

Two Traumas One Aesthetic in Walsh's *Operación Masacre* and Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*

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Henry James Morello, "Two Traumas One Aesthetic in Walsh's *Operación Masacre* and Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*" <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweb/vol13/iss1/8>>

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Abstract: In his article "Two Traumas One Aesthetic in Walsh's *Operación Masacre* and Kaufman's *The Laramie Project*" Henry James Morello analyzes the stylistic similarities of Walsh's and Kaufman's texts. Walsh's 1957 testimonio *Operación masacre* was written as a response to the politically motivated violence perpetrated by the military government after the overthrow of Juan Perón, specifically the kidnapping and murder of a group of men thought to be Peronist sympathizers. In 1998 Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project created *The Laramie Project*, a play about the reactions of the people of Laramie to the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, which was motivated by his sexual orientation. Although these traumatic events could not be more distinct, there are intriguing parallels between these texts and the traumas that preceded them, which make these texts prime exemplars of what Morello calls posttraumatic literature.

Henry James MORELLO**Two Traumas One Aesthetic in Walsh's *Operación Masacre* and Kaufman's *The Laramie Project***

By examining Rodolfo Walsh's 1957 testimonio *Operación masacre* and Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project's 1998 play *The Laramie Project*, it becomes evident that these two texts, while distinct in terms of the traumas they seek to reconcile, share specific characteristics which mark them as prime exemplars of "posttraumatic culture." Posttraumatic culture is defined as a culture which is produced as a response to a trauma and whose stylistic features mirror symptoms found in posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). While *Operación masacre* was written as a response to the politically motivated violence perpetrated by the Argentine military government after the overthrow of Juan Perón and describes the kidnapping and execution style murder of a group of men thought to be Peronist sympathizers, *The Laramie Project* dramatizes the reactions of the people of Laramie, Wyoming, to the brutal murder of Matthew Shepard, which was motivated by his sexual orientation. Despite the fact that *Operación masacre* is a testimonial written in novel form and *The Laramie Project* is a play based on witness testimony, both projects fit the criteria for inclusion into posttraumatic culture. The events that are depicted in both of these texts have in common the dehumanization of the victims. In both cases the dehumanizing was, if not state sponsored, at least encouraged by the state. Giorgio Agamben traces dehumanization in *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* where he examines the contradiction in those who are included in the *polis*, like the suspected Peronists and Matthew Shepard, by way of their exception. Agamben's argument becomes important for the discussion of *Operación masacre*, as it is the Argentine government that creates the circumstances under which the alleged Perón supporters can be murdered without fear of consequence. In the case of Matthew Shepard, perpetrators Henderson and McKinney are not granted permission overtly to kill Shepard in this bestial manner; instead, they operate using cues they have picked up from the state and society: "Gay bashing ... allows perpetrators to reaffirm their own masculinity, their own aggressive heterosexuality, in opposition to this nonconformist threat. As an activity, it is tailor-made for this construction of masculinity, since it allows the visible demonstration of the most salient features of manliness: aggression, domination, and heterosexuality. ... Gay-bashing provides a resource through which young men can confirm not only what is natural, but what is culturally *demanded* of them in performance of their particular style of masculinity" (Perry 108). Henderson and McKinney view Shepard's sexual preference as a crime that sets him apart from society, yet he is human enough to be a danger to that society. The cues that the two use to "authorize" their behavior have a long legal and extra-legal history in the United States. For example, in the U.S., people of African descent are thought of, by too many, as less than human. In fact, the US constitution used fractions to count the slaves, creating a foundation for this way of thinking that has proven difficult to overcome. During wartime, governments would spend considerable money to dehumanize the enemy so that the soldiers would find it morally easier to kill them, and to garner public support for ongoing conflicts. Propaganda put out by Germany, the U.S., and Japan during World War II all depicted their enemies as less than human.

