The Nausea is not inside me: I feel it *out there* in the wall, in the suspenders, everywhere around me. It makes itself one with the café, I am the one who is within it. Jean Paul Sartre, *Nausea*. (19)

[W]alls, enclosures and facades serve to define both a *scene* (where something takes place) and an *obscene* area to which everything that cannot or may not happen on the scene is relegated… Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*. (36)

There is nothing behind the wall. There is nothing behind the wall.
Judith Thompson, *I am Yours*. (119)

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Space, Identity, and Difference in 4 Plays by Judith Thompson

by

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Dedicated to Rejean Gagnon, my father.

Abstract

In this dissertation, I read Judith Thompson's *The Crackwalker*, *I am Yours*, *Habitat*, and *Lion in the Streets* with an eye towards how Thompson produces socially contingent spaces as sites of marginalized identity. My focus is on Thompson's work as a playwright rather than on the texts in performance. My interest is in the ways Thompson mediates a characterization of class-based marginality through the experience of space as a social product.

In interrogating Thompson's use of space, I refer to the theories of philosopher Henri Lefebvre, specifically to the notion of space as a social product and his conception of the "double illusion."

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Introduction

Judith Thompson is one of Canada's most accomplished playwrights. In the nearly three decades of her career, Thompson has had over 10 full length plays produced multiple times across Canada and abroad. She has been anthologized many times and received numerous awards including the Order of Canada. Thompson is so much the subject of critical and scholarly study that in a recent anthology of critical writings about Thompson's work, editor Ric Knowles suggests that she may well be "…the subject of more MA theses, PhD dissertations, scholarly chapters, articles, and interviews than any other Canadian playwright, with the possible and partial exceptions of Sharon Pollock and George F. Walker" (Knowles vii).

Her 1984 play, *White Biting Dog*, garnered her a Governor General's Award. She received a second for her anthology *The Other Side of the Dark* (1989) which featured *The Crackwalker* and *I Am Yours* as well as two radio plays: *Pink* and *Tornado*. She has also been awarded two Chalmers awards for *I Am Yours* (1987) and *Lion in the Streets* (1990). She holds multiple Dora Mavor Moore awards, and in 2007, the Canada Council for the Arts recognized her work with the Walter Carsen Prize for Excellence in the Performing Arts.

Awards and honours notwithstanding, Thompson's plays are rarely, if ever, described as pleasant to watch. Rather, her works are almost always discussed in terms of the horror, pain, and alienation in which they traffic. Words like "disturbing", "brutal", "dark", and "harrowing" pepper the reviews of her work. Critics have described Thompson's oeuvre as a "Canadian Grotesque" (Wilson 1996), and "[…]a virtual

catalogue of tortured characters, macabre perspectives, unflinchingly brutal depictions of urban life" (Nichols 2002). Her characters have been described in a variety of ways from simply "disgusting" (Hampson 2001) to "the urban underclass" (Cushman 1990) and even a collection of "[…] oddballs and losers, the people who nice, genteel folk […] might normally avoid." (Renzetti 1997) Certainly, there is something to these perceptions: Thompson's characters do much more than merely lie, cheat, and steal; they humiliate and terrorize each other, they commit acts of extreme cruelty and, in two cases, even murder children. Reviewers overwhelmingly characterize the experience of a Judith Thompson play as an uncomfortable one, recalling audience walkouts (Conlogue 1984) and requests to change seating in order to be more physically distant from the action on stage (Rafelman 1990).

Examined as a whole, Thompson's collected plays are consistent in their treatment of certain themes. The most apparent of these is the issue of class difference and alienation – a theme for which Thompson is particularly well known. Virtually all of Thompson's plays deal with working-poor characters. Critics frequently make much of this feature and in so doing, highlight class tensions both within Thompson's plays and in the real world. Writing on *Sled* (1997), Elizabeth Renzetti highlights class tension in Thompson's work by quoting an anonymous audience member who asks: "What's a nice Annex mom doing writing about all these low-lifes?" (Renzetti 1997). Another reviewer refers tellingly to this theme as it appears in *Lion in the Streets*, invoking: "[…] the contempt of the working class for the middle class […]" adding "[…] things we all know to be the stuff of daily reality" (Conlogue 1990). When discussing *The Crackwalker*, Sarah Hampson says it "[…] explored the bleak realities of the inner city"(Hampson

2001); she clarifies her use of the term "inner city" – this term, of course, being code for the space of the urban poor, or as Hampson refers to it later in the article, the "cultural underbelly." So ubiquitous is this theme in Thompson's plays that a review of her more recent *Capture Me*, specifically notes the absence of the alienated poor: "The debilitating male violence that was once limited to her socially marginalized characters has spread to society's upper strata" (Al-Solaylee 2004). The identification of this theme by reviewers is consistent with Thompson's own characterization of her work: "At the risk of sounding grandiose, I seem to give voice to people who have no voice or very little in the culture, whom people don't listen to" (Vowles 1999). Thompson's description of her subject matter is supported in the literary critical reception of her work. Urjo Kareda remarks in his introduction to *The Other Side of the Dark* that:

> Judith Thompson hears the poetry of the inarticulate and semi-literate, embodying the colloquialisms, the brand names, the fractured but expressive syntax, with the urgency of their speakers. She frees her words to carry their wild, unruly, seeking spirits. (Thompson 1989)

Thompson and Kareda both make reference to a "voicelessness" or "inarticulateness" inherent in Thompson's misfit characters. The causes of this breakdown in communication are varied throughout Thompson's plays. In *The Crackwalker*, it is most vividly represented in Theresa's mental retardation. In *Lion in the Streets*, Isobel suffers from it as a product of her non-corporeal status, her existence as a mere spectre rather than an actual person. *I am Yours* calls attention to it as a consequence of enculturation and as a choice on the part of Pegs to reject the grammatical conventions of the bourgeoisie. Finally, in *Habitat*, it is manifest in the deaf ears with which the group

home residents' desires for home and community are met as they enter the neighborhood of Mapleview Lanes. This breakdown in communication and understanding is an essential characteristic of Thompson's marginalized characters. It is a natural part of the alienation her characters suffer and it is the source of the violence that is committed in her plays.

In discussing the seemingly dark themes in her plays, Thompson frequently appeals to a conception of the world that is essentialist, unified, and heavily infused with Catholic conceptions of good and evil, sin and redemption, confession and forgiveness. In discussing the cause of her characters' destructive and frightening behavior and the nightmares that plague many of them, she suggests: "It's probably just radical evil," (Wachtel 1991). At the same time, however, the inability to find common ground and mutual understanding is also offered up as an explanation for the violence committed by her marginalized characters. In Thompson's words: "Often, I think it comes from a *perceived* persecution; *why* do certain individuals feel they're being persecuted? Where does that come from?" (ibid). This voicelessness is the contributing factor to the rage that manifests itself in so many gruesome acts by her characters. Eschewing a more materialist interpretation of such situations, Thompson suggests that there may not be a specific source to the oppression and persecution suffered by her characters. Rather, she leaves the source unknown and merely offers that her characters "[…]might blame it on someone who's altogether innocent – they do – completely innocent" (ibid). Thompson offers her characters up as microcosmic representations of "the whole culture" and suggests that "[…]there is evil and good warring in the culture at all times" (ibid). In light of this characterization of good and evil, it is the act of writing by Thompson that

simultaneously creates these characters and offers them salvation: "you're humanizing these people, giving them a voice" (ibid). Thompson herself has been quoted with saying as much and this perception of her work is shared by Urjo Kareda who says of Thompson's marginalized characters: "They have no champions, except for their playwright, who in creating them gives them, unequivocally, their moment of self-knowledge, their moment of dignity, their moment of visionary ecstasy" (qtd. in Thompson, 1989). These characterizations of Thompson's work suggest a link between being human, receiving grace, and having a voice. Under this framework, it is the audience who struggles to understand these characters. It is the audience, positioned on the outside of the action, witnessing and judging, who ultimately confers - through the playwright's guiding hand - humanity upon these pitiful, flawed, and unknowable characters.

For Thompson's characters, the struggle to find a metaphorical common ground with the audience is coupled with a simultaneous negotiation of the social space within the world of her plays. The journey her characters take is one in which the bid for mastery over space is tied to one's relationship to the normative social body. In the case of Thompson's characters it is a relationship in which the marginalized exist as the constitutive border of the spaces of normal, good, and desirable members of society. Just as the actors in these plays stand on a threshold between the world of the audience and that of the story, so too do Thompson's characters struggle with the nebulous position of being within-yet-apart-from social space. It is my contention that the relationship between Thompson's characters and the spaces that encompass them determine the success or failure of their attempts at self-mastery. Thompson creates space as more than

merely the backdrop against which her characters vie for recognition and agency. Rather, I argue, Thompson establishes and defines the space of her characters in such a way that it always influences how such struggles occur and whether or not they are ultimately successful. It is my belief that in most cases Thompson's characters are doomed to fail because she has created spaces in which there is never any real possibility for the marginalized to achieve agency.

The way individuals define and are in turn defined by space is at the heart of many of Judith Thompson's plays. I have chosen to focus on four of Thompson's plays that I feel most exemplify both a personal and a public relationship to space. *The Crackwalker*, *I am Yours*, *Lion in the Streets*, and *Habitat* all begin with main characters leaving their homes behind. This initial estrangement from the private space of the home precipitates the action of the plays that reveals a deeper separation from public space as well. In all four cases, Thompson's characters seek a state of belonging and self-actualization that is thwarted by their inability to fit into public space. Of the four plays, none ends with any true homecoming. While *Habitat* and *Lion in the Streets* each end with an apotheosis of sorts, this transcendent rising to a divine level implies not self-mastery, but a complete submission to a divine authority. While all four of the plays I have chosen have these basic elements in common, all can be read as examining the space of marginality in different ways. Thompson, as the playwright, produces the spaces that shape and define the experiences of her characters. The way she writes their relationships to space establishes a conception of social space that excludes the other from normative society.

The spaces that Thompson writes for her characters are heterotopias – spaces in which an alternative ordering of identities and truths exists. They are spaces of difference; transgressive, contradictory arenas within which she makes her abject and alienated characters play out their frustrations and rebellions against the social, political and economic realities that bear down on them. From Sandy's living room doubling as Theresa's bedroom in *The Crackwalker*, to the affluent home in *Habitat* that becomes repurposed as a shelter for troubled youth, Thompson creates spaces that are fluid in their identification. They are liminal insofar as they exist on the threshold of being one thing or another; public or private, home or shelter. As theatrical spaces, they are even more troubled in their identification. On the one hand they are the spaces in which the unseen, the wretched, and the voiceless exist – representations of the borders of normative society. Yet, being the focus of the theatrical audience, they are discursively relocated to the centre of social focus. Thus, even as Thompson's marginalized characters stand at a literal and figurative centre-stage, they remain relegated to the constitutive outside of a society that keeps such people invisible. It is Thompson's assertion that she tries "…to help make the invisible visible" (Hampson 2001) and a part of that involves moving the margins of society to a central point of audience focus.

From a theatrical standpoint, moving the outside to the inside is by no means a new concept – any play that establishes the performance space as something other than what it literally is performs some discursive reordering of space. This discursive re-imagining of space is a social phenomenon – audiences and performers agree that, for the time being, one specific space is actually something else for the purposes of telling a

story. According to Henri Lefebvre, a similar phenomenon occurs in society: space is always a social product and the result of repeated actions and behaviors.

It is the notion of space as a social product that I intend to explore here. This concept, initially elaborated by Henri Lefebvre, proposes that space must be read as more than the backdrop before which human existence plays out (Lefebvre 1991). Lefebvre's greatest achievements are frequently said to be his work on the sociology of urban and rural spaces and of everyday life. Operating from within a Marxist Humanist framework, he sought to examine the way space is produced even as it finds itself alienating the very people who produce it. Lefebvre's explorations of space would prove to be highly influential to human geography, urban studies and architecture. Vital to Lefebvre's work is the conception that space is always tied to a production of sorts. It is always the result of relationships of power and the repeated actions and gestures occurring within it and because of it. For Lefebvre, space is simultaneously the product and the means of production. "Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting others" (Lefebvre 1991, 73). Lefebvre's work is particularly well suited to interrogating theatre in general and Thompson's work specifically. The theatre is always already a socially produced space – at its very basest level it requires some consensus as to the border between performance and reality. This need not be consciously decided or predetermined (as with an actual constructed stage); it may be as simple as the space towards which the performers draw the audience's gaze. Any participation in a performance must necessarily employ some social construction of space and this construction occurs through the spatial practice of audience and performer. It is always subject to the social codes of performer/spectator even when it attempts to

break those same rules. Even the most radical guerilla theatre must contain some element of a playing space and must involve, to some extent, the experience of witnesses. Thus, within the theatre, we are not simply experiencing a single social space, but a multiplicity of spaces that exist simultaneously, each produced by and producing a series of social relationships and hierarchies of power. The space in which a performance unfolds is never merely an inert container for action, but is always invested with a litany of power relations being performed within it.

