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The Performance of Identity in Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an analysis of Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*, the second play in his tetralogy *Le Sang des promesses.* It is the stories of multiple journeys of self-discovery taken by characters seeking to better understand their own history and present identity as it exists within a complex and continually shifting socio-political web. Through the lenses of Postcolonial and Trauma theory, I endeavor to do a close reading of the play script as well as semiotic investigation of Mouawad's original staging of the production in comparison with Richard Rose's mise en scène of the play in English, *Scorched.* I will demonstrate in this thesis that the techniques suggested by Postcolonial and Trauma theorists for the re-establishment of identity in the face of loss are exemplified in *Incendies*, both in the fictional world of the play and its reception by an audience.

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Foreword

Incendies was my introduction to theatre artist Wajdi Mouawad and his plays that echo the grandeur of Ancient Greek epics such as *Oedipus Rex.* I was unable to get enough of Mouawad's elaborately crafted work, be it in the viewing of his stagings of *Incendies* and *Forêts* or in the form of his dramas, his political letters, or his novel. By the time I attended his solo endeavor *Seuls*, which was his way of introducing himself as the new Artistic Director of the French Theatre at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, I knew I was in love with his theatrical stylings and intelligent philosophy of the world he inhabits.

This thesis was proposed as a study of the first three installments of the tetralogy *Le Sang des promesses – Littoral, Incendies,* and *Forêts.* However, once I embarked on this journey the incredible magnitude of Mouawad's work became apparent. In an attempt to do justice to complexity of his oeuvre, my thesis was pared down to an analysis of my first reception of Mouawad's work, *Incendies*.

Chapter I – Introduction and theoretical framework

Born in Lebanon in 1968, displaced to France in his childhood by the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1989, and transplanted to Montréal, Québec in his early adolescence, Wajdi Mouawad has been a nomadic exile for most of his life. "Personnellement, je me sens étrange dans mon rapport avec ma langue maternelle. Je suis un peu perdu" (*Méchant* 76); his own identity is in a constant state of flux – a condition which has become the unstable cornerstone of his dramatic oeuvre. A playwright and theatre maker, Mouawad often described himself as "Lebanese in his childhood, French in his way of thinking and Quebecois in his theatre." More recently, "[l]orsque l'on me demande si je suis québecois, français ou libanais, je réponds que je suis juif et tchèque…" (Côté 69). Mouawad now feels a stronger tie to Franz Kafka and *The Metamorphosis*' Gregor Samsa. This notion of displaced identity manifests itself in his creative process: all of his plays deal with characters on a pilgrimage towards the realization of their own identities. The principle characters within Mouawad's works are survivors themselves or descendants of survivors of tragedies; these range from a country with hints of the Middle East torn by civil war, the First and Second World Wars, even Auschwitz. A death in the family frequently becomes a catalyst for an exploratory examination of the past, especially those concerning familial roots and origins.

A graduate of the National Theatre School of Canada's French Acting Program, Mouawad continues to pursue a broad range of theatrical endeavors including acting, writing, directing, and artistic management. Between 2000 and

2004, Mouawad was the Artistic Director of Théâtre Quat'Sous in Montréal where he shaped the company and its seasons around the theme that "art est un témoignage de l'existence humaine à travers le prisme de la beauté." Moreover, in 2005 Mouawad founded sister theatre companies in two countries, Abé carré cé carré in Montréal and Au carré de l'hypothénuse in Paris –which has allowed him to collaborate with a plethora of French and French-Canadian talent. Wajdi Mouawad is the recipient of numerous awards including: the Governor General's Award for *Littoral* (2000); Chevalier de l'Ordre National des Arts et des Lettres (2002); the Prix de la Francophonie (2004); he declined the Molière du meilleur auteur francophone (2005) in protest of the inequitable system of recognition[1]; l'Artiste de la paix de l'année in Montreal (2006); most recently the Grand Prix du Théâtre for his body of theatrical work (France). In September of 2006, Mouawad took up the post of Artistic Director of the French Theatre at the National Arts Centre in Ottawa, and in 2009, he was also named Artiste Associé at the Festival d'Avignon. Mouawad is the author of nineteen plays, five of which have been translated in English, one novel, a series of adaptations (including Cervantès' *Don Quichotte*), a dialogue with André Brassard entitled *Je suis le*