In *The Laramie Project*, which includes some of the transcript from Aaron McKinney's confession to police, one can see how the othering of Matthew Shepard precipitated his death. Even during his confession, McKinney continues to label Shepard as less than human, but close enough to human to be considered a threat to McKinney's worldview. He is a "queer" or not human, but he is a "dude," the word dude implies both a human quality and a masculine one at that and therefore is a threat to McKinney's sense of both what it means to be human and masculine. Furthermore, he tries to justify the murder as "gay rage." In McKinney's mind, if the sheriff, judge, and jury would see Shepard the way that he did, as inhuman, then his death would be meaningless and McKinney could go home. Neither the sheriff, nor the judge or jury saw Shepard the way McKinney and Henderson saw him. The murder of Shepard by McKinney and Henderson was not sanctioned by the state. In fact, the state of Wyoming arrested and convicted the suspects in rapid fashion, signaling an overt disapproval of the murder regardless of the victim. Yet, when we get to a discussion of how *The Laramie Project* contests official history we will see that the state's position on homosexuality is not exactly clear-cut.

Conversely, in Argentina, the state had more of a direct influence on the othering of Perón supporters and sympathizers. When Perón and the Peronist party were eliminated from political life, one could argue that Peronists were subjected to a "state of exception" and became, according to Agamben, *homo sacer*. Their political lives were officially removed leaving them in a state of "bare life." All mention of Perón was altered along with everyone or anything associated with him or his presidency (see Rein 6). They were, among other things, labeled terrorists. Like other people labeled terrorist throughout history, they were considered sub-human and were not afforded basic human rights. Finally, the alleged terrorists, since they had no rights under the law were dealt with through extra-legal means. Perhaps one of the more telling passages in *Operación masacre* comes as the alleged rebels are being loaded into a vehicle so that they can be driven to a remote location and brutally murdered. A prisoner by the name of Giunta is seen by police superintendent Cuello who calls out his name. The two talk briefly. According to the testimony it seems as though Cuello wants Giunta to remove the terrorist label from himself so that Cuello can save him from the firing-squad. For Cuello, as well as for all of the police and military involved, the group that was meeting at the house of Horacio di Chiano, to ostensibly listen to a boxing match on the radio, were part of a terrorist organization who were going to attempt to overthrow the government. To be in that house on that night was to be a terrorist. It was to be less than human. However, Giunta, a neighbor of di Chiano, barely knew him. They met in the street and Giunta was invited over probably more as a neighborly courtesy than anything else. For this reason Giunta did not know how to answer the question Cuello put to him: "But you. You were in that house? You were really there?" ("Pero usted. ¿estaba en esa casa? ¿Realmente estaba?" 87). Giunta could not have made the link between being in the house and being labeled a terrorist, which, in essence, attests to his innocence. He answered that he was there.

In both of the above examples, it is clear that the perpetrators of these violent crimes see the victims as less than human. In both cases, there is a sense of guilt by association. In *The Laramie Project* the overriding factor was Matthew Shepard's sexual orientation, or the way in which he associates with others, while in *Operación masacre* location is more important than Giunta's humanness with all of its attending rights. He is simply associating with the "wrong" people. *The Laramie Project* and *Operación masacre* then attempt to "re-humanize" the victims of these traumas so that the reader or spectator can more readily identify with them and share in their traumas. Moreover, these texts expand the view of who was victimized by the attacks. In both cases the victims stretch far beyond the people who died or were physically injured. In the case of *Operación masacre*, some of the victims actually escaped their execution, nevertheless, they have to live with the traumas associated with the night they almost died and some of their friends did die. They have the added trauma of survivor's guilt. The family members of the dead, the wounded, and the escapees also have to be counted as victims as they too were traumatized by the government's actions that night. Similarly, Matthew Shepard was not the only victim in Laramie. The interviews in the play indicate clearly a wide range of people, including the victim's friends and family, hospital staff, local police, and clergy suffered as a result of the torture and murder that took place the evening of the sixth of October. Even the local bartender who was one of the last people to see Matthew Shepard alive has been affected to the point that it is clear that he is a victim as well: "MATT GALLOWAY: Ultimately, no matter how you dice it, I did have an opportunity. ... If I had — amazing hindsight of 20/20 — to have stopped — what occurred... and I keep thinkin, I shoul'da noticed. These guys shouldn'ta been talking to this guy. I shoul'da not had my head down when I was washing dishes for those twenty seconds. Things I coulda done. What the hell was I thinking?" (52).