Lefebvre's theories are particularly germane to Thompson's work with the space of the other. In the opening pages of *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre clearly states that in his work he will "[…]show how space serves, and how hegemony makes use of it[…]" (Lefebvre 1991, 11). His aim, like Thompson's, is to make visible that which is unseen. His methodology involves demonstrating how hegemonic power operates through the naturalization of space and the ignorance that space is a social product. The marginalized characters in Thompson's plays exist as the victims of a hegemonic authority even as they find themselves acting as the functionaries of that same power. Whether by invoking a variety of discursive authorities or by appealing to "common sense", these characters repeat and legitimize the power structures that hold sway over them. This process is clearly evident in the way the characters create sometimes transgressive, yet always exclusionary spaces for themselves.

Julia Kristeva is another theorist upon whom I rely. Her development of the concept of the abject is very useful for my examination of the way the characters in Thompson's plays exist within a kind of abject space; a liminal, othered place that permits action without agency. As Kristeva puts it: "what is *abject,*[…]the jettisoned

object, is radically excluded and draws me toward a place where meaning collapses" (Kristeva 1982). At the same time, as they are the central characters in Thompson's plays, they are not wholly excluded and obscured from discourse, rather they become lost within it, buried beneath plot and spectacle and ultimately pushed back to the margins by the end of the play. In performance, there is always an element of abjection that occurs.

The actors in Thompson's plays are always reenacting a form of abjection, always simultaneously standing in the dual roles of the familiar actor and othered character. Moreover, the abject spaces inhabited by the characters in Thompson's plays are thrust center stage, in full view of the audience even as their marginalization speaks of their failure to enter the symbolic order. This abjection is made palpable when one considers how the theatre house can frame and redefine abject status. For a few brief hours, an audience is made to empathize with the downtrodden, to suffer with them within the safety of the theatrical space while outside, beyond the doors to the lobby of any major theatre, there are always individuals panhandling, often unseen or unacknowledged.

In the following chapters, I explore some of the spatial relationships set up by Thompson in her creation of abject and othered identities as well as the interplay between the ordering of such spaces and the identities produced by and within them. Thompson's staging of space, her creation of transgressive potential within such sites, and the way these sites affect agency and identity formation will also be explored. My focus is not to examine Thompson's work in production, but rather Thompson's writing of space and identity and how these two elements relate to the otherness with which she endows her characters. Though Thompson's work has been produced extensively both in Canada and

internationally, my interest is in exploring Thompson's role as the playwright producing marginality and space.

In Chapter 1, I examine the identity panic that ensues from Thompson's portrayal of her marginalized characters' alienation from space. I show how, in Thompson's plays, subjective identity is contingent on the character's ability to identify with and claim mastery over space. I refer to Pierre Janet's notion of Legendary Psychaesthenia as discussed by Elizabeth Grosz to pinpoint those moments in which the characters, barred from a mastery over space, find their very beings threatened.

Examining the way Thompson's characters struggle to locate themselves socially and spatially in her plays, I argue that Thompson establishes a reciprocal relationship between space and agency, the loss of one precipitating the loss of the other. When space as a grounding force for identity formation is denied to Toilane (*I am Yours*) and Isobel (*Lion in the Streets*), their identities fracture.

In Chapter 2, I move the focus outward, towards the space of the neighborhood and community. In this chapter, I examine how Thompson establishes communities based on a rhetoric of exclusion. Using the central conflict elaborated in *Habitat* around who may or may not move into the neighborhood at Mapleview Lanes, I explore Thompson's writing of the battle over agency, identity, and the right to belong. Thompson's characters affix their identities to the places in which they live and those who are denied access to the normative space of the community – and by extension, the home – attempt to build their own spaces and identities from the margins through their own spatial practices. The margins are not always so far removed from the centre, however, and therein lie the seeds of conflict.

Having elaborated Thompson's writing of space in the first two chapters, in Chapter 3, I engage with such spatial practices as located within the body itself. In the interest of doing so, I examine how Thompson's writing of the womb can be read through Henri Lefebvre's theories on the production of space. Specifically, I focus on how Thompson sets up two different iterations of prenatal space and how each can be read as representative of what Henri Lefebvre calls the Double Illusion – a two-pronged reification of the social processes that go into creating space. Through my reading of Theresa in *The Crackwalker* and Dee in *I am Yours*, I examine just how much, in Lefebvre's words, "space serves" the designs of hegemonic authority.

I. *Lion in the Streets* and *I am Yours:*

Broken Homes, Fractured Subjectivities

In many of her plays, Thompson interrogates the relationship between identity, space, and society. Almost all of Thompson's plays begin with an initial loss of the home and a consignment of a main character into a "homelessness" of sorts. This loss of the home, of one's own private space, is alluded to by George Toles, who identifies in Thompson's characters a consistent inability to mediate their private thoughts and desires with the public, social, spaces they are forced to inhabit. According to Toles: "Perhaps the most distinctive, and consistent, quality of her characters is their lack of a public, social self that monitors and limits the exposure of the private self" (Toles 1988). Thompson's characters have no private space in which to determine the boundaries of their private and public selves. Othering her characters at the outset of her plays, Thompson situates them within a simultaneous private-public realm, a liminal borderland that never allows her characters full fledged entry into normative society. Within Thompson's plays, subjectivity is dependent on mutually reinforcing social and spatial positioning – one's right to occupy space is contingent on one's relationship to society. Moreover, mastery of space confers with it acceptance into the prevailing social culture. What problematizes this relationship between space and identity is that the nature of space itself is always predicated on how that space is perceived and experienced. As Thompson strips her characters of an anchored position within space, she transforms the nature of that space into something that is itself Other. This othering of space therefore contributes to a further alienation of Thompson's misfit characters from normative

society. These characters may well struggle to construct their spaces and identities, they may attempt to effectuate an alternative identity within these spaces, but they are doomed to failure without the substantiation of the prevailing hegemonic authority that has cast these characters out. In order to explore this ordering of space and identity, I refer to two characters in two different plays: Isobel in *Lion in the Streets* and Toilane in *I am Yours*.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine Isobel and her shifts in identity as they relate to the space around her. Beginning the play as a complete outsider, she finds her social and physical space mutually reinforcing: As she remains within a liminal abject space, so too does she continue to perform a marginalized identity. In Isobel, Thompson has created the ultimate non-subject. Isobel's entry into this status occurs prior to the action of the play. Seventeen years before the play begins, Isobel's abduction, rape, and murder removed her from the world within the play. From that point forward, she has had a dwindling existence as a fading memory. Her murder never solved, her case is abandoned and her killer remains free to roam the streets. Isobel's dramaturgical function within the play is to act as an intermediary between audience and character, watching the scenes unfold before her. She is ever-present to the audience, but rarely interacts with the events on the stage, mostly only commenting on the action through her reactions to the events as they unfold. Her positioning – on stage, but never really a part of it – creates of her the very literal constitutive other through which the space and community of the city is to be examined.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the character of Toilane in *I am Yours*. Similar to Isobel, Thompson has created in Toilane a character who is marginalized, devoid of agency, and without a solid relationship to space with which to build any kind

of identity. While the fact of their otherness and the effect it has on them are similar, there is also much that sets Toilane and Isobel apart from each other. They differ from each other in terms of race, gender, and age. Moreover, while Isobel is removed from the action in *Lion in the Streets*, Toilane plays a much more active role in the action of *I am Yours*. What the characters do share in common, however, is their misrecognition of space which Thompson establishes at the very beginning of both plays, the erosion of identity that precipitates from this estrangement from space, and their working-class status. Toilane spends his time in *I am Yours* desperately seeking out the building blocks for his selfhood and it is only through extreme measures that he comes close to grasping it. Whereas Isobel is a passive presence in *Lion in the Streets*, Toilane's attempt at self-mastery is violent and invasive – the kidnapping of his child from its mother. This desperate act of self-creation is at once a claim to patriarchal authority and an erasure-by-proxy of his own domineering mother. His revolt against the authority that would make him invisible ultimately fails however as he ends the play even further removed from any form of agency and located deeper within the theatrical abject space. While Thompson may allude to the potential for agency from within the spaces of liminality inhabited by Toilane and Isobel, she dooms them to failure by purposefully denying them the ability to fit in as subjects within the hegemonic authority that orders identity and space.

Lion in the Streets unfolds in a series of short scenes that progress in relay fashion: as one scene ends, one of the characters continues on to the next. Thompson establishes a series of more or less self-contained vignettes that unfold before the audience. Evocative of the play's title, these scenes feature a variety of characters experiencing various forms of exploitive and predatory situations. While not directly

linked together in terms of plot, they are thematically linked in terms of the violence, domination, and alienation described in all of them, always under the literal spectre of Isobel's murder – an act of ultimate predation. As a unifying device, Thompson has Isobel's ghost wandering from scene to scene bearing silent and unseen witness to a number of characters' lives. At repeated moments throughout the play, Isobel will attempt to disrupt the action, involve herself in it, or merely discover herself through monologues delivered to the audience. It is not until the final moments of the play, though, that she is ever anything more than ineffectual.

In Isobel, Thompson has created a personified link between character, space, and audience. This three way relationship is established from the very outset of the play and with the first words uttered:

> ISOBEL. Doan be scare. Doan be scare. (*turns to audience)*
> Doan be scare of this pickshur! This pickshur is niiice, nice! I love this pickshur, this pickshur is mine! (*gesturing behind her*) Is my house, is my street, is my park, is my people!
>
> (3)

The progression Thompson follows in examining space and identity is relatively straightforward in this opening monologue: as Isobel presents this space to the audience, she claims mastery over it. It is hers and she knows it to be so. Her self-mastery is reinforced by her possession of this space. The place in which she and the audience find themselves at the opening of *Lion in the Streets* is *hers.* It is, therefore, safe, nice,

something to be loved. She describes the scene as an image of which she is a part. "I love this pickshur, this pickshur is mine! *(Gesturing behind her)* Is my house, my street, my park, my people!" (ibid). Moreover, spatial proximity is expected to guarantee familiarity and is the foundation on which Isobel creates her identity. "You know me, you know me very hard! I live next house to you with my brother and sisters…" (ibid). Not only does Isobel expect to be known by the audience because of her spatial relation to them, her position in this space –and the relationships that this positioning entails – are the characteristics by which she identifies herself to her audience. "[…]we play with your girl, your boy, you know me, you know me very hard…" (ibid). As the monologue draws to its close, Thompson destabilizes Isobel's identity by reversing the familiarity of Isobel's surroundings and transforms the safe, close, familiar home into an uncanny reflection of itself. This change in the perception of space produces the alienating effect by which Thompson breaks the link between Isobel and her home. In this moment, Thompson completely subverts the tone of Isobel's monologue, and it instantly becomes apparent that Isobel is not, in fact, of this space. The effect on Isobel is one of complete identity panic as expressed in the final lines of her monologue. "is my house but is not my house is my street but is not my street my people is gone I am lost. I am lost. I AM LOOOOOOOOOST!!" (ibid). The literal space has not changed over the course of the monologue. The house that Isobel describes at the beginning, at first a source of identity and grounding is the same one that alienates her at the end. Similarly, it is not Isobel herself who has changed. What has altered the perception of this space, rather, is Isobel's relationship to it as mediated by Thompson through the presence of the audience. The inclusion of the audience's real-world perspective transforms Isobel's home into a

"pickshur", a representation. Unlike the other characters in the play, Isobel can see and address the audience. As such, she remains neither wholly contained within the world on stage, nor can she – being a fictional character of the drama – exist within the world known to the audience. It is in this way that she straddles both worlds without being permitted agency in either. Isobel's harrowing journey in the opening monologue of the play rips her from the world of the drama and forces her to exist for the duration of the piece alongside the audience – an ever-present embodiment of the outsider. A limited portion of Isobel's marginality is certainly shared by the audience. Like Isobel, the audience members are relegated to the status of relatively silent witnesses, existing outside the action of the play without really being a part of it. By divorcing Isobel from her space in the way she has, Thompson allows the audience to identify somewhat with this character. The vital difference, of course, being that while the audience chooses whether or not to occupy such marginal space, Isobel's only option is to inhabit the abject.

For most of the play, Isobel will continue to exist within this liminal non-space from where she follows the other characters along, always watching, rarely seen, bearing silent witness to their own encounters with the familiar uncanny. In this capacity, she occupies a doubled identity of victim/witness. Her presence at the edge of the action remains a constant reminder of the incomprehensible, that which needs must be forgotten even as it threatens reemergence. Always dangerously close to self-actualization, her mere presence threatens the self-imposed sleight of mind trick by which she can be absented by those she observes. Isobel wanders these places incapable of effecting change within them, unable to occupy or truly inhabit them, as she moves unseen before

others (19) and grapples them unnoticed (25). This ineffectuality on her part, this lack of control over the space she inhabits, undermines her role as witness. In order for the witness' role to be fully realized, the witnessing individual must be able to report on the experience. In stark contrast to the audience's role as true witnesses to the drama, Isobel remains the uncanny reflection of the audience's conflicted subject position. Isobel's disconnect from space and from any social relationship to the people around her preclude her from fulfilling any role but that of the marginalized outsider. Already dead, she is moreover denied a full claim to the mantle of victim. She is instead only the revenant of a victim. As she comes to acknowledge her terribly sad fate, her identity begins to crumble and she lets out an unheard primal scream as the realization hits her that she has become the ultimate abject.

> ISOBEL. I am dead! I have been bones for seventeen years, missing, missing, my face in the TV and newspapers, posters, everybody lookin for, nobody find, I am gone, I am dead, I AM DEADLY DEAD! Down! It was night, was a lion, roar!! With red eyes: he come closer (*silent scream*) come closer (*silent scream*) ROAR tear my throat out ROAR tear my eyes out…ROAR I am kill! I am no more! […] (*to JOANNE*) We are both pictures now.
>
> (Thompson 1992, 31)

In death, Isobel becomes much less than bones and flesh, she has instead become as the uncanny house in her opening monologue, an image of something once known, but no longer recognizable – neither fully victim nor witness. If she is a picture, then her

existence begs the question of what becomes of the picture that isn't seen or is misread. Relegated to the realm of the symbolic order, she exists only in terms of the difference she embodies.

Isobel's displacement and subsequent loss of self is evocative of what Pierre Janet calls "legendary psychasthenia" (Grosz 1995, 89). This concept, initially developed by Pierre Janet and elaborated on by Roger Caillois, proposes a psychological condition in which the individual loses the ability to situate herself in space. Elizabeth Grosz describes the effects of the condition:

> For the subject to take up a position as a subject, he must be able to situate himself as being located in the space occupied by his body. This anchoring of subjectivity in its body is the condition of coherent identity, and, moreover, the condition under which the subject 'has a perspective' on the world, becomes the point from which vision emanates. (Grosz 1995, 89)

What this means is that subjectivity is at least in part determined by one's ability to locate oneself in space. Specifically, a subject needs to be able to recognize its position as the reference point from which all other space extends – being at these originating coordinates is essential to subject status. Moreover, the recognition of one's positioning is essential to having a perspective from which to relate to everything else. The result of the spatial dislocation of legendary psychasthenia is that the individual is no longer able to differentiate between the self and the other, causing a dissolution of identity. In Caillois' words: "[…]the living creature, the organism, is no longer the origin of the

coordinates, but one point among others; it is dispossessed of its privilege and literally *no longer knows where to place itself*," (qtd. in Grosz 1995, 89). The individual who cannot place themselves in this way is forced to instead be wholly dependent on the perceptions of others. And so, occupying this secondary position, the individual comes to exist within a space from which they are alienated with an identity they cannot themselves know. This recognition of the relationship between space and selfhood has two important consequences for how Thompson writes Isobel. In the first place, by negating Isobel's ability to locate herself within a space that is contingent on Isobel's point of reference, Thompson forecloses the potential for this character's claim to agency. Isobel cannot claim subjectivity because she cannot recognize, interpret or effectuate change on the space around her. A secondary consequence of this is that Isobel's social positioning is disrupted. Her inability to be located as the subject makes her unable to relate to those around her. She remains relegated to the outside both in terms of social and literal positioning. This breakdown in the relationship to space disrupts and erodes an identity that is based on a social or spatial positioning.

This inability to locate herself forces Isobel to abandon any possibility of a subject position. Her victimhood having ended with her death, her status as a witness cut short by her inability to report what she sees, she is without options. It is this state then, when Isobel accedes to her status as a "picture." Being a "picture" she can no longer "have" the picture that was once hers. Instead, she takes on the position of that house: known yet unfamiliar, to be recognized, misrecognized, or ignored by those situated at the originating coordinates of subjectivity.

Thompson gives Isobel only one tangible act to perform in the play: the forgiveness of Ben, her murderer. For the purpose of this singular act, Thompson grants Isobel a temporary reprieve from her marginalized existence. In this moment she is able to reclaim simultaneously the roles of both victim and witness one last time, a status she confirms through her statements of presence and self-awareness: "I am Isobel […] I have come […] I am here" (Thompson 1992, 73). These statements are an affirmation of identity and of a mastery over space. She enters, finally, into the social space of the characters within the play and this grants her the ability to act in the capacity of victim, forgiving her murderer by telling him "I love you" (74) and then as a witness by recounting coherently and with full knowledge the events leading up to her death: "I want to tell you now a secret. I was dead, was killed by lion in long silver car[…]" (74). It is, however, a short-lived agency. As the abject, she is not permitted to remain within the space she has so desperately sought, but is erased fully from it. Thompson's stage direction reads that: "ISOBEL ascends, in her mind, to heaven"(75). Her escape from abjection has not delivered her into subjectivity but into nothingness. Thompson is specific in stating that Isobel's ascent is "in her mind". In this sense, her apotheosis is contingent not on a social position, but on a personal one. This final moment of the play is a highly problematized form of agency and it leaves many questions unanswered. Thompson's stage directions call for a "[…]sense of sadness and triumph" (74) . The final spoken line in the play, "I want you all to have your life" (74) implies an appeal to the agency that Isobel has sought so hard for throughout the play. At the same time, however, this delivery into a radically Othered space is as crushing as it is hopeful. In an interview with Eleanor Wachtel, Thompson says of this final moment that "It's the

triumph of the spirit[…]our bones can be broken but our selves, our souls, are much stronger than any destructor" (Interview 1991, 41). It would seem that since Isobel's self cannot exist within the social space of the play, it must ultimately find its own space, elsewhere, and be contented with that.

The struggle to regain subjectivity and the ultimate deliverance of the self into a space of extreme marginality is likewise experienced by Toilane in *I am Yours*. For Toilane, however, the result is unquestioningly more grim. *I am Yours* follows the story of Dee, a young middle class woman who is severely mentally unstable and in the process of breaking up with her current boyfriend, Mac, through increasingly erratic and emotionally manipulative behavior. After a particularly vicious breakup, Dee meets her building's superintendent, Toilane, and the two end up having a one-night stand. The tryst leaves Dee pregnant and Toilane obsessively infatuated with her. The bulk of the plot revolves around Dee and Toilane becoming more obsessed over the objects of their desire. For Dee, she goes through a process by which she first chooses to abort, then have the unborn child. In Toilane's case, he becomes increasingly obsessed with the child as both his own offspring and as the symbol of his subjectivity and rise in class status. Throughout the play, Toilane is spurred in his actions by his extremely overbearing mother Pegs. The primary tactic used by Pegs to move Toilane to action is to work him into a frenzy over the class discrimination that has him alienated from greater society. First seeking legal restitution for Dee's denial to allow Toilane to have the child, he abandons his suit after Dee threatens to accuse him of raping her. Left with no other alternative, and growing more and more desperate, Toilane and Pegs kidnap Dee's child from the maternity ward and head into Northern Ontario in order to avoid pursuit. The

play ends with Toilane and the baby in a hotel room in Sudbury, with Pegs possibly dead in a chair behind them.

Toilane's lot in *I am Yours* resembles Isobel's in *Lion in the Streets* in many ways. Just like Isobel, Toilane suffers an initial displacement from space followed by a crisis of identity. For Toilane, this loss of place is less an issue of physical dislocation and much more based in the psycho-social. Thompson's depiction of Toilane's loss of subjectivity, however, takes the notions examined in Isobel's characterization and moves them much more firmly into the social arena. Moreover, unlike in *Lion in the Streets*, Thompson does not in this case set up a world in which the marginalized Other has the luxury of removing oneself to a supernatural dimension. Thompson instead forces Toilane to reckon with a social space from which there is no potential for escape.

Just as with Isobel in *Lion in the Streets*, *I am Yours* opens with a monologue in which the speaker moves from a position of certainty with regards to the space they inhabit to one of confusion leading to a breakdown of identity.

> TOILANE. Mum! Muum, I'm home!
>
> Hey, Mum, I'm home!
>
> Where's my mummy?
>
> But this is my house! I live here. [*pause*]
>
> I do so! I do so live here! I do so live here! [*pause*]
>
> I do so! My parents are in there! I do so live here,
>
> They're in there! I do live here, I do live here! I do live here!
>
> I do live here! I do live here!

> [*The 'door' slams. The audience should serve as the door. Do not bring in a real one.*]
>
> (Thompson 1989, 119)

This opening scene bears a striking resemblance to Isobel's opening monologue in *Lion in the Streets*. The themes of confusion and loss are very similar as is the grounding of the speaking characters' identities within perceptions of their own spaces – namely, the home. In both cases, the speaker suffers from a form of thwarted adulthood. In the case of Isobel, she is the adult ghost of a murdered child. Toilane, on the other hand, has regressed back to his childhood in a dream state. Reading the play in the context of psychoanalytic examinations of identification/differentiation, Robert C. Nunn interprets the monologue as an analogy for the emergence of the child from the mirror stage.

> The loss that this scene signifies reaches far beyond the emotionally-charged memory-trance of a six-year-old child in front of a closed door. That is a screen memory: displaced onto it is the "lack" that is the key term in Lacan's reading of Freud: the lack that first comes into being in the mirror stage, in which the infant seeks an imaginary recovery of fullness of being in identifying with an object (above all the mother's gaze); the lack that finally and irrevocably defines the subject with its entry into the symbolic order.
>
> (Nunn, 1989)

For Nunn, this scene exemplifies the jarring formation of self-identity through separation from the mother during the psychoanalytic mirror-stage of human development. There is,

however, in the case of Toilane, a dissolving of identity rather than its formation. Tied to his attempts to reclaim his home as his own through identification with his family unit are attempts to assert himself within space and repeated insistences that the space outside of which he is located is indeed his "But this is my house! I live here!" Moreover, Thompson has written spatial dislocation into Toilane's speech, conflating "there" with "here."

Speaking from outside the apparently contested space, he says "I do so live here!" Invoking his familial bond, he charges "My parents are in there! I do so live here!" Toilane's identity crisis at the outset of the play will propel his actions going forward. In Nunn's words, "The I who speaks is shut out from the I who lives: "here" is where the "I" who speaks of himself is not…The desire that animates Toi throughout the play is born in that moment recapitulated by the dream, born of that lack" (Nunn, 1989). Just as in the case of Isobel, Toilane cannot locate himself within space. As such, he must try to locate himself somewhere else in accordance with the visual field of those possessed of a more solidly defined subjectivity – this is the marginalized position that causes Isobel to react so violently in *Lion in the Streets*, the same crisis of identity that Grosz describes in her work mentioned above. Thompson establishes Toilane's primary motivating desire as this attempt to prop up his eroded selfhood. Toilane obsessively seeks out space in which he can situate himself socially thereby claiming a subject position; he will seek to build a home. Although he spends the majority of the play operating within his allotted role as the marginalized other, he overreaches himself and it is in his attempt to break out of marginality and into a socially central position that he encounters the resistance that ultimately thwarts him. As Dee says near the end of the play: "He couldn't have handled

a child, I mean there's no way" (Thompson 1989, 164). It is after he has exhausted these avenues that Thompson writes for him a last ditch attempt at mastery over his world when she has him kidnap his own child. The implication of the necessity of this final act of desperation is that Toilane's social status trumps his biological identity. Toilane's status as the legitimate parent of his child is secondary to his position as a marginalized outsider. In order to prove himself worthy of entry into normative social space, he must prove himself to be above his social position. He does this by laying claim to the only other defining characteristic he has – that of fatherhood. As Pegs says to him: "[…]And now they have you believing you don't have a right to your child! If you don't fight for your child you're worth even less than they think" (160). In this moment, Thompson inexorably ties Toilane's social identity to the concept of the home. The identity that was fractured in the opening monologue of the play, he will seek to rebuild through his claim to fatherhood.

Of all the characters in the play, Toilane's identity is most tied to the home as a private space that is socially produced. He is the son of Pegs, a cleaning woman. He makes his own living as the caretaker of the building in which he and Dee live. Through the characters of Toilane and Pegs, Thompson explicitly ties class to space and identity. In so doing, she provides a link between the socio-political construction of space and the rights of individuals to occupy it. One of the major qualities of these spaces is the semi-permeability of their borders. Toilane and Pegs are not wholly shut out from the spaces inhabited by Mercy and Dee. If anything, they are essential in the construction and maintenance of those spaces. On a literal level, this is true of them in that they make their livings as custodians of other peoples' places. Pegs as a cleaning woman and

Toilane as the caretaker of the building inhabited by himself and Dee, are both granted conditional access to spaces that would otherwise be closed to them. They enter the homes of the socially and economically more well off on the grounds that they will maintain the integrity and desirability of these places. "DEE: Listen, I know that you're the superintendent here, but …Other than for those kinds of things, I never want to see you. Do you understand?" (136). Implicit in Dee's warning to Toilane is that an element of the integrity of her space is its exclusion of his like from within. With this dynamic, Thompson certainly calls attention to marginality as the constitutive outside of normativity, but it only remains such for so long as it is kept somewhat at bay.

For his own part, Toilane also defines himself in terms of his relationship to socially constituted space. Toilane's first scene in the play, as discussed above, involves an initial loss of self predicated on a spatial dislocation. In his second scene in the play, Thompson has him seeking recognition and identity formation through his relationship to the normative space of the apartment building:

> TOILANE. …Nice night.
>
> [DEE turns away. DEE starts to go]
>
> Hey hey do you…do you not know who I am?
>
> DEE. [Shakes her head] No…
>
> TOILANE. I'm the new super. You know, like the superintendent? So I'll be looking out for you, right? Fixin your leaky taps, got a problem with the toilet, whatever.!
>
> The name's Creese. Toilane Creese. [he extends his hand]
>
> (120)

Toilane's conversation with Dee attempts to reassert his subjectivity and Toilane's tactic is twofold: He attempts to establish his relationship to the place in which he and Dee live and also seeks to have Dee recognize him for who he is. Both attempts at defining himself will ultimately fail. Dee refuses, in the long run, to acknowledge Toilane as anything but that which constitutes the space in which she lives, moving him to the borders of her own conceptions of self. Toilane will also come to find that simply being that which helps produce and maintain space does not grant him agency within that space. In the end, his attempts to insinuate himself within spaces that are not his own will lead to his full removal from subjectivity, the stripping of his parental rights, and the loss of his job and home. Elizabeth Grosz describes the dual importance of both recognition and spatial relations to the formation of a normative subject as follows:

> It is our positioning within space, both as the perspectival access to space, and also as an object for others in space, that gives the subject a coherent identity and an ability to manipulate things, including its own body parts, in space.
>
> (Grosz 1995, 92)

Thompson establishes Toilane as a character who is seeking out a position in space in terms of both of the elements elaborated by Grosz. His initial estrangement from the space he knew to be his home forces him to seek out that perspectival access – he must come to be able to take on a sense of spatial subjectivity. Moreover, as the unseen marginalized Other, he also seeks out an identity through recognition by those who do hold a greater position of subjectivity. His initial question to Dee: "Do you not know who I am?" (Thompson 1989, 120), is for his own benefit rather than hers and he follows

it up by defining himself in terms of his relationship to space first and foremost. "I'm the new super. You know, the superintendent? So I'll be looking out for ya, right?" (120). It is only after establishing this role and location that he then offers his name. Who he is, is ultimately of less importance to those around him than where he belongs.

Thompson uses the relationship to place, and more specifically to the home, to establish Toilane's identity repeatedly throughout the play. As a foundational aspect of identity, the relationship to space is essential to Toilane being able to claim a subject status. After Dee refuses to allow him the option of having his baby on the arguably unfounded and arbitrary grounds that he cannot care for it, Toilane seeks to assert his parental rights through the courts. His loss of this case precipitates his loss of multiple defining characteristics. Now branded a rapist and stripped of any rights to his child and by extension a family and home, Toilane will lose his job and his apartment in the same instance. Ultimately, he will also lose his self-defining role as custodian/caretaker of space and any illusory agency conferred by that role. This sudden and overwhelming identity crisis is the turning point for Toilane, who is forced to reckon with a situation in which he is branded an outsider and cannot easily overcome that status. Toilane's existence as the other is further underlined by Mercy's relief at the sanctity of space being restored through Toilane and Pegs' exclusion from it. "I'm just glad they don't live here anymore." (164) This moment, like Isobel's anagnorisis in *Lion in the Streets*, produces an overwhelming identity crisis and precipitates Toilane's final desperate attempts at claiming subjectivity.

Thompson's depiction of Toilane's relationship to social space is firmly internalized by the character and repeatedly expressed in his speech. Pegs' suggestion

that he return to live with her threatens two seemingly unrelated aspects of his identity; his intelligence "[…]anyone who's twenty eight and still hasn't moved out of home is a retard." (128) and his sexuality "[…]is that what you want me to be, eh? A fag living with mummy?" (128). While sexuality and intellectual capacity have no direct correlation to one's living conditions, this exchange creates a perceived relationship between such defining characteristics and space. All three of these elements do have a strong relationship to one's social positioning insofar as queerness, spatial dislocation and mental disability are all characteristics used to establish the Other. Thompson uses Toilane's fear of being seen as retarded or gay, to deepen the futility of the situation in which the character finds himself. Living with his mother may well alleviate the financial hardship of his class-based marginality. This attempt to circumvent that position, however, entails with it the stigma of being othered through a different set of criteria. Toilane's expressions of self-loathing come out of a disjointed assimilated identity in which he expresses the views of the dominant paradigm even as those views are used to other him and deny him a subject position. He is in effect restating assumptions of a social authority that separates and categorizes individuals. These concepts, far from being his own, are handed down to him from the normative social spaces he seeks to occupy. Thompson allows him, in these moments, to act as the mouthpiece of a discursive authority that controls and subjugates him. By placing the edicts of such an authority in the mouth of a character like Toilane, Thompson foregrounds the constructed nature of normative identity, revealing it to be as dependent on relations of inclusion and exclusion as is marginality. In so doing she proposes a transgressive potential through the contradictory nature of such proclamations issuing

from the mouths of her abject characters. Toilane speaks, however, not from a position of mastery, but of subordination. There is little indication as to the origin of the beliefs he expresses, they rather seem to be pulled from some undefined collective consciousness. Therefore, what occurs instead, is that Toilane expresses this belief system "as-is", without any actual interrogation and the relationship between space and identity is solidified by the action of the play, rather than being challenged. Thus, his otherness produces his exclusion from space, which facilitates his othering and precipitates further spatial exclusion that is compounded until his eventual decision to reject the ordering and take what he sees as his rather than achieve it legitimately.

Toilane's decision to kidnap his child and run off with it is the final attempt he makes at solidifying his identity. Up until this moment, Toilane remains a relatively sympathetic character. The audience is aware that the accusation of rape that puts him into such a desperate situation is patently false. Thompson is careful, throughout the play, to make of Toilane a character who is downtrodden, lower class, marginalized, but always a subject of audience pity. So long as he remains within the space of marginality, so long as he does not assert too strongly his need to enter into normative space, he remains pitiable. It is, however, when he finally attempts to assert his subjectivity on his own terms that he goes beyond marginality and into monstrosity. Denied the possibility of creating a normative family, he pieces one together like the archetypal mad scientist: Himself as father, a child plucked from the cradle, and Pegs, his own mother who will serve as surrogate for Dee. Now, criminal and abnormal, Toilane flees to Northern Ontario where he is ultimately delivered up to his otherness. The single word spoken in this scene is Toilane's bewildered "Mum??" The question is first and foremost a

bookend to the play. It is the reiterated question first asked by Toilane in his opening monologue: "where's my mummy?" That the same question can be asked at the end of the play indicates no growth within the characters themselves and recreates the loss of space and identity upon which the action of the play is predicated. Pegs, "[...]passed out or maybe dead in a chair" (176) is simultaneously present and absented. Toilane, standing between generations, aims the question to his mother but in so doing asks a complimentary, unspoken "Dad??" of himself. Neither fully parent nor child, his identity can come from no one. Without such social identiary anchors, he is left with nothing but place to define him. The last three scenes for Toilane take place within transitory locations. The first of these is on a bus heading towards an undefined location, the last two are set within a generic hotel room. If his starting positioning in Act I was outside of the originary location of the subject, Thompson places him, at the end of the play, in a veritable nowhere.

Having established these problematics of identity, Thompson has her characters play them out through their attempts to claim subjectivity and acceptance within a dominant social paradigm. The initial estrangement from the home precipitates the need for both Isobel and Toilane to find a way to fit into space so as to shore up their destabilized identities. However, as identity and positioning within the social space of society are mutually reinforcing, Thompson's characters suffer an inability to overcome their abject status. This becomes apparent to both characters in their respective moment of anagnorisis – the realization for Isobel that she is dead, and Toilane's reckoning with the subversion of his biological status as the father in the name of his socially determined status as the marginalized other. This moment of revelation precipitates in both

characters a sudden and irreversible course of action that ultimately delivers them to their fates. In both cases, the outcome is one that exacerbates exclusion rather than corrects it in any way. It would seem that, at least in these two cases, Thompson presupposes that marginal status is something that remains relatively unchangeable. One cannot transcend marginality in any way that can provide a meaningful entry into normative social space.

The disconnect of these characters from the spaces around them is at once a symptom and a cause of their marginal status. As already othered individuals, Isobel and Toilane do not have free access to the spaces with which they could construct any identity that is not marginal. Thompson, by employing this rhetoric of "homelessness," by dramatizing legendary psychasthenia, alters the audience's experience and interpretation of alienation and marginality. The near-interchangeability of Isobel's and Toilane's story arcs is suggestive of a difference that is primarily based on social identity as opposed to one that is necessarily grounded in class status. Isobel's class is of significantly less importance than Toilane's and yet both undergo a very similar journey within their respective plays. What may perhaps be inferred from this, is that Thompson's use of class difference is as a device by which she can more compellingly explore more universalized questions of personal identity and social belonging.

II. *Habitat*: Spatial Practice in Conflict

Thompson's *Habitat*, written in 2000, is one of her more recent plays. Co-commissioned by the Canadian Stage Company and England's Royal Exchange Theatre, the play came into being at a time when Canada was beginning to enact its first contemporary anti-vagrancy laws: the "Safe Streets Acts." The play is infused with a rhetoric that recalls many of the social anxieties around space and identity that go into determining who has a right to occupy what spaces. While the play focuses on the controversy around a group home operating within an affluent Toronto suburb, its title invokes not the group home itself, but the entire neighborhood. Using an ecological term to represent a human environment, Thompson has opted to employ not the animal equivalent to house or home such as "nest", "den", or "hive", but has settled on the term "habitat" which encompasses not only the living spaces themselves, but also an entire host of relationships between different entities. Within any given habitat there exists a need for balance between predators, prey, resources, available space, and a number of other variables. This balance rests on a delicate relationship and the disruption of this balance can prove catastrophic. In *Habitat*, Thompson establishes within the suburban neighborhood, a zoological habitat in human terms. The description that Margaret, a longtime resident of the suburb, offers Raine, the newly arrived protagonist, is almost edenic its suggestion of harmony:

> I was just taking my midnight walk. I sometimes see rabbits in
> this park, the occasional fox. Once I even saw a flash of Ian,
> my late husband, behind the hawthorne there.

(Thompson 2001, 34)

Margaret's language establishes Mapleview Lanes, the titular neighborhood of the play, as an ecosystem in which all manner of creatures – predators, prey, living and dead – coexist together. It is a self-sustaining world and while its inhabitants may not fully understand the ecological niches into which they fall, they experience their world as one that is fragile and in need of protection. This conceit sets up Mapleview Lanes as a fragile ecosystem and places the residents of Chance's group home in the role of invasive species. Their mere existence within this space is taken as an indication that something is out of balance and it forebodes disaster for the "legitimate" citizens of the neighborhood. As Margaret argues early on in the play: "My God. I really do not want to live the last ten or fifteen years of my life in fear. It's bad enough to fear for my own body, and all the possibilities are there, but to fear […] thieves and rowdies, rapists!" (25).

The conception of the urban environment as ecological habitat does much to support the notion that human spaces are dependent on not merely their physical components, but to a greater extent they rely on the relationships occurring within them. Thompson creates such a world for the characters in *Habitat*. The world beyond Mapleview Lanes is never shown. This omission establishes the residents as complicit in a world that is self-centered, self-generating, and independent of anything that exists outside of it. The world beyond the borders of Mapleview Lanes exists as little more than an anecdote. This outside is a place from where some characters are said to originate and into which others sometimes disappear. It is also the void into which the group home and its residents are to be cast if the sanctity of the neighborhood is to be preserved.

The incursion of disadvantaged "outsiders" within the space of the affluent Mapleview Lanes residents is the play's primary source of conflict. This chapter focuses on how this conflict is embodied in the battle between the neighborhood's established, upper middle-class residents and the underprivileged newcomers who seek to build their home there. I will focus on the events of the plot as they unfold, the claims of the "legitimate" residents to rightful control of the neighborhood, the character of Lewis Chance and his status as the apparent outsider seeking admission, and finally Raine and her descent in class status. I will identify and discuss the class and spatial conflict Thompson sets up in the piece. If, as I stated earlier, a habitat is contingent on the series of relationships occurring within a given space, then the stakes go far beyond the mere operation of a group home within an affluent suburb. What is being vied for is control over which relationships are permissible within this space. Moreover, since there is effectively no world portrayed to exist in any meaningful way outside of this neighborhood, control of Mapleview Lanes confers with it control over the entire world as the characters experience it.

If the neighborhood's pre-established residents see Mapleview Lanes as an independent, autogenetic given, for Lewis Chance and the children under his care, the neighborhood is a new frontier, one last chance for hope, a potential utopia. Two differing and conflicting perceptions are overlaid onto the same physical space. Both characterizations of the neighborhood cannot coexist and so the conflict arises over whose beliefs hold primacy.

The events of the play are established in such a way as to draw battle lines between two very separate groups: invaders and defenders. Social worker Lewis Chance

has purchased a house on Mapleview Lanes, an affluent Toronto suburb. Chance, originally from rural New Brunswick intends to use the home to house his wards, Raine, the play's protagonist and a middle-class runaway, and Sparkle, a juvenile delinquent. The current residents of the neighborhood, represented by long time resident Margaret and her daughter, Janet, seek to have the home's operation stopped. The play includes a side-plot with Raine that bookends the story of Chance's group home. At the outset of the play, Raine is seen in her mother's hospital room speaking to her. Raine's mother, dying of cancer, is present but supposedly non-responsive and under the effects of either her illness or strong medications. During the prologue, it is established that Raine's mother is dying rapidly and that there is some conflict over where Raine, a minor, will live. Raine maintains that she will remain in Toronto with friends rather than move to Cornwall with her father and his girlfriend. The scene ends with a waking dream sequence in which Raine and her mother experience together an event from the past when Raine was an infant and dying – a reversal of their current situations. At the end of the scene, Raine requests money from her mother to buy clothes, she takes her mother's credit card, and leaves. When the audience next sees Raine she is wandering around Mapleview Lanes in search of Chance's group home. Her mother having passed away, nothing further is learned about her father or her plans to live with friends. Raine encounters Margaret and reveals to her the existence of a group home operating within the wealthy suburb. This sets in motion the central conflict of the play. Margaret seeks out her daughter's aid in having the group home closed and the two organize the neighborhood's residents to have Chance and his wards barred from the community. Appeals to the sanctity of their living spaces, its necessity for the health of their families

and the disruptive potential posed by the group home and its residents are the major issues around which the community's objections are formed. Ultimately, the group home fails, not because of the citizens' mobilization but through a destruction from within. Legal issues arising from Chance's public admission to engaging in sexual relations with Sparkle as well the home's torching by Sparkle and Raine ultimately complete Margaret's and Janet's work for them. The play finally closes on Raine, alone, watching the house burn after setting it alight as she undergoes a spiritual reunion of sorts with her mother.

Thus, the deathblow dealt to the group home on Mapleview Lanes is delivered not by the concerned citizens of the suburb, but by the home's own beneficiaries themselves: Sparkle, Raine, and Lewis.

The apparent destruction of self that is performed by the invaders in the play is tied to a conservative rhetoric that absolves larger society from responsibility for class disparities. The attribution of individual guilt for poverty is important to the obfuscation of structural factors that promote economic inequality. Moreover, personalizing the issue as an individual one mythologizes difference, making it natural rather than social or political. In setting up the events of the play as she does, Thompson unfolds the plot in a way that places the responsibility for marginalization on the shoulders of the marginalized characters themselves: even with the benefit of the neighborhood and house in which they now live, the characters fail to make things work for themselves and are left worse off than they were at the beginning of the play. She does, however, grant them some ability to change the world around them. In order to survive, these characters effectively re-order space around themselves making it serve for them whatever purpose

it needs to: congregating, hosting their parties, and having sex outside in whatever secluded parts of the neighborhood they can find. This agency is double edged, however, as their appropriation and repurposing of the space of the neighborhood is the main source of anxiety around their right to exist within it. In society, the ordering of space by governments and the erasure of the homeless from visibility neutralizes their subversive potential and denies the existence of alternative orderings of space. In *Habitat*, the appeal to the status-quo is inherent in the frantic attempts to preserve Mapleview Lanes from incursion by others. Their erasure is sought though attempts to return them from whence they came. When Margaret says to Lewis Chance: "Mapleview Lanes is our WORLD…" (51) she leaves unsaid, but fully implies "… not yours." If Mapleview Lanes is subject to a strict ordering by its residents, then the anxieties expressed by the residents over the incursion of the disadvantaged into their space are worries against the potential re-ordering of their space into something else. Moreover, the use of private concerns regarding the acceptability of certain individuals within the public space of Mapleview Lanes demonstrates the degree to which such space is not, in fact, public, but closed off and exclusive.

> JANET. […]no, its not RACIST, Hamish, its about property values for some of the neighbors and well, it means how much money our house is worth, and if they let their lawn go to weed, and the paint peel, and if they have big rave parties and make lots of noise and leave beer bottles…
>
> (21)

What is being protected is the exchange value of private property within specifically ordered, exclusive spaces. In order to legitimize this system of access and prohibition, the space is discursively tied to the sanctity of the home and the personal wellbeing of normative citizens. Thompson does problematize the exclusion of the invaders from the neighborhood by juxtaposing this concern over property value with the rhetoric Margaret uses to spur her daughter into action: "Do you want your mother to live in fear, Janet? Do you want your children afraid to – walk on Mapleview Lanes?" (26). Echoing her mother, Janet will later escalate the perceived threat to one against personal safety and wellbeing "JANET: […]Michael somebody has to fight for our neighborhood, protect it from the THUGS of the world – listen it is my JOB to protect my children isn't it?" (58). As Thompson ramps up the stakes for the defenders in the play, she moves the conflict from one that is based on monetary concerns to one that seeks to protect the children and by extension the future of this world.

Thompson's characterization of the neighborhood is itself steeped in contradiction. It is at once naturally occurring, self-contained, inviolable, and simultaneously constituted by the inhabitants who live there and thereby subject to contamination and destruction from within. As Janet describes it: "[…]Mapleview Lanes is our WORLD I grew up here, there is a way of life here, a routine, certain sounds and sights we are accustomed to, and you know what I mean[…]"(51). Janet's line of argument is blind to the historical and social factors that created her neighborhood in the first place. She denies to the social other any role in the creation of her own privileged space. It is infused with a unitary and fixed nature, a purity which must be safeguarded for the benefit of all. At the same time, the neighborhood's potential decline as a

sanctuary for the wealthy and its corruptibility suggest that it is, in fact, dependent on the people existing within it. Its borders both physical and social must not be transgressed. "You grew up in a small place, wasn't it Herring Cove in New Brunswick, that was your world" (51). Janet's silent implication is that *that* was Chance's world and that the *here* of Mapleview Lanes is not. Thompson, however, offers no space beyond the "here". If Janet denies that the poor have a role in constituting the wealth of the neighborhood's residents, then in a similar vein, Scarborough, Sparkle's home, is as far removed from this neighborhood as Herring Cove. And yet, despite the seeming impossible distance between Mapleview Lanes and everywhere else, Chance and his wards have arrived and since this neighborhood is not their world, they must make it so in order to survive.

This incursion of the disadvantaged into the neighborhood forces a reckoning with inequity. What was once a pure socially homogeneous space takes a turn towards the heterotopic as Thompson introduces Chance and his wards into the neighborhood. A major point of contention is the conception that Mapleview Lanes cannot be both sanctuary for the affluent and refuge for the disadvantaged at the same time, and so as two separate groups seek to establish the right to occupy this space, tensions between both camps mount.

This contradiction and the linking of property rights with the survival of the species raises the stakes and shifts the conflict from one in which capital for the majority trumps the physical wellbeing of a minority to one in which two opposing needs for physical integrity are pitted against each other. Indeed, Chance voices the impending loss of the group home in such terms at the end of Scene 7: "CAN'T YOU SEE I'M ALL BY MYSELF ON THE FIRING LINE HERE? FACING A WHOLE FUCKING ARMY?

LOOK AT ME I'M BLEEDING TO DEATH" (62). Mapleview Lanes is the lifeblood of whatever community controls it and this blood can only flow in one set of veins.

Many of Thompson's plays deal with a conflict between the normative selfsame, positioned as the audience's proxy within the world of the play, and the abject Other. In most of her works, the differences between both are stark and vividly stated, involving severe mental illness, extremely poor socialization, or grotesquely shaped bodies. *Habitat*'s selfsame-other dynamic is much more subtle. The Other in this play is not shockingly grotesque. Its difference is not violently stated, nor does it come with such visual markers as physical abnormality or mental deficiency as it does in most of Thompson's plays. The misfit characters in *Habitat* are Lewis Chance, Raine, and Sparkle. They are for the most part simply homeless youth and petty criminals. That said, there is still a very powerful division established between the normative and heterogenic and it is possibly because of the understated nature of the difference that the conflicts are made more powerful. Their repudiation is part of a process of excision and banishment that produces the normative through its exclusion of that which is determined to be other. In the case of *Habitat*, this difference is primarily class based.

Lewis Chance, the social worker who establishes the offending group home within the community, stands defiant in the face of the preexisting conventions of spatial and social ordering. As he introduces himself to the members of the community and simultaneously the members of the audience, Chance threatens social, economic and spatial boundaries. He is also clearly defiant of his neighbors' apprehensions and their assumed desire that he occupy a space elsewhere.

> …we're gonna be neighbors for the next fifty years. That's right I'm not going anywhere for a long time because I, Lewis Chance, have purchased a home on your exclusive Mapleview Lanes. You's better believe it. I paid 640,000 dollars for it and I paid it in cash. Yes. I, Lewis Chance, who grew up in rural New Brunswick, and have lived in rat-infested Parkdale rooming houses and illegal basement apartments all over the city, have bought a house in one of the finest neighborhoods in Etobicoke, a neighbourhood of accomplished and distinguished and really well-dressed, well shod people. For me this is a miracle. (10)

Chance's introductory monologue betrays an understanding that his presence threatens the human habitat that is Mapleview Lanes. He is aware that he is unwelcome, but his bragging that he paid cash for the house is an appeal to his right to occupy this space. The house was acquired on *their* terms and as such, he sees himself as having bought his way into this group of "distinguished, and really well-dressed, well shod people." Chance's incursion into the neighborhood is not merely a movement through space, but an attempt to move through class. Thompson's initial establishment of Chance as a self-made man posits a parallel between his conception of self and the Mapleview Lanes residents' views of their community as one that is self-produced and stands independent of everything to the outside of it. Over the course of the play, as it becomes increasingly clear that the neighborhood is in fact, dependent on a whole host of relationships, Chance succumbs more and more to the characterization of himself as an outsider. Chance's outburst at the end of Scene 7, in which he claims to be bleeding to

death invokes not only the threat to his physical well-being that accompanies his ousting from the community, but the slow draining away of the identity he tried to construct for himself. The few sentences before his claim of bleeding to death imply a clinging to the identity he so wants: "LISTEN TO ME YOU FUCKING LOSERS. GET OUTA MY HAIR I MEAN IT GET OUTA MY HAIR. CAN'T YOU SEE I'M BUSY? ARE YOU BLIND?"(62). The sudden repudiation of his wards establishes a separation between them and Chance. An imposition of exclusion on his part in an attempt to differentiate himself from them while he grapples with resistance he meets in trying to enter into this community. In order to be middle-class, Chance must, as do the other "legitimate" residents of the neighborhood, turn his back on those who are not as he sees himself. Chance's slippage of identity completes itself in Act 2, Scene 13. He reverts to the story of his impoverished past as he did in his opening monologue. This time, though, it is not to build himself up as the equal of the middle-class residents, but in a bid to absolve himself of his wrongdoings. "[…]I was still reeling from tragedy after tragedy in my family and yeah, I acted out. But THAT is why I am qualified to help these kids." (71). Resigned to his inferior class status and his inability to change it, he seeks comfort in the belief that he couldn't have done any better, his wrongdoing was a natural product of his class status. This attempt to ingratiate himself with the middle-class residents through the further repudiation of his own class background fails him. He is, as they have branded him, criminal (69), a lowlife (56), a parasite (56) and a con artist (54). His acceptance of the role dictated to him by the neighborhood's "rightful" inhabitants leads to his confession of both embezzling funds from his charges and the statutory rape of Sparkle (71). At the end of his *mea culpa*, Chance submits to the primacy of Janet and

Margaret's conception of Mapleview Lanes: "You. Here. You are Mapleview Lanes, you created it, you represent it, you are a fine and thinking person with a conscience, I think and I am in your hands. If you tell me to go, I will go. And if you want me to stay, I'll stay" (72). With these words, Chance is completely broken. He has forsaken his bid to climb the class ladder, he is without a community within the world of the play and will retreat finally to the oblivion he so sought to escape. Though unstated in the play, the true threat that Chance brings with him to the neighborhood is not the theft of tax money nor is it his inappropriate behavior towards one of his charges, it is the challenge his existence brings against the identities and the space of the neighborhood's residents. His ultimate downfall serves to validate the anxieties and mistrust of both the community in the world of the play and the audience sitting in the theatre. Thompson's destruction of Chance serves to reinforce the immutability of his identity and his unsuitability for this space.

Raine, the play's protagonist, does manage to transgress class. Her journey, however, is a downward one. Her grief at the loss of her mother and her fractured home precipitates her slippage out of the middle-class, and it results in her consignment to the same liminal space as Chance. Forgoing a life with her father in Cornwall, she instead become homeless in Toronto. Her arrival in Mapleview Lanes and discovery by Margaret is the catalyst for the conflict within the play. Indeed, the idea of such a place existing within her neighborhood is unthinkable to the elderly long-time resident:

> MARGARET. Oh no, dear, I think you must be mistaken.
> Now there might be a group home past the apartments, over
> the marsh–

RAINE. No. It's 237 Mapleview Lanes.

Look.

She shows her an official booklet/document with her name

in large letters on the front. MARGARET reads in horror.

She is horrified she cannot speak. (17-18)

Margaret's horror stems from the dawning realization that her long-held, neatly constructed perceptions are in fact erroneous. Contrary to her expectations, the poor exist and they exist closer to her than she would have believed. They are no longer consigned to some undefined other place "…past the apartments, over the marsh" as she says it. From this point forward, they will exist here. What was once an exclusive normative space, has taken on a dual nature as both affluent suburb and refuge for the disadvantaged. Even more incomprehensible to Margaret is Raine's seemingly hybrid status:

Dear child. Tell me. Why would you be going to live in a

"group home." I can hear breeding under that slovenly

speech, and I see years of ballet lessons in your carriage[…]"

(18)

Raine's identity is doubly problematic. On the one hand she *is* middle-class, although she has lost this position. On the other hand, she is aligned with Chance and Sparkle in invading the sanctity of the affluent suburb. Just as Chance exists as a reminder of the potential for the Other's invasion of normative space, Raine represents a painful and present reminder of the possibility of falling from grace, losing one's coveted class status. She is very much the uncanny yet familiar stranger to Thompson's audience.

Raine, the fallen, once-privileged darling of well-to-do parents, stands in as the reminder to the Mapleview Lanes residents and - by proxy - to the audience, of the very real threat the underclass poses towards the sanctity of normative space. It suggests that the borders between the normative and the Other are fragile and must be safeguarded against egress for the good of the decent, hard-working, liberal-minded middle-class and their children.

Of all the characters in the play, Raine skirts the most with contradictory world views. She seems to choose her lot and the type of space she will inhabit. As would be expected under the rhetoric that ascribes individual guilt for one's poverty, Raine's fall in class status appears to be somewhat of her own doing. This runs counter to Chance's futile attempt to break out of his class and climb the ladder so as to legitimize his place within the suburb. Operating within the system and as a subject to it, Chance cannot break out of his class, nor can he break into the community that "rightfully" has a claim to Mapleview Lanes because the very system in which he operates sees no room for him within the suburb. The poor have their place, and it is not in this neighborhood. The attempted repurposing of space within the suburb rejects this myth, but it ultimately fails as Chance is shown to be, not the philanthropist he first seems to be, but a wolf in sheep's clothing, preying on the marginalized and wealthy alike.

Raine, for her part, rejects the system that enthralls Lewis though she is no better for it. Thompson writes Raine's rejection of middle-class complacency first through her slippage from middle to lower-class, then through her attempted suicide (65). Her rejection of life may be seen as a rejection of a homogenic order. Even this act, however, only serves to maintain one possible alternative: Join or die.

Raine's final act of rebellion against hegemonic authority is a second act of self-eradication, this time by destroying not herself, but her space. Raine and Sparkle set fire to the group home, watching Raine's "three story birthday candle" (78) burn to the ground as Sparkle sings. In the final monologue of the play, Raine opines that she has come home. She has not returned to her father's house, for all the audience knows, she remains outcast, formerly middle-class, now fully homeless. Thompson's omission of any concrete resolution to Raine's story suggests that she will continue to inhabit marginalized, liminal space without the benefit of a social or communal agency from which to build her identity. The end of the play offers Raine up as a powerful statement to Thompson's audience about their own precarious social status. She is, after all, of the middle-class and her slippage from privilege produces anxiety and fear over the spectator's own potential to fall. The unsettling possibility of the end of the play is that Raine has not so much found a home as oblivion. The marginalized characters may rail and threaten to break out of the spaces assigned to them, but within the middle-class world of the play, the only real alternative to marginalization appears to be erasing oneself before authority can.

III. *The Crackwalker* and *I am Yours*:

Prenatal Space and the Double Illusion

Through her writing of prenatal space – the space of the gestating fetus - and her characterization of the fetal subject in *The Crackwalker* and *I am Yours*, Thompson sets up a venue for exploring the social and discursive production of space as applied to the body. In *The Crackwalker*, the womb undergoes a metonymic shift, coming to stand in for the mother's identity, its own status taking precedence over hers. In *I am Yours*, Thompson metaphorically pulls the womb outside of the mother's body and displays it on stage, granting the gestating fetus its own separate agency and identity that is contingent on the erasure of the mother. These two different creations of prenatal space, read through the work of philosopher Henri Lefebvre, exemplify what Lefebvre calls the "Double Illusion" – an idealistic erasure of space as a social product and a naturalization of the power structures that define and control spatial practice. Thompson's different uses of prenatal space as a theatrical device make possible this comparison and furthermore helps to illustrate the contradictions inherent in such an obfuscation of the social nature of space.

In the first part of this chapter, I examine how *The Crackwalker* involves a metonymic conversion of woman into womb, stripping Theresa of agency through a false societal appeal to not only the wellbeing of her unborn child, but to any *potential* children she may or may not have. In this way, Theresa comes to embody what Henri Lefebvre calls the "Illusion of Opacity". In the second part of this chapter, I examine the second half of Lefebvre's Double Illusion – The "Illusion of Transparency". I argue that the

primacy of the fetal subject in *I am Yours* executes a form of maternal erasure. This representation of prenatal space and the fetal subject make of Dee a living example of transparent, wholly ideological space. It is my contention that by implementing these two forms of maternal effacement, Thompson presupposes a space that is neither transparent nor opaque, but contingent on the social relations that define and produce it. Her treatment of the womb and the fetal subject suggests that space is not an unchanging, natural given nor is it a purely innocuous phenomenon holding no influence on the subjects it contains. Rather, her representation of prenatal space is one that can lead the audience to identify the effect that authoritative discourse can have on manipulating space as a social product. Thompson's use of prenatal space and the fetal subject asks the audience to reckon with such space as co-opted by a hegemonic authority that seeks to exclude the Other from its borders, re-imagined and redeployed in the name of protecting normative society.

The Crackwalker, as the play's title would suggest, deals heavily with the theme of being outside of normative space. The idea of always being in-between spaces permeates much of the play and at various points in the plot, the characters are moving from one home to another, losing jobs, splitting up, or reconciling. Change and impermanence seem to be the only constants offered up by the play. Theresa, a mentally retarded woman and the play's protagonist, begins the play running away from her current home to move in with her friend Sandy – a place, it's suggested, she's lived before. "I not goin back there no more no way, I'm goin back to Sandy's." (Thompson 1989, 19). Moving into Sandy's house, however, only serves to set in motion a series of departures and arrivals. Theresa's arrival at Sandy's sparks a fight between the two

women when Sandy confronts her over Theresa having had sex with Sandy's husband, Joe. Theresa accuses Joe of having raped her. Sandy sides with Theresa and the exchange the two women have reveals to the audience that such violence is relatively commonplace at Sandy's house. Joe enters shortly after, Sandy accuses him of the rape and Theresa corrects her: "No no Sanny not rape I only said he done it when I never wanted it" (29). In the ensuing fight between Sandy and Joe, Joe reveals his intentions to leave the house. "I been wantin out of this hole" (28). Alan, Joe's friend and Theresa's lover, promises he will keep Theresa out of trouble and Sandy grudgingly allows Theresa to stay. As Theresa and Alan leave, Sandy and Joe have a screaming match that almost instantly turns into a failed attempt by Sandy to seduce her husband before he walks out the door, leaving her nearly naked on the floor. At the same time as Sandy and Joe are going through their violent relationship issues, Alan and Theresa are discussing possible marriage. Theresa is ecstatic, but lays out the caveat that "The sosha worker, she say I gotta get my tubes tied" (34). Theresa is aware, through being told by doctors and her social workers, that her mental retardation makes her an unsuitable parent. Alan convinces Theresa to eventually relent and have a child with him by likening her to images of the Virgin Mary; "Cept the Madonna picture got a baby in it" (36). As Joe leaves Sandy's house, Alan moves in to be with Theresa and is kicked out by Sandy shortly afterwards. As Act II begins, it is revealed that Theresa and Alan now have a child and live together. Theresa still spends many nights staying at Sandy's house, leaving the child with Alan. Theresa makes an offhand remark, letting the audience know what life is like at her house: "Al cryin nights[…]I tell him nothin's wrong everything fine but he keep cryin" (54). In the latter half of the play, Joe returns to

collect Sandy and bring her to Calgary to live with him, Alan loses his job and then suffers a psychotic break and strangles his child in front of Theresa. In the aftermath of the infanticide, Theresa carries her child to Sandy's in a bag. She accuses Alan of the murder in front of Joe and Sandy and announces to Alan that she will start dating another man. Alan runs off and Sandy calls the police. What follows is an account by Sandy of the child's funeral, and musings about Theresa's future: "I worry about Trese but she'll be okay, you know? She'll – she'll go back down the Lido, start blowin off old queers again for five bucks" (71). The play ends with Theresa, struggling against an unseen assailant. Her self-respect somewhat intact, she defends herself by making allusion to Alan's earlier characterization of her with the last lines in the play: "Stupid old bassard don't go foolin with me you don't even know who I look like even. You don't even know who I lookin like" (71).

The characters in this play are always moving from one space to another. Never remaining in one spot for very long, their identities are likewise in transition. Sandy's home, the main setting of most of the action of the play, is never just a home. At various points in the play, Thompson has the characters commandeer the house for various purposes. Joe uses the living room as a temporary chop shop in Act I when he and Alan bring a stolen motorcycle into the home and begin dismantling it. Later on in the play, the living room becomes Alan and Theresa's temporary bedroom, much to Sandy's consternation: "It's just strange you goin with Trese on our floor" (42). Strange is certainly an apt descriptor for how Thompson uses space in this play. These spaces come to symbolize in their difference, the Otherness of the characters who wander about within them. At the same time, the space of the traditional home - a staple of kitchen sink

realism – is an ever-present palimpsest beneath the grimy, abject space Thompson creates for her characters. Along with references Thompson makes to social workers, medical practitioners, the common sense advice of *Reader's Digest*, and the expectations of nosy neighbors, she has set up a present, but mostly unseen power structure that frames the characters' difference for the audience.

In setting up the spaces and identities of her characters in the way she does, she juxtaposes their otherness with hints at the discursive authorities that exemplify what Thompson's decidedly middle-class audience would recognize as the familiar. In Act II, Scene ii, Thompson makes this authoritative hand manifest in Alan's attempts to correct and educate his wife: "Theresa, you don't *eat* milk you drink it." And again, later on in the scene in reaction to Theresa describing a bowel movement she'd had earlier: "Theresa married ladies with babies ain't supposed to say things like that!" (52). Alan's prime motivator is, as he says, to improve his family – to make it more like what a middle-class family would be. The otherness of the characters, combined with omnipresence of social authority, informs the spaces in which they exist. Thompson effectively sets up an othered space that is made even more abject by its constant referral back to the normative.

The spatial iterations Thompson sets up when she pits the abject space of her characters against the ordering hand of authority, recall a phenomenon Henri Lefebvre refers to in *The Production of Space*, his major treatment of space as a social product. In his work on space, he argues primarily that "(Social) space is a (social) product." (Lefebvre 1991, 26), that it, like capital and commodity goods: "[…]serves as a tool of thought and of action" (26). Moreover, like with capital and material products, the

production of such space is masked by hegemonic power. The obfuscation of authority's role in ordering the thoughts, actions, and identities that may exist within space and that may - by extension – participate in the construction of space, occurs through a process he calls the "Double Illusion" (27). Lefebvre articulates this illusion in terms of two separate but mutually reinforcing ways of perceiving space: The Illusion of Opacity and the Illusion of Transparency. "Opacity" suggests that space is possessed of a "natural simplicity" (29), that it is a wholly material phenomenon, unshaped by and independent of the socio-economic process occurring within and around it. Society is thought to have no role in how space is ordered and produced because spatial divisions are naturally occurring. The scrutiny of opaque space should only ever reveal what is always already there. On the other hand, "transparency" suggests that space is a completely unproblematic phenomenon. It merely exists and it is always secondary to the subject within it. Transparency suggests a space that is dematerialized, and that does not hold any bearing on the subjects within it and such a conception of space precludes the need to interrogate it. These two tiers of the double illusion, - one reifying space as natural given, the other trivializing it as a mere subjective condition - in Lefebvre's estimation, prevent space from being interrogated as a social product. As such, they serve to legitimize an authority that imposes its ordering of space as natural and unquestionable. It is in Thompson's writing of the womb, of prenatal space, and of the fetal subject, that she has created two halves of the double illusion, pointing to the contradictions in both, thereby offering up the potential for space to be perceived not as natural given nor as ideological conceit, but as a social process.

In *The Crackwalker*, prenatal space is articulated in such a way as to align it with an Illusion of Opacity. The way that Thompson sets up Theresa's reproductive potential as the most important means by which she interacts with the world creates a rhetoric of woman-as-womb. Thompson, in identifying Theresa and her relationships with Theresa's womb, produces a metonymic shift in which Theresa's identity is contingent on her status as the gestative space of biological reproduction. This shift in identification supercedes all other considerations and the courses of action and thought open to her are determined based on her suitability as an apparatus for the gestation of offspring – as a functional prenatal space. This identification is the only thing to which Theresa cleaves with any consistency throughout the play. Generally, Theresa is governed by her desires and caprices, she leaves her home as soon as it no longer suits her, saying to Sandy "[…]I don't get off on livin where I'm livin no more so I come back here sleepin on the couch, okay?" (Thompson 1989, 20), she accuses Joe of a rape he likely didn't commit, and she leaves her own home to move back in with Sandy when the stress of raising a child becomes too bothersome. Her friendship with Sandy is likewise abandoned in favor of being with her new best friend, Ivy: "She hardly funny she hardly get pissed off when I eatin icin…" (68). This friendship, new though it may be, is also grounded in Theresa's pursuit of anything that catches her fancy at any given moment. Unfettered by any sense of commitment in her relationships, Theresa can embark on them or end them as she sees fit with little to no second thoughts on it. After Alan strangles their child, in the middle of her confrontation with him, she shows the degree to which she's detached from those around her: "You goin up the river to Penetang, Al, you goin there tomorrow and you never comin out for what you done you not goin back with me I goin with Ron Harton he

better than you…" (66) In a world populated strictly by the lowest classes of people, Thompson has written a protagonist who is an outsider from even this social circle.

As the abject protagonist in the play, Theresa embodies her outsider status fully. Her relationship with the truth is as tenuous and fleeting as that with the people around her. Theresa exists in a world of contradictions. She lies almost constantly throughout the play, shifting her version of the truth instantly and without regard for anything she's said previously. In her opening monologue, when she describes being caught with a man named Danny in her bedroom by Mrs. Beddison she initially avows that her relationship with him was completely non sexual. As she describes it, "we're just talking, eh, we weren't doing nothing" (19). As she continues the story, the truth of the situation changes drastically: "We don't got no clothes on, eh, so I put his jeans and that under the covers like I'm sleepin…" (19). Another source of ambiguity is her account of Joe raping her which may or may not be true as well. Theresa doesn't lie with any malice, but she shifts her version of the truth repeatedly, basing it on the situation in which she finds herself. This instability, along with her capricious treatment of relationships, is part of how Thompson sets her up with a mostly destabilized, ever-shifting identity.

Early on in the play, Thompson lays out the one stabilizing source for Theresa's identity: her relationship to society and her understanding of herself is mediated through her reproductive potential – her womb. Throughout the play, her relationship with Alan, as well as the interaction she has with medical and social authority is a result of her potential to bear offspring. This consistent element of Theresa's personality stands in stark contrast to the otherwise capricious nature Thompson gives her. This is first

illustrated when Alan proposes marriage to Theresa, and Thompson unveils the prohibition against Theresa's reproductive agency. She accepts, but with a caveat:

> THERESA. Hope you don't want no babies.
>
> ALAN. Why. I do! I do want babies! I get on with babies good!
>
> THERESA. Not sposda have none. … I gotta get my tubes tied.
>
> (34)

This sets in motion a simultaneous identification and alienation from the womb. The only rule to which Theresa cleaves with any real consistency is this prohibition against having children. She is adamant throughout the rest of the scene. When Alan protests that "They don't have no right" (34), Theresa demonstrates the degree to which she's internalized this denial of her reproductive agency, saying "Yah they do Al I slow." followed by "I ain't a good mum Al I can't help it" (34). This negative identification with her womb is the only thing in the play that Theresa holds onto with any degree of consistency. Social and medical authority seeks to instill in her the notion that she must not conceive a child, going so far as to hold her sole source of income ransom. Referring to her social worker, she tells Alan, "But Al she say she gonna cut off my pension check if I don't get my tubes tied" (35). In a standard patriarchal trope, the woman is to become identified with the womb in such a way that her organs become the matrix by which society propagates itself. This is not lost on Theresa and her admission to the denial of her right to reproduce demonstrates as much.

Thompson further underscores this potential role for Theresa when Alan insists on how perfectly suited to bearing children Theresa should be, linking her to the ultimate

mother in western culture, the Virgin Mary. "Yuh look just like her. Just like the Madonna. Cept Madonna picture got a baby in it" (36). Thompson has Theresa cling to this identity and the comparison between Theresa and Mary surfaces over and over again even to the final moments of the play when Theresa, besieged by an unseen assailant seeks comfort in this perception of herself: "Stupid old bassard don't go foolin with me you don't even know who I look like even. You don't even know who I lookin like." (71) For Theresa, who isn't much of anything else, there is some attempt at grasping agency in her grappling for the role of mother. And yet, Thompson's choice of language and iconography engages with Theresa and her role not as potential parent, but as a potential fetal incubator. It is telling that the medical authority in the play is mobilized to oppose not Theresa's *parenting*, but her *conceiving* of a child. It is not her legitimacy as the child's parent that is challenged, but rather her suitability as a gestating apparatus for the fetus in the first place. Moreover, Thompson deepens this identification of Theresa with the womb when she so strongly links her to the Virgin Mary – Western culture's single most powerful icon for the mother - a woman made famous not for raising a child, but for giving birth to one. Theresa's identity is contingent on her identification with her womb much more than with her husband or son. Theresa's rebellion against the medical prohibition that seeks to stop her from reproducing comes about as a decision to more deeply identify with her role as child bearer. This image becomes for Theresa a foundation of her identity and she eventually has a child, Danny, with Alan.

Theresa's relationship to the prenatal is defined in negative terms: she *is* the birthing machine, but she is not to serve such a purpose. Instead, she is to submit to a willing erasure from prenatal space altogether. Even after she has moved against this

prohibition and had a child, she maintains the interdiction against her having children. When Alan comes home from work, expecting to have sex with Theresa, her response is based on this solidified identity: "No I can't do it till I get my new IUD in. Or I get pregnant again doctor say so!" (64) Even breaking the rules does not free Theresa from identifying with them. In the end, however, regardless of whether she uses her womb or not, her relationship to it remains the single most powerful factor in determining what is important to her. From the moment she mentions the denial of her biological agency, to the final lines she utters in the play, Theresa's identity is bound up in her womb.

By establishing Theresa's identity as contingent on her reproductive potential, by showing the womb itself to take precedence over Theresa, Thompson is establishing a rhetoric of woman-as-womb. The womb comes to take metonymic primacy because nothing else solidly defines Theresa in any way. Moreover, Theresa's identity is so dependent on her relationship to her womb that the womb comes to take on a greater materiality than she herself has. Whereas her status as mother, best friend, lover, and wife are all contingent on context and change at various points in the play Theresa remains, to the end, subordinate to the role her womb may or may not play in society. The prohibition against Theresa being able to reproduce is articulated time and again throughout the play as inviolable. This rigidity in the space Theresa both constitutes and inhabits suggests Lefebvre's Illusion of Opacity. By offering space up as opaque, as rigid and unchanging, naturally occurring, unintelligible, the discursive production of space is ignored. Likewise, Theresa is deemed unsuitable to bear offspring and this is the defining characteristic by which larger society in the play interacts with her. The challenge to this assumption, put forth by only Alan and Theresa, merely deepens the

conflation of Theresa with the womb because the womb is the only stabilizing source for her identity. Theresa finds herself constituted as the generative apparatus of society, the space by which populations prosper or fail.

In creating this metonymic shift with Theresa, however, Thompson also underscores a contradiction within the Illusion of Opacity. For if Theresa can be personified as that space and if that space can be conceived as subject to public regulation and definable by authority, then it remains at least somewhat dependent on social discourse. Moreover, Thompson shows the hand of authority at work. While she doesn't pinpoint the source of hegemonic power, she alludes to its presence by using Theresa herself to voice those prohibitions. Theresa need not know from whence come the rules she parrots back to Alan. Rather, Thompson presents the scene to the audience who recognizes, - through Theresa defining herself by her womb and yet conditioned to avoid using it – the inherent contradiction. In this way Thompson, by calling into being the Illusion of Opacity in the way she does, by making the womb a site of discourse on identity and personal agency, throws into question its very validity.

I am Yours proposes a prenatal space that is not opaque, but rather transparent. In this play, Thompson offers up a contrasting view of the womb that supports a notion of fetal primacy, positing the fetus itself as a subject that is of greater import than either the womb or the mother. Whereas Theresa in *The Crackwalker* is the constitutive outside space of the fetus, there is no contextualizing frame for the fetal subject in *I am Yours*; it merely exists. Its conception is self-willed and as such, is aligned with the conceptual "self-made man," tied to a myth of self-willed agency. The mother, Dee, is not in this case conflated with the womb, but rather erased from it altogether. In this section, I

examine how Thompson's staging of the absented mother can be read through Lefebvre's concept of the Illusion of Transparency – a perception of space as uncomplicated, dematerialized, and holding little to no influence over that which exists within it. It is my contention that through her writing of prenatal space in *I am Yours* – specifically demonstrated in the device of Dee's paintings - Thompson elaborates a sliding scale of fetal versus maternal agency. Over the course of the play, Dee's fetus becomes more and more a subject in its own right. It is given a will of its own that eventually comes to supercede Dee's. Dee, for her own part, finds her agency slipping as she becomes less a subject in her own right and instead becomes merely the space in which the fetus gestates. By visually relocating fetal space outside of the mother and onto the stage, Thompson alludes to the idealized erasure of the mother as transparent space.

Like *The Crackwalker*, *I am Yours* is a play about relationships and difference. The play opens with Toilane, experiencing a dream in which he finds himself estranged from his home. At the same time, Dee awakens startles in her bedroom from a nightmare in which she is "*willing the creature, that torments her to stay behind the wall, and not enter her being"* (119). Dee and Toilane meet a few hours later in the courtyard of the building in which they live. He introduces himself as the building's superintendent. She runs away. Meanwhile, Mercy, Dee's sister, is on her way to visit her. On the bus, she has a dream of a much older man with whom she had an affair at 15. Mack, Dee's estranged husband, arrives and runs into Toilane who reveals to Mack that he's just met the woman who will have his baby. Mack continues into Dee's apartment where he finds her painting. They have a vicious fight in which Dee switches back and forth between begging for forgiveness and tormenting her husband. Mack leaves Dee, who is clearly

suffering some kind of mental crisis, crying on the floor and begging him to stay. The next scene describes Toilane's life, showing him with his extremely controlling and overbearing mother, Pegs, berating him over how little he's made of his life. Toilane eventually comes back to Dee's apartment and finds her lying on the floor. He then swears complete devotion to an incredulous Dee, seeing a fated bond between the two of them: "I want to be your knight – with no armor…Because – somepin'…you got …somepin …like ME, somepin YOU know, you KNOW" (132). The two eventually have sex, after which Dee tells Toilane that she never wants to see him again. He leaves, heartbroken, as Mercy enters. The sisters talk about their childhood together, their dysfunctional family, and failed relationships. It eventually becomes known that Dee is pregnant. Dee initially goes to the hospital in order to have an abortion, but she senses the fetus speaking to her, demanding to live, and leaves before she can go through with the procedure. The true father of Dee's child remains unknown for the rest of the play. She initially tells Mack that it' his, but suspects it might be Toilane's. After originally planning to give the child up for adoption when it is born, she decides to keep it, assuring Mercy that she'll tell Mack the truth, "When I'm sure I have my roots in him" (149). Toilane, believing the child to be his, and at the urging of his mother, confronts Dee and demands to be allowed to keep his child, revealing Dee's infidelity to Mack in the process. Pegs threatens legal action and riles her son up to fight for his child, telling him how much lower class people like him suffer from the whims of the better-off. In his determination to win legal custody of his child, Toilane literally declares war on the middle-class. During the legal battle over custody, Dee falsely accuses Toilane of having raped her. Unable to disprove the accusation, he withdraws his suit. With no other

avenues open to them, Pegs and Toilane visit Dee under the pretext of wanting to make amends. During the visit, Dee's water breaks and she begins to deliver the child. Pegs and Toilane hold Dee and Mercy hostage, kidnapping the baby and going on the run with it. Dee awakens in the hospital, delirious, having decided she wants to keep her baby, but not realizing that Mercy allowed Pegs and Toilane to take it. The play ends with Dee resolving to love and take care of her child, believing she sees it in the hospital nursery while Toilane stands alone and bewildered in a hotel room with the child, Pegs possibly dead in a chair beside him.

Thompson has created in Dee a protagonist ever-standing on the edge of oblivion. As Dee becomes pregnant and the fetus within her grows, she finds herself struggling more and more to maintain agency against the autogenerative fetus she carries. Her paintings exist not only as a chronicle of the life of the fetus within her, but as they take a more defined form, Dee finds her selfhood eroding. At the beginning of the play, Dee appears to be haunted by some unknown, undefined presence. It is characterized throughout the play as "the creature" or her "animal". This malignant presence threatens her throughout the play and initially does so from behind an imaginary and emotional wall of sorts. It is relegated to a dark recess in her being, hidden away, unseen and unknowable. Over the course of the play, this being will threaten to surface repeatedly throughout the play, it is typically the excuse given for her erratic and decidedly cruel behavior. It is first invoked into being in Act I when Dee, just waking up from a nightmare is said to be "…willing the creature that torments her imagination to stay behind the wall, and not enter her being" (119). As the action progresses, however, Dee will come to invoke it first in words, then on her canvas. Her first line in the play is to

deny its existence as she awakens from a nightmare, repeating a mantra intended to consign it to oblivion: "There is nothing behind the wall. There is nothing behind the wall" (119). Dee's denial of the "animal's" existence, however, has the result of invoking its presence for the audience and setting in motion its gradual revelation as it manifests itself over and over again in Dee's behavior and art.

As Dee paints, she slowly reveals the monstrous being within her to the audience. And as it becomes more and more intelligible, Dee begins to fade more and more into obscurity. In this way, Thompson has established a sliding scale of agency. Dee and the creature she paints, eventually revealed to be the fetus growing within her, cannot coexist. They are set in opposition to each other and much of the play involves Dee attempting to forestall its coming into being. The first graphical representation of Dee's "animal" appears in Act 1: "Dee is fingerpainting a large black blob, in a frenzied attempt to depict the 'animal' behind the wall that she so fears – on a large canvas" (123). Here, the force against which Dee will struggle for her agency is depicted as formless, not yet exposed to the light of knowledge. As the play progresses, however, the subject of Dee's paintings becomes more and more defined while Dee herself slips deeper into madness.

Thompson accomplishes Dee's erasure on two levels. On the one hand, Dee loses agency as the fetus takes on its own subjectivity. Dee's inability to exert her will over the fetus first becomes apparent to the audience in the abortion scene in which she is forced to acknowledge the fetus' being.

> DEE. Is that you? Are you…speaking…to me? I can hear you breathing, speaking. STOP, PLEASE! STOP SPEAKING TO ME NOOOO! … I DON'T want to KNOW you, NO,

> PLEASE, I WANT TO GET RID OF YOU I – don't. Don't. DON'T make those… [*she sees something that touches her – such as a baby's smile, a small hand, etc.*] don't – no, no no no OKAY! OKAY OKAY OKAY YOU ARE! You are! You are!! YOU ARE!!! (143)

Thompson establishes the fetus within Dee as a self-willed individual, independent of its surroundings. It demands recognition and acknowledgement and Dee is forced to grant it. In granting this subjectivity to that which is dependent on her, however, Dee must refute her own importance in the relationship. This creates a schism in Dee's personality and as she experiences her transformation into the transparent, passive receptacle for the fetal subject she denies her agency and primacy within the relationship. By the end of the play, this self-erasure becomes so powerful that the fetus becomes, for Dee, a malignant force threatening to obliterate her completely. In the last moments leading up to the birth of the child, Dee is ranting and delirious, her own loss of self a certainty: "I think I'm gonna die, I really think I'm gonna die […] Oh God, oh God, I must be in hell […]It's a dream, that's what it is, a terrible nightmare, oh God, oh AGHHHHH. LET ME WAKE UP PLEASE LET ME WAKE UP" (170). In these final moments, Thompson has swapped the positions of Dee and her fetus from the abortion scene. Whereas the child growing within her demanded its right to exist, Dee has lost that level of agency through the slow erosion of her sense of self. Instead she is left begging and pleading for the right to continue to exist.

The exposition of Dee's paintings onstage provides a second level of erasure. Thompson sets the paintings up as a stand-in for medical fetoscopic imagery, allowing

the audience's gaze to penetrate through Dee via the proxy of the paintings she creates. Dee's second painting is much more direct in its representation, "[…] a black line inside a brilliant yellow circle" (142). It is at once the literal image she sees on her positive pregnancy test and a representation of the reproductive process happening inside her body. Evocative of the human zygote undergoing the first cell division, the painting propels the space of Dee's womb outward, making it public, illuminating it finally. Dee's next action is to seek out an abortion that she ultimately fails to go through with. Possessed by the fetus inside her, she acquiesces to its demands for subjectivity and agency even to the detriment of her own. As Dee loses the battle to hold her subjectivity together, she must accept that the fetus is claiming agency, creating itself independently of her. As Dee cries out acknowledgement of its coming into being, "You are!", Thompson is leaving unsaid "[…]and I AM not".

The third painting Dee creates for the audience is, as Thompson describes in the stage directions, "…the grotesque painting of a ten-week-old fetus" (143). There is a parallel between the paintings Dee is creating, medical imaging techniques and the sliding scale of subjectivity. In ultrasound imaging, in order for the fetus to be made visible, the mother's body must in some way disappear. As Dee paints more and more, depicting the growing life inside her, she must reenact her own eradication upon the canvas. In her first image, she is still able to recognize and depict the opacity of her body, the darkness that shrouds the being within her is the impenetrable, wholly conceived subject herself. As the fetus grows in age, Dee finds herself unable to be represented along with the fetal subject. Only one may claim agency and in Dee's final painting, Thompson makes the result abundantly clear: "On the canvas is a grotesque

painting of a nine-month-old fetus" (164). The culmination of Dee's erosion of self is made manifest in the final visually represented denial of her motherhood.

As the Illusion of Transparency suggests, Dee has become incorporeal and of little consequence to the gestating fetus. In Lefebvre's words, transparent space, "[…]appears as luminous, as intelligible, as giving action free rein. What happens in space lends a miraculous quality to thought, which becomes incarnate by means of a *design*" (Lefebvre 1991, 27). The designer in Lefebvre's argument being the self-willed agent – the correlative of the subjective fetus in *I am Yours.* Dee stands in as the transparent space that must be made invisible so that, "[…]everything can be taken in by a single glance by that mental eye which illuminates whatever it contemplates" (28). The eye, of course, being that of authority and of the subject, and in the case of Thompson's play, the gaze of the audience. As she writes the play and builds the action, Thompson makes Dee's body transparent in conjunction with her shrinking subjectivity.

In the final moments of Dee's pregnancy, Thompson brings the character to the precipice of oblivion. As her water breaks, Dee suffers hallucinations of a Lion threatening to devour her. "[…]a Lion, I can … see – a – a – lion, a lion, breaking through the wall a lion roaring all the stones breaking, flying, roaring. Stop!" (Thompson 1989, 165). As the child within her begins to be born, Dee is suddenly aware of the precariousness of her selfhood. Having suffered such a complete erasure, becoming the child's legitimate mother is a final possibility for Dee to come back from the brink of meaninglessness. Toilane, the child's supposed father, has kidnapped the baby and run off. In this last moment, Dee's erasure is made final. Thompson has Dee come out of her delivery fully changed, ready to love the baby that is hers. Thompson describes her as

being “infused with this love”(176). She dotes over a baby in the hospital nursery, ignorant of the fact that her child, the subject by which she will seek to define herself, has been kidnapped. “I want you baby I want you forever because I …love you”(176). In this final moment, Thompson reveals the precariousness of Dee’s identity and leaves unspoken what Dee is to become.

In creating an external representation of Dee’s womb, and in representing the fetus as a self-determining subject, Thompson has made literal the idealized erasure of the mother as a subject. By creating out of Dee a space that is secondary to the subject operating within it, she calls into being the Illusion of Transparency, a perception that suggests that all things are eminently apprehendable as what they are. Transparent space does not distort and yet, the paintings Dee creates are always distorted, never true to life, and always must omit the mother from the frame in order to make the fetal subject intelligible. By underlining the erasure that must accompany any perception of the womb made visible as transparent space, Thompson highlights the extent to which this perception of space is, as with the Illusion of Opacity mentioned above, ideologically grounded and misleading in its refutation of space as a social product.

To summarize, Thompson’s writing of space and the social relations occurring within it never goes so far as to seek out space as a wholly social, discursive product. She doesn’t take the situations she sets up quite so far as to permit the audience to explore fully for themselves the problematics of a reified spatial practice. She does, however, grant the audience a glimpse at the hand of authority as it operates to obfuscate the power relations that go into producing space. The audience certainly recognizes the hand and gaze of authority as it’s proxy within the play. The values of the prevailing authority are

those of the middle-class audience and its members are called upon to legitimize for themselves the alienation of Thompson's marginalized characters for the good of mainstream society even as they reckon with the pain and suffering of the Others within the plays. In *The Crackwalker*, she does so by aligning the medical establishment firmly in the camp that would seek to first define Theresa by her womb, and then restrict her from obtaining subjectivity from that definition. Instead, Theresa finds herself excluded from society on the very grounds by which society determines her identity. In *I am Yours*, Thompson does allude to a medical establishment that is complicit in erasing the mother from the site of the process of birth, othering the mother so as to place its focus on the immanent fetus. Dee executes this self erasure by referencing archetypical images of fetuses taken with ultrasounds and other medical imaging technologies. Within these fetal viewing technologies, the mother's body is always erased from the scene by necessity. The major result of this is the penetration of the woman's body by the gaze of medical practitioners, lawmakers, and fetal rights advocates to name a few. By aligning the audience with this gaze, Thompson places it in the position of authority over her characters. The need to reckon with the pity felt for Dee and Theresa even as the sanctity of the hegemonic order is maintained for the good of the status-quo produces the uncomfortable dramatic tension for an audience that should otherwise be aligned with the forces that oppress Thompson's misfit characters.

Thompson does, however, offer up the possibility for cracks in the veneer of these two ways of perceiving space, identity, and subjectivity. In both cases, the erasure or exclusion is always slightly problematic. In both cases, the exclusion of the mother from prenatal space is accomplished through a process of exclusion or erasure. As a process,

this exclusion is itself grounded in relationships and spatial practices and that fact is always on display for the audience. Thompson's characters ultimately come to inhabit a spatial practice more than a space itself. Their identities are always contingent, and always in a state of flux. Thompson never firmly sets her characters in one place at the end of her plays. Rather, she seems to set them adrift in the abyss. As terrible as their fates are, they are always shown to be changeable in some way which suggests a rejection of solidly determined identities and naturalized social space. At the same time, by implying the potential changeability of her characters' lots, Thompson manages to absolve the audience of any complicity in the creation of the spaces and situations that exclude the Other from their space.

Conclusion

Jennifer Harvie proposes that applying a version of standpoint feminism can situate Thompson's work within a rhetoric of emancipation. Applying this reading to Isobel in *Lion in the Strets* Harvie offers up the character's fragmented and destabilized identity as an alternative perception of reality that allows"…for the possibility of change - as alternative 'realities' may be seen to be constructed equally easily – and […] also stimulate[s] a recognition of reality not as essential and homogeneous, but plural and heterogeneous" (Harvie 1992). Such a reading of the play is similar to my own exploration of Thompson's writing of space as a social product insofar as Harvie also identifies a fractured and destabilized identity. For my own part, I have focused on how Thompson destabilizes identity by tying it to a conception of space that is socially determined.

In my first chapter, I found that for Isobel and Toilane, the spatial dislocation manifested in their estrangement from the home exacerbates their identity crises, forcing them to seek out a way to gain mastery over social space in order to shore up their eroding selfhoods. These attempts at self determination are ultimately thwarted by the characters' inability to engage in a meaningful social practice. By denying Isobel and Toilane an ability to engage with space from the originating coordinates from which all space extends, Thompson precludes for them a position of subjectivity. These characters must therefore appeal to the interpretive gaze of privileged subjects in order to have their identities bestowed upon them. The rejection of this subordinate identity and the desperate acts with which these characters make their final grasps at subjectivity only

serve to push both even further beyond the borders of the normative. As such, while Thompson undoubtedly establishes a heterogeneous world, it is one in which the only potential outcomes for these two characters is either marginalization or eradication.

In Chapter II, I identify in *Habitat* multiple alternative realities operating within the same social space. In this case, Thompson elaborates a spatial practice in which two opposed groups vie for the right to occupy the same neighborhood. In her writing of Mapleview Lanes, Thompson establishes a normative middle-class space, the integrity of which is dependent on the exclusion of the Other from within its borders. The appropriation and repurposing of space by the group home residents initiates a conflict between two incompatible conceptions of the neighborhood. By showing Mapleview Lanes to be susceptible to the will of the grouphome residents, Thompson proposes a heterotopic and transgressive view of social space. At the same time, however, the legitimacy of such alternative orderings of space is called into question by her characterization of the community as an entity that exists independent of the relations and processes occurring outside of it. Thompson ties the sanctity of Mapleview Lanes to the physical and social well-being of its middle-class inhabitants and thereby legitimizes the exclusion of the Other from the neighborhood on the grounds that the unwanted group home residents pose a threat. Thompson further complicates the situation by suggesting that the borders between the Other and the selfsame are dangerously fragile. Offering up Raine as an example of the ease with which anyone may slip into the space of marginality, Thompson eventually expels her from the middle-class, leaving Raine in a liminal space of abjection.

My third chapter applies Lefebvre's assertion that a reified space serves the hegemonic order to Thompson's writing of the womb as a discursively produced space. Thompson's use of prenatal space as the contested site of maternal agency discursively relocates the space of the womb into the realm of the social, aligning it against the marginalized mother and with the dominant social order. Applying this to Lefebvre's double illusion illuminates the way that even the bodies of the marginalized may be redeployed in the service of authority. As Dee and Theresa find their identity produced by their relationships to their wombs as mediated through medical and social discourse, they find themselves being pushed beyond the field of relevance until Thompson forsakes them to the abyss of marginality.

My findings suggest to me that some of the emancipatory potential Harvie describes may well be subject to a number of obstacles built in to Thompson's work on these plays. While Thompson's elaboration of spatial practice and destabilized identity offers a potential recognition of alternative realities and truths, the privileged position of Thompson's middle-class target audience subverts this emancipatory potential. In all four of the plays I've discussed, Thompson interpellates her audience as occupants of a position of privileged subjectivity. By recognizing Thompson's lower-class characters as such, her audiences are required to use their own middle-class experience as the benchmark against which to measure her marginalized characters. Finally, Thompson frequently involves her audience in the constitution of marginalized spaces through her repeated use of monologues delivered to the house. By breaking the fourth wall in this way, she situates the target audience as one of the many authorities to whom her marginalized characters must appeal in their struggle for agency. Since such audiences

are expected to impose their own social reality onto the spaces Thompson writes, those spaces can never become truly alternative.

It is my belief that, given the limitations within these plays, an emancipatory interpretation of Thompson's work necessitates some form of radical dramaturgy so as to further destabilize those positions that are grounded in hegemony while providing an effective glimpse at the constructed nature of identity and spatial practice. It is my hope that a staging of Thompson's plays in such a way could provide fleeting moments of heterotopic spatial practice in which a multiplicity of subjects could operate.

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