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[1] Magali Leris read a statement on Mouawad's behalf, "Je ne suis pas à l'aise avec l'idée de recevoir un prix pour avoir été mis en compétition avec d'autres artistes, a-t-il déclaré. C'est là une position tout à fait personnelle, qui correspond le plus honnêtement possible à mes valeurs et à ma façon d'aimer le théâtre. Ce n'est en rien une contestation. […] Pour que ce prix ne soit pas perdu totalement, je désire en faire un tout petit symbole pour tous ces textes que les auteurs envoient dans les théâtres et que la plupart des directeurs ne lisent jamais, [...] pour tous ces textes perdus auxquels les théâtres n'ont même pas retourné un accusé de réception, pour tous ces théâtres qui n'ont même pas la décence d'avoir un comité de lecture, pour tous ces appels placés par les auteurs auxquels on ne répond jamais."

méchant!, and is the subject of Jean-François Côté's *Architecture d'un marcheur: Entretiens avec Wajdi Mouawad.* His largest oeuvre is a tetralogy of plays – *Le Sang des promesses*. This tetralogy continues the tradition of exploring the disruption of identity in times of crises. Each title evokes a specific element of nature, *Littoral* (1999) – water, *Incendies* (2003) – fire, *Forêts* (2007) – earth, and *Ciels* (2009) – air.

Littoral begins with the death of Wilfrid's father and continues with a journey to his father's native land in order to properly bury the body. Along the way Wilfrid encounters other orphans who, despairing against their own losses in the face of civil war, join in Wilfrid's quest to bury his father in hopes that they all may find peace with their respective pasts.

Incendies is set in motion by the death of Nawal Marwan and the reading of her will. Her twin children, Simon and Jeanne must each deliver a separate letter to a father and a brother they never knew existed in a pilgrimage which takes them back to their mother's native land.

Forêts is a dizzying labyrinth of journeys in which a young woman, Loup, is dragged through the histories of six interconnected women in order to aid an anthropologist in the completion of a skull. The rebuilding of this artifact will satisfy a promise made by the anthropologist to his father on the latter's deathbed. This quest transcends multiple periods of history including the First and Second World Wars, the fall of the Berlin wall, and the shooting at Montréal École Polytechnique.

Ciels follows the story of five spies locked inside a maximum-security facility listening to phone conversations from around the world. When a plot to end the world is revealed, the five must race to save humanity while coming to terms with their own mortality. Limited to brief private video-conferencing sessions with loved ones, they remain torn between the collective needs of the world and their own intimate lives and secrets.

The focus of this thesis will be an analysis of *Incendies*; it stands out for me because of its structural complexity, and its dynamic discourse on issues of identity – especially as they are traced through a matriarchal line. This investigation will consider the drama in terms of content, dramaturgy, and two specific productions of the play, which I had the pleasure to see – the first in French, directed by Wajdi Mouawad at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (Montréal) in 2006; and the second in English (*Scorched)*, directed by Richard Rose for Toronto's Tarragon theatre, while touring at the Citadel Theatre (Edmonton) in 2009. The working language within the thesis is English, however the playtext will be considered in French, the language of its creation, in order to mitigate the additional challenges associated with drama in translation. Due to the multiple issues surrounding the deconstruction and consequential re-construction of identity in *Incendies*, I will be primarily using Postcolonial and Trauma Theory to provide the framework for my analysis. Both these theories utilize techniques for the overcoming of adversity associated with the displacement of a subject's notion of self. *Incendies* captures the struggle to reconstitute the self in terms of the negative elements of suffering - as revealed by the trials of civil war, violence,

torture, and rape – as well as the positive elements of survival. As I hope to demonstrate in this thesis, the techniques suggested by Postcolonial and Trauma theorists for the re-establishment of identity in the face of loss are best exemplified in theatre, both in the fictional and representational world of the play and its reception by a live audience.