Both texts use a similar tactic in their efforts to humanize the victims. *Operación Masacre* is more structured in its efforts to construct multi-dimensional characters that the reader can relate to. As I mentioned, the book is divided into three parts. The first part, "Las personas," introduces the reader to a number of the men who were slated to be assassinated the night of the massacre. We are allowed glimpses into their personal lives; lives that go beyond the images conjured up by the state imposed terms like terrorist. When possible, Walsh tries to paint the picture of what their domestic and work lives were like before they were ripped apart by the traumatic events of the ninth of June in 1956. For example: "Nicolás Carranza had six children. The youngest ones must have grabbed his knees. The eldest, Elena, would have placed her head within reach of her father's hand. The tiny Julia Renée —

scarcely forty days old — dozed in her crib. His partner, Berta Figueroa, raised her eyes from the sewing machine. She smiled with a mixture of sorrow and joy. It was always the same. Her husband always arrived like this: elusive, melancholy, fleeting" ("Seis hijos tenía Nicolás Carranza. Los más pequeños se habrán prendido a sus rodillas. La mayor, Elena, habrá puesto la cabeza al alcance de la mano del padre. La ínfima Julia Renée — cuarenta días apenas — dormitaba en su cuna. Su compañera, Berta Figueroa, alzó los ojos de la máquina de coser. Le sonrió con mezcla de pena y alegría. Siempre era igual. Siempre llegaba así su hombre: huido, nocturno, fugaz" 23). In light of the fact that Carranza is one of the group who does not survive the firing-squad, it is important to take note of the verb tenses Walsh uses in the section that describes him. He shifts from the imperfect in the first sentence, which is a verifiable piece of information regarding the number of children Carranza had to the future perfect which indicates a shift to conjecture. This change makes sense if Walsh is imagining the scene. He then however moves back to the more concrete preterit form. This brief shift in tense stands in stark contrast to Walsh's use of the present indicative when describing the thoughts Carranza is having while awaiting interrogation: "Carranza, for his part, remembers Berta's words, 'Turn yourself in, turn yourself in'" ("Carranza, a su vez, recuerda las palabras de Berta: 'Entregate, entregate'" (75). Walsh also uses the present indicative just before Carranza is shot: "Let's run, Carranza, says Gavino, I think they are going to kill us. Carranza knows it. But a remote hope that he was wrong keeps him walking" ("Disparemos, Carranza — dice Gavino — creo que nos matan. Carranza sabe que es cierto. Pero una remotísima esperanza de estar equivocado lo mantiene caminando" 95). Walsh hypothesizes that it is doubt or perhaps hope and not fear that keeps Carranza from running, but he writes the scene with knowing authority. However, before he writes what he imagines is going through Carranza's mind he indicates to the reader that the whole section is speculative: "From this point the story is fragmented, blown into twelve or thirteen panicked fragments" ("A partir de ese instante el relato se fragmenta, estalla en doce o trece nódulos de pánico" 95). This technique builds a level of trust between the reader and the text. Through the use of verb tenses the text clearly indicates the difference between speculation and more concrete information regarding an event.

The *Laramie Project* uses a similar but far more disjointed introduction to the lives of the victim(s). Furthermore, the play also introduces the reader/spectator to the lives of those who would bear witness to the testimony of the townspeople who had been suffering the effects of the crime. The first person to appear is a narrator who describes how the play was created, as well as, when, and how many interviews were conducted. The narrator's final line introduces the first company member, Greg Pierotti who describes his first interview: "My first interview was with Detective Sergeant Hing of the Laramie Police Department. At the start of the interview he was sitting behind his desk, sitting something like this (he transforms into Sergeant Hing)" (5). At this point, he takes on the physical and vocal characteristics of the police sergeant. Once he becomes Hing, he then offers some of his history in Laramie: "I was born and raised here. My family is, uh, third generation. My grandparents moved here in the early nineteen hundreds. We've had basically three, well, my daughter makes it fourth generation" (5). Although brief and spread out through almost the entirety of the text, these introductions are similar to the first section of Walsh's text and they serve an analogous function: a description of people that extends beyond their labels. Also, since, like many of the victims in *Operación masacre*, Matthew Shepard was dead, third party witnesses had to fill in those human details, that which made him more than, as McKinney put it, "queer." "Romaine Patterson: We never called him Matthew, actually, most of the time we called him Choo-choo ... And whenever I think of Matthew, I think of his incredible beaming smile" (19). At the same time, the play did not try to obfuscate the complete picture that made up Matthew Shepard: "Doc O' Connor [limousine driver]: And he says, 'Yeah, I'm Matthew Shepard. But I don't want you to call me Matthew, or Mr. Shepard. I don't want you to call me anything. My name is Matt. And I want you to know, I am gay and we're going to a gay bar. Do you have a problem with that?' And I said, 'How're you payin?' ... Matt was a blunt little shit, you know what I'm sayin?' But I liked him 'cause he was straightforward, you see what I'm saying? Maybe gay but straightforward, you see what I'm saying?" (19).

Also, the play did not try to avoid the fact that Shepard was HIV positive. In fact, it became a subplot within the play and created much of the dramatic tension. In the first act, Officer Reggie Fluty describes her first encounter with the dying boy: "He was covered in, like I said, partially dry blood and blood all over his head – the only place that he did not have any blood on him, on his face, was what appeared to be where he had been crying down his face" (36). Midway through the second act, Reggie Fluty returns to her description of the scene adding a little more detail: "It was just such an overwhelming amount of blood... and we try to wear protective gloves, but we had a really cheap sheriff at the time, and he bought us shit gloves, you know, you put 'em on, and they kept breaking, so finally you just ran out of gloves, you know" (53). Fluty goes on to explain that Shepard had HIV and that because she had been building a shelter for her llamas she had a number of open cuts on her hand and she had been exposed to the virus. It is not until the final act that Fluty returns to say that she has tested negative for the virus. There are three significant points that can be made from the way this information is used in the play. The first is that this information does not necessarily endear the reader/spectator to the victim and could have a negative affect on the audience. However, since the play presents the fact that Shepard was HIV positive, the reader/spectator has no reason to believe that the author is hiding any information. Second, as David William Foster notes concerning Walsh's work, this "narrative withholding" creates dramatic tension. Like Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Walsh's *Operación masacre*, this text uses journalistic techniques, and narrative strategies found in fiction writing to create a dramatic arc. Third, the fracturing of this narrative, as I will discuss below, is indicative of posttraumatic literature.

The way in which these two texts begin is reminiscent of one of the symptoms of PTSD. Victims of PTSD often do not know how to begin to bear witness to their traumas. People who have suffered the disorder often start their narratives with "I don't know where to begin." Similarly, posttraumatic texts start from a metaphoric "I don't know where to begin." Often when victims try to speak of their traumas they are told to begin with their names. A person's name serves as a point of identification that predates their traumatic events. The result of these two works opening with this technique is twofold. First, the texts clearly, in a Brechtian sense, distance themselves from their audiences by reminding them that it is a novel or a play. Posttraumatic culture is also Brechtian in the sense that it is interested, not in catharsis, but in finding a starting point for reflection on traumatic experience. By clearly indicating that *Operación masacre* is a narrative and *The Laramie Project* is a theatrical interpretation of people's thoughts, these works signal to their audiences that they do not expect a suspension of disbelief, but rather an engagement. Second, as I mentioned, the texts start with a metaphorical "I don't know where to begin." The introduction of characters is a safe space from which to begin their engagement with the audience. Once these works confront the traumas, the next stage of posttraumatic culture begins.

There is a tension that exists in victims of PTSD, in traumatized societies, and in posttraumatic culture. In all cases there is a need to avoid the original traumatic events coupled with the desire to talk or write about them. The avoidance of thinking or speaking about the horrific events leads to a variety of problems in individuals and societies. One of the gravest dangers of avoidance at a societal level is the imposition of false memories and the same process that is used in creating false memories for the individual can also create false collective memories. Although collectives cannot have memories in the same way an individual does, they do serve the purpose of finding the common denominator among shared narratives so that the group can share in past events. The memories can either be recorded or reiterated when the group gathers. Either way, collective memories as Ana Douglass and Thomas A. Vogler point out, take time to construct and they posit that "Now, on the other hand, we have a much more immediately materialized history, one that can even be fabricated and recorded on the spot by modern media — making history come *before* collective memory rather than after. Advances in technology do not guarantee greater accuracy for collective memory, since those technologies can readily be manipulated by those in power" (16-17).

This danger is multiplied during times of crises, regardless whether the crisis is real or imagined. Populations that feel threatened in some way are more apt to accept, uncritically, the immediate histories created by the modern media: "The controlled productions of the media during the 1991 Gulf War are a good example of this process, short-circuiting the more conventional sense of a gradual

process of the "transformation of memory into history" (Douglass and Vogler 17). In both *Operación masacre* and *The Laramie Project* the media created official history, a history that circumvented or ignored collective memory. This manufactured history had to be contested. However, posttraumatic literature emulates the tension between the need to tell and the desire to avoid found in the symptoms of PTSD making the task of contesting official history more complicated. In a sense the texts seemingly try to avoid the very traumas they set out to address. While this might seem to be counter-productive there are several important reasons for emulating the desire to avoid.

Operación masacre uses three techniques to avoid trauma. The first is the organization of the narrative. Since the book is separated into three distinct sections, fully one-third of the text introduces us to the characters and tries to build sympathy for them. The first part of the narrative hints at what is to come, but Walsh does not give us explicit detail until the second section. The second way in which Walsh disassociates from the traumatic events is the use of fictional narrative techniques. More than one critic has commented on how the text rides a very thin line between fiction and non-fiction (see Castillo; Foster; Zavarzadeh). Carolina Castillo goes so far as to say that this genre "*pondría definitivamente en crisis ciertas categorías tradicionales como realidad, ficción y verdad*" ("would definitely put into crisis certain traditional categories such as reality, fiction, and truth") (Castillo <<http://www.ucm.es/info/especulo/numero25/yoacuso.html>>). This technique allows readers some distance from the actual traumatic events. In some cases, when the reader is not distanced from the original tragedy by time or geography, other forms of distance need to be created in order for the events to be assimilated. This process mimics the mediated form of the reoccurring dreams reported by victims of PTSD. The third technique found in the text is described by David William Foster as a "form of narrative withholding" (Foster 44). Walsh cuts away from one narrative line and jumps to another using a technique that builds suspense but also avoids traumatic information. Interestingly, everyone, from participant, to author, to reader all share the same conflicting desires. A narrative that does not create distance, that does not mediate the trauma, that is too blunt, will not be readily acceptable to an audience that may have been affected by that or similar traumas. For example, Ariel Dorfman's *La muerte y la doncella* (*Death and the Maiden*) did not find initially success in Chile because it did not create the distance needed by the Chilean audiences at the time. Dorfman notes in an interview with Jenifer Berman that "In Chile, the people found it not to be allegorical at all, but realistic, and found themselves hurt or wounded by the brutality with which I show their lives" (Dorfman qtd. in Berman 31).

The Laramie Project uses many of the same devices to create a safe space for the audience. The play is divided into what playwright Moisés Kaufman calls "moments." Each moment works like a flash of memory from an event or a series of reconstructed fragments of voices, images, and thoughts. The moments, like the fractured narrative in *Operación masacre* break off, often at moments of heightened tension. Furthermore, on more than one occasion, the people who are bearing witness to the tragedy are unable to speak directly to the trauma and leave out information. The use of ellipsis and verbal pauses such as "uh" and "um" highlight the difficulty people had speaking about what had happened. At the end of the moment entitled "Alison and Marge," Marge Murray, tells members of the theatre company interviewing her, "Okay, then, there are parts I won't tell you" (17). What Marge leaves out is that she is Reggie Fluty's mother and does not want to divulge the information about Reggie's contact with Shepard. The inclusion of Marge's omission of information serves a dual purpose. First, Marge's desire to avoid is indicative of posttraumatic culture. Second, at the level of story the mention of something-yet-to-come serves as foreshadowing for information the audience assumes will come later. Nevertheless, the narrative continues. The stories are told, and these stories, once completed by the characters and reconstructed by the spectators offer a challenge to official history.

The challenge to official history is more complicated in *The Laramie Project* than in *Operación masacre*, where the official story was that the event never happened. The murder of Matthew Shepard was widely reported, and is part of official history. What was left out was an important element of the crime, that the beating death of Shepard was a "hate crime." Barbara Perry describes hate crime as follows: "Hate crime involves acts of violence and intimidation, usually directed toward already stigmatized and marginalized groups. As such, it is a mechanism of power and oppression, intended to reaffirm the precarious hierarchies that characterize a given social order. It attempts to re-created

simultaneously the threatened (real or imagined) hegemony of the perpetrator's group and the 'appropriate' subordinate identity of the victim's group. It is a means of marking both the Self and the Other in such a way as to reestablish their 'proper' relative positions, as given and reproduced by broader ideologies and patterns of social and political inequality" (10). When asked by company member Stephen Belber if homophobia was involved or contributed to the crime, "Jen," a friend of McKinney, responded, "Probably. It probably would've pissed him off that Matthew was gay 'cause he didn't like" (61). The abrupt termination of "Jen's" speech is another sign of posttraumatic theatre. This time instead of the spectators anticipating future information, they are required to fill in the missing piece of dialogue. Jen breaks off at this point but, from this statement, the statement by McKinney during his confession and others, it becomes obvious that this was a hate crime (see Perry for prevalence rates of hate crimes against the gay community). However, Wyoming is the only state to offer no hate crime legislation, furthermore, the defendants could not be tried on federal hate crime legislation because "sexual orientation" is not a protected category. On occasion, until 28 October 2009 when President Barak Obama signed into law a comprehensive hate crime bill, a bill would surface that would add gender, disability, and sexual orientation to existing hate crime laws. However in 1999 it was referred to a subcommittee of the Committee on Judiciary where no action was taken. In 2004, the U.S. Senate voted 65 to 33 in favor of hate crime legislation, the House of Representatives also supported the measure, but when the bill went to a joint House-Senate committee the hate crime wording disappeared allowing most lawmakers to say that they voted for crime legislation, but it did not make it into the final law. On 26 May 2005 Senator Edward M. Kennedy introduced yet another hate crimes bill. That bill again was sent to the Judiciary committee where no action was taken. It was not until 28 October 2009 that the Mathew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act (HCPA) was signed into law by President Barack Obama.

