

Outi Lahtinen

Aalto University

CARYL CHURCHILL'S KILL: DEEDS OF WORDS, DEEDS OF BODIES & MATTER

DECONSTRUCTING THE CAPITAL TRANSGRESSION OF KILLING CHILDREN

Caryl Churchill's *Kill* (produced by Finnish National Theatre, dir. Minna Leino) is an extremely economical and focussed play: two people on the stage, one giving a monologue, the other one pouring sticky liquid from a carton to a bowl. They both remain seated during the whole monologue, only the words and the sticky liquid, stage blood, flow in a torrent. The monologue hurls words talking about family relations generation after generation repeating one particular narrative: the fathers sacrificing their children. Something else keeps on repeating as well. The speaker of the monologue is a God, and he speaks on behalf of gods. Occasionally, he reminds us that the gods do not exist, they are invented by people. Yet the sacrificing of the children is performed to please the gods. The stage blood flows over the brim of the bowl.

In my paper, I use the word 'deed' to point specifically to J. L. Austin as the theoretical founder of the discourse on performativity. *Words and Deeds* was the name of Austin's series of lectures at Oxford before his better-known Harvard lectures (1955) of which the notes then were later edited and published as the book *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). Following Austin, I locate the point of performativity in the act's capacity to establish something instead of representing or presenting something. Churchill's play points a finger at humans who use gods that they have invented to justify their transgressive acts. The scandalous spectacle of Greek mythology is distant and therefore safe, but the bare and reduced narrative and setting suggests that it might be a representative of a larger group, the religions in general. Is that what the humans tend to do with religion: justify the killing of their own descendants?

Biography

Outi Lahtinen (PhD in theatre research, University of Helsinki) is a professor of practice at Aalto University / The School of Arts, Design and Architecture and a visiting lecturer at the

University of Helsinki. Her research interests include performance analysis and theory of performativity, which are also the topic of her dissertation *Performativity in Theatre or How to Play with a Burned Match: A Study on a Concept, a Theory and a Theatre Production* (<https://helda.helsinki.fi/handle/10138/321776>).