Postcolonial theory is an ideal lens with which to perform a close reading of the *Incendies* playtext and the issues of history and identity that are central motifs. *Incendies* tackles the consequences suffered by a family when their genealogy is challenged by the surfacing of an unstable and consequently unforgettable past. The reading of Nawal Marwan's final testament, which reveals the existence of previously anonymous father and brother figures, catalyzes the resurfacing of these events. Her twin children, Jeanne and Simon, are bequeathed the responsibility of this parental and filial quest, in order to deliver a letter to both their unknown father and brother. The children's present day journey towards their kin is complicated by the *mise en abyme* of a simultaneous re-living of Nawal's traumatic past. The techniques utilized by Mouawad in *Incendies* to explore this dismantling and rebuilding of self are very similar to those utilized in postcolonial narratives – they include: the splitting of time and space; the use of dead, imagined, and archetypal characters; a splitting of the subject position; a return to the feminine narrative; and a deconstruction of language, to name a few. These techniques are examples of formal strategies advancing the decolonization of the stage. Christopher Balme refers to this as, "[t]he process whereby culturally heterogeneous signs and codes are merged together [and] can be termed

'theatrical syncretism'" (1). Balme goes on to define syncretism as a term, "borrowed from the discipline of comparative religion and denotes the process whereby elements of two or more religions are merged and absorbed into one another" (2). A term that embodies not only postcolonial studies but also the techniques utilized by colonized subjects.

In the face of erasure or absorption, postcolonial writers try to reestablish a native identity; strategies for which include a re-appropriation of history, a historicization of the past, as well as a self-conscious occupation of a space designated for subordination. As Edward Said points out, these techniques are embodied in narratives that "become the method colonized people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history" (*xii*). Homi Bhabha furthers Said's thinking, operating on the assumption that a traditional philosophical binary between the self and other – subject and object – has very negative consequences. "The desire for the Other is doubled by the desire in language, which *splits the difference* between Self and Other so that both positions are partial; neither is sufficient unto itself" (Bhabha 50). Consequently, colonized identity will never be an *a priori* or finished product – it will always be the unstable sum of a desired image of self and the transformation undertaken by the subject in the assumption of that image. Bhabha posits instead an ongoing relationship between the colonized and the colonizer, an intermingling which results in constantly shifting hybridity. As an immigrant twice removed from his motherland, Mouawad's exile status places him in a position of instable hybrid – both in terms of his presence in Canada as well as the negotiated absence from his

country of origin. This hybrid state – a conglomeration of cultures that continuously interact and mix with each other, according to Bhabha – manifests itself in the sustained quest of the author and his characters to locate themselves globally, culturally, and inside their own heredity.

Nawal Marwan, the protagonist and *agent provocateur* in *Incendies* uses her final testament to propel her children into a journey exploring their origins. Her history is marked by a series of promises made to others; these utterances are what will shape her identity for the remainder of her life. Language, both uttered and written, become critical components to her survival and growth – they are also the keystone of the establishment and maintenance of identity. By leaving her native village and becoming educated, Nawal becomes an enlightened woman – a status that will aid in her ontological survival in the middle of a civil war. She vacillates between the written and the spoken word; from engraving Nazira's name on her tombstone; to teaching her companion Sawda the sounds of the Arabic alphabet; to establishing a newspaper that incites rebellion against the militia. Nawal's successful struggle against violence with language addresses the colonial subject's demand for narrative and triumphant negotiation of that dialogue by occupying a space designated for subjugation and disruption of the narrative. The formal elements of language, both written and oral, are frequently considered to be too sophisticated for the uncultured colonized subjects. As I will demonstrate, despite her momentary descent into violence with the assassination of a prominent militia leader, Nawal's redemption and recovering of her identity is established through a re-living of history and a re-utterance of her words in

letters delivered by her children Jeanne and Simon. Mouawad's characters confirm the uncanniness of Bhabha's migrant experience. "[i]t 'repeats' a life lived in a country of origin, but this repetition is not identical, introducing difference and transformation; further, the difference-in-repetition is a way of 'reviving' that past life, of keeping it alive in the present" (Huddart 79).