The Laramie Project challenges the idea that the crime was motivated by something other than hate. Furthermore, it challenged the idea that in Wyoming, as well as many other states, and on a federal level in the United States, no one can be attacked due to an intense hatred of their sexual orientation. As I suggest earlier, the attempt at controlling official history was more clear-cut in the case of Argentina after the military led coup in 1955. The country was led by Eduardo Lonardi-Aramburu whose regime controlled the nation between 1955-1962: "Aramburu believed that with the erasing of Peronist institutions and memories ... the road could be cleared for re-establishing 'representative democracy'" (Ciria 26). The most popular way of trying to erase Peronism from the country involved purging trade unions, universities and the military of suspected Peronists: "Propaganda of any kind favorable to Peronism was prohibited, as was the mere mention of Perón's name; henceforth he was referred to as the "'fugitive tyrant' or the 'deposed dictator'" (Romero 135). The eradication of all things Perón extended to the schools where, according to Monica Rein, teachers told their students to rip out any pages in their textbooks with reference to Perón: "Once the 1955 school year had ended, the education ministry began to prepare for the next school year. It had to devise new curricula, write textbooks to replace the Peronist ones, hire teachers with the 'right' educational orientation, and undertake various other tasks" (Rein 139). This level of control extended to the execution style slaying and escape of the suspected Peronists as described in *Operación masacre*. According to Walsh, "Los hechos que relato en este libro fueron sistemáticamente negados, o desfigurados por el gobierno de la Revolución Libertadora" (150) ("The facts that I relate in this book were systematically denied or altered by the government of the Revolución Libertadora"). Furthermore, according to the government "Fernández Suárez claimed that Livraga had been neither shot nor wounded" ("Fernández Suárez pretendió que Livraga no había sido fusilado, ni siquiera herido" 150). Later, in the same summary of events by Fernández Suárez, he admitted that Livraga did have wounds, but that they were "evidence of his active participation in the revolutionary movement" "evidencia de su activa participación en el movimiento revolucionario" 151). Walsh is able to use the statements and contradictions by the officials involved in the massacre to discredit them and to lend credence to the statements made by the victims in the story. By collecting the testimony of those victims who escaped the government sponsored murder attempt and publishing it in Argentina, Walsh challenged the official position that the events did not take place. Equally as important, Walsh positions the victims as deserving of human rights. These challenges have a dual effect. For the wounded and the friends and families of both the

wounded and dead *Operación masacre* allows the testimonies to be heard, in some cases for the first time. He helps the victims recreate personal narratives that were interrupted by the traumatic events and in some cases the onset of PTSD. Through the act of listening, Walsh validates the victims and aids in their reconstruction of the fragmented memories of that night. On a societal level, through the act of publishing the reconstructed memories, Walsh creates a more complex history by adding previously silenced voices to the collective memory.

The Laramie Project also helps individuals reconstruct their personal memories and after collecting those memories, projects them into the public sphere. Once in the public sphere, those personal memories become part of the collective memory of the community: "What is 'collectively' remembered is not in this sense the sum of isolated personal experiences but something that was an intensely *shared* communal experience, the sum of a collection of separate but similar individual experiences" (Douglass and Vogler 17). Without cultural acts like *The Laramie Project* the only record of the life and death of Matthew Shepard would be the media created insta-history. Furthermore, without such collected and shared memories there, most likely, would not be the perennial push in the U.S. Congress for more comprehensive hate crime legislation. The collective memory of traumatic events serves a myriad of purposes. It can affect legislation, alter official history, allow survivors to assimilate the events and mourn, and it can share the pain of the original trauma among a wider collective. No longer do the victims of *Operación masacre* and of Laramie, Wyoming have to bear the entire weight of those traumas.

Once the texts or the performances are created and communicated to the public they begin a process of bearing witness. The implicit agreement made by the readers/spectators of posttraumatic literature is that they will serve in the role of "listener" that they will themselves share in the trauma. The trauma that was felt by a few is now shared among many. Bearing witness to traumatic events is an integral part of posttraumatic culture. Posttraumatic culture by my definition must have, or at least aim for, a therapeutic effect. However, unlike Aristotelian tragedy, these texts do not offer closure. The goal is not to force a cathartic reaction, nor is it to invoke fear and/or pity. What they offer is an opening from which discussion and understanding of the horrific events can begin. Once the audience has witnessed the events, it is encouraged to then bear witness to them. The texts and performances of posttraumatic culture are a trigger for meditation or discussion of these particular traumas, as well as other related traumas. Through the use of fragmented story lines, shifting verb tenses, and other narrative strategies that parallel symptoms of PTSD, these texts attempt to speak to the tragic events that inspired them. These two works, like all examples of posttraumatic culture attempt to challenge official history, recreate personal memories and add to the collective memory of society. In the end, using similar techniques for very different traumas, *Operación masacre* serves as a tool for the assimilation of related political traumas in Chile, Spain, Germany, or the United States, just as *The Laramie Project* can serve to help us better understand the traumas related to hate crimes.

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