!! . . . We often see the pain in one another and then we talk about it. . . . Most of what I know about human experience comes from listening. . . . Hearing is very powerful for me. (qtd. in Betsko and Koenig 281)

Her theatre is justifiably called the theatre of testimony because “[i]t is an extension of listening. I hear the stories, then I let you, the audience, have the same experience” (qtd. in Betsko & Koenig 281). She illuminates her audience by bringing a number of interwoven perspectives or voices into her plays. Her achievement is to turn what she has heard into a refined story and eventually a compelling theatrical performance. The success of her theatre testifies to the fact that Mann is a self-conscious artist and an experienced theatre practitioner who knows her trade—the theatre and its doubles. Of all the doubles manifested in her plays, *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène* form the most prominent pair which shows us fundamental things about Mann’s art in playwrighting and directing. In other words, Mann aestheticizes her documentary materials through the double movement of *mise-en-sens* and *mise-en-scène*, and invests Annulla with genuine affective force and originality. While at once the products of language and theatricality, the two characters in the play provide the double perspectives which contribute to the creation of the play’s overwhelming power.

Over the years, Mann, a theatre auteur, has developed a distinctive documentary style, which can be considered as her distinguishing contribution to the American stage. As Bigsby cogently points out, “The power of Emily Mann’s plays lies in part in her subject matter, in the knowledge that behind her characters lie people whose experiences compel attention. It lies in part in her skillful blending of documentary and invented material, in her orchestration of diverse elements to tell a story which addresses public issues through the lives of those who suffered, individually and collectively” (163). Mann’s impulse for verbatim testimony co-exists with her impulse for theatricality. As a playwright, Mann is never a neutral observer or voice. What characterizes her theatre is that her theatre is always a contested space between perspectival ideas and stories, between the will to verbatim testimony and the will to theatricality, between documentarian’s ethical responsibility and theatre artist’s interpretive constructivism, and between testimonies and theatre doubles. Her theatre is never a quiet place, always full of dissented voices clamoring for attention and understanding. It is unsettling and always makes you think because the interplay of perspectives or voices not only clarifies the network of individual character’s motives but also provides insight into the larger social matrix of which they are a part.

When being asked by her interviewer, Leigh Buchanan Bienen, about the element of autobiography in her plays, Mann gave us an intriguing answer: "There's autobiography in *Annulla*. That was one of the premises of *Annulla*. . . . Everything I write about is all me. They're all me, all of them. . ." (210). The power of *Annulla* lies not only in the affective power of its subject matter, but also in the fact that it is created out of Mann's deep-seated and heartfelt feelings toward human suffering. Mann's theatre is always a theatre with a vision, a vision to cultivate a learned public and to build up a philanthropist society. It is invested with a strong sense of what Victor Turner calls *communitas*, which is an acute point of community, always taking the whole of the community to share the feeling of great social equality, solidarity, and togetherness. "Spontaneous *communitas*," as Turner defines it, "is 'a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities,' a deep rather than intense style of personal interaction. 'It has something magical about it. Subjectively there is a feeling of endless power'" (47-48). In *Annulla*, Annulla's story is set against an acute point—the Holocaust—of twentieth-century European history, which forces people, even family members, to confront each other in a direct and immediate manner. Her story and testimony tend to break through the implacable fact of an enormity and bring the audience together affectively in a magical way.

Responsibility, community, and justice are the three keywords I will use to characterize Mann's art. In addition, as Athol Fugard notes in his "Introduction" to Mann's plays, "There was an even deeper process at work. The word that immediately came to mind was 'healing'" (xi). By arranging and constructing testimonies, Mann uses words, meaningful words to inform, to provoke, and to heal, to memorialize the event, and to replace the violence with words. Her theatre in the end is at once a documentary, an oral history, an indictment of injustice and violence, a celebration of humanity, a memorial for the dead, and a requiem that heals.

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## 語意構成與場面調度： 艾蜜莉·曼《安紐拉（一個自傳）》 —劇中的證言劇場和其兩個複象

### 摘要

艾蜜莉·曼是一個堅持以逐字方式，忠實呈現當事人證言的紀錄劇劇作家與劇場導演，她除了極盡可能地嘗試著去趨近真理與真實性，也試圖去提供有關猶太人大屠殺、越戰、謀殺案件審判、種族主義或同性戀恐懼症等，一個可被證實的故事與敘事。本論文試圖論證她是一位「作者導演」，意指她是一位在詮釋上與場面調度方面具有獨特個人風格與洞見的劇作家或導演，而非僅只是位執行例行公事卻缺乏個人風格與特色的導演。同時，本論文也指出曼的語意安排或詮釋絕不僅只是訪問稿的抄寫整理工作，因為所搜集的第一手紀錄資料往往需要經歷繁複地選材、濃縮、型塑與別具巧思的藝術安排過程。整個過程也須顧及時間的安排，亦即將歷史與故事放在時間的主軸上。辛苦編輯撰寫的劇本還須透過導演在舞台場面調度的巧思安排，才得以公開呈現。本論文的主要目的在討論曼的第一本紀錄劇本《安紐拉（一篇自傳）》(1977; 1985)，而不打算探討在《證言：四個劇本》一書中的其他劇作。其目的不外乎希望能深入探討分析艾蜜莉·曼的證言劇場和其兩個複象—語意構成與場面調度—在《安紐拉》一劇中的具體實踐方式。

**關鍵字：**艾蜜莉·曼，證言劇場，語意構成，場面調度，《安紐拉》