The critical reception to Wajdi Mouawad's work often foregrounds the autobiographical elements in his canon. When questioned, Mouawad confirms the importance of his own life experience as a source of inspiration. He frequently talks about his life as a confrontation with loss: "Au fond, je crois que je ne fais que répondre à cette mort initiale qui m'a arraché à mon pays. C'est un travail de résistance extrêmement personnel. Jouer, lire, écrire, mettre en scène, chorégraphier, diriger une compagnie du théâtre, peindre, pour moi, à chaque fois, c'est une manière de répondre à la mort" (l'Hérault 97). While the country of origin in *Incendies* is never named, there are many cultural signifiers and transformed events that bear a striking similarity to those Mouawad bore witness to in Lebanon as a child. For example, the story of the burning bus told by Nawal may be a reference to the bus massacre on April 13th 1975, an incident often attributed as being the catalyst for the eighteen months of civil war in 1975-76. While many refugee camps constructed during this time never directly affected Mouawad, he still touches on this issue in *Incendies*. Jeanne, having returned to her mother's homeland and following the trail to the Kfar Rayat prison, tours through the prison camp turned museum with a guide who informs her that the prison opened in 1978, "l'année où il y a eu les grands massacres dans les camps

de réfugiés de Kfar Rayat et Kfar Mantra" (*Incendies* 56). Historically, there were many massacres of women and children in refugee camps, however there exist no historical references to camps with these names. The Kfar Rayat prison may be an indirect reference to the Khyam Prison located in the Israeli Security Zone in South Lebanon – a strip of Lebanese territory located along the Israel-Lebanon border between Naqura on the Mediterranean Sea to Mount Hermon, and the Litani River. As a hybrid subject and witness to trauma, Mouawad displaces the grand narrative of Lebanese history by fragmenting and fictionalizing events he experienced in his childhood. The creative process, including the writing, work-shopping, rehearsals and ultimate production and performance of *Incendies*, can be seen as Mouawad's own working through, or *Trauerarbeit* as postulated by Freud. A process within which he "bears witness to the national tragedy of Lebanon, works through the trauma it caused, and offers hope to the survivors. Instead of inspiring dread, fear, horror, and pity leading to catharsis, these plays re-enact violence, memorialize victims and perform mourning work in order to renew our shattered faith in humanity" (Moss). These techniques are best exemplified in an analysis of the performance and reception of *Incendies*, which I present in the second chapter.

Two specific productions will be scrutinized: a French mise en scène by Wajdi Mouawad and assisted by Alain Roy, and an English mise en scène by Richard Rose of a translation by Linda Gaboriau. It is important to consider the performances in order to see the impact of ritual and the body of actors on the postcolonial elements of narrative. The French performance will be the point of

comparison because it is Mouawad's own mise en scène. While the stage directions in the playtext are very specific and informative for the realization in production, they also tend to be reductive. Therefore, I will also analyze the playwright's own choices in his *mise en scène*. Continuing in chronological order as the performances were viewed, the English production will be studied as well as brief analysis conducted on Linda Gaboriau's translation and the key differences that exist between this and the original French version. Both productions demonstrate some remarkable similarities in their mise en scènes, including the sharing of roles by a smaller company of actors, the rhythm and speed of the performance, as well as the minimalist design choices.

The framework for the analysis of these productions will be two-fold; the first, a semiotic analysis focusing on the questions identified in Anne Ubersfeld and Patrice Pavis' questionnaires for performative analysis. While Ubersfeld's questionnaire considers the material impact of the performance, such as the carriers, access, communication, and reception – Pavis' questionnaire provides a more in-depth framework of the internal space of the mise en scène as well as the physical characteristics of the production. His approach leads to a close reading of performance, largely grounded in a semiotic analysis of the phenomenological world of the play. The analysis will involve a further investigation of the tenants established through postcolonial lens using the techniques of witnessing as manifested in Trauma theory. This analysis is critical because it focuses on the element of survival and the re-appropriation of a narrative by a subject that is then

related to an audience – both in the internal context of *Incendies* and in its external reception by an audience.

Originating from Greek, the word trauma means 'wound' and is often interpreted as the result of an act inflicted upon the body. Beginning in the late nineteenth century, Sigmund Freud furthered the notion of trauma as a wound afflicting the mind. Not only is the initial incident a matter for analysis but Freud elaborates upon an entire cycle of behavior, a traumatic neurosis characterized especially by "[t]he time that elapsed between the accident and the first appearance of the symptoms is called the 'incubation period,' a transparent illusion to the pathology of infectious disease" (*Moses* 84). According to Freud, and the majority of psychoanalytic thought, the symptoms can only be eliminated through their analysis – preferably in individual talk therapy. It is the void that fascinates Freud, the gap that is formed between the certainty of self which exists in terms of the subject's ego and super-ego and the consequential disruption of consciousness caused by a trauma and the lack of control it engenders. Consequently,

> If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet. (Caruth 3)

In order to reach this axis of transformation, there must be a working through the unknown in order to achieve an understanding of its origins and impacts. *Trauerarbeit*, or a working through, "is aimed at *restructuring* traumatic moments through their repetition and 'insertion' (integration) into the (private or collective)

self. The repetition functions to reconstruct the mourner's identity in terms of the loss" (Malkin 112). *Incendies* functions as an ideal example of a theatre that exemplifies *Trauerarbeit* both for the characters inside the fiction and the playwright, and, one may suppose, the spectator. Nawal Marwan is able to relive her struggles in life through the journey towards the past made by her children; this is exemplified in the mise en scène by a constant flow of action involving the crossing of characters through time periods they do not belong to. For Mouawad, his ability to fictionalize traumatic accounts from his own childhood and give them a new voice through the monologues of a character alters the political perspective associated with the event. While the issue at hand remains survival in the face of a severe wound to the psyche, the repetition of these events in different circumstances transforms their affect on those who participate in the retelling, including the audience. "That is, mourning – and a theatre that induces and imitates mourning – allow for the past to find a 'place' within the identity of the remembering community" (Malkin 112). It remains important to scrutinize each individual traumatic experience; however, it is critical to consider the wider socio-political aspects of memory, identity, and trauma within the wider community.

Trauma theory has been further developed as an invaluable tool in response to the Holocaust, which remains one of the most catastrophic events faced by mankind. In fact, trauma theory has proven to provide a critical foundation to our understanding of the endless plethora of consequences endured by those who survived. "No one but the survivors themselves can become witnesses about what happened in the Shoah. The attempt to represent Auschwitz

by aesthetic means is, as Theodor Adorno claimed, one of the most difficult moral and aesthetic issues of our time" (Rokem xii). Representation of the Shoah and other traumatic events have been dissected and scrutinized by such theorists as Dominic LaCapra, Robert J. Lifton, as well as Adorno himself - famously skeptical of its respresentability in the first place. Trauma theory has evolved beyond the Holocaust to focus on other events with theorists such as Shoshana Felman, Susan Sontag, and Elaine Scarry. It is Felman who deconstructs the performative elements of trauma and justice in her book *The Juridical Unconscious* in a variety of contexts including Walter Benjamin's final days. I remain as skeptical as Adorno of the phenomenologically reductive nature of performances of traumatic experiences that tend to essentialize survivor accounts in order to perform a truthful retelling.

The foundation of my analysis will build on the work of three theorists and the techniques borrowed from Trauma theory and utilized in performances of *Incendies;* Robert J. Lifton, Cathy Caruth, and Karen Malpede. In *Death in life: Survivors of Hiroshima*, Robert Lifton negotiates the important counter argument of Trauma theory regarding survivor guilt.

> Rhythms of guilt, then, involve the survivor in shifting patterns of troubled identification, from an image of purity modeled upon the environment of the death immersion and possibly upon its instigators. These images connect with earlier emotional tendencies, to be internalized and acted upon as part of the continuing struggle with guilt. (Lifton 498)

Not only is the identity of the subject transformed by the traumatic event, but by the consequences of moving beyond it. Lifton values the power of theatre in terms

of coming to terms with trauma. "Artistic re-creation of an overwhelming historical experience has much to do with the question of mastery. Artists can apply to that experience their particular aesthetic traditions and individual talents to evolve new ways of 'seeing' it and giving it form" (397). In *Incendies* Nawal is plagued by the guilt associated with the torture she was subjected to at the hands of Abou Terek. The traumatic experience of rape lives with her daily in the form of her twin children; in an attempt to keep the pain at a minimum she never tells her children about their father. However, at the critical point of testimony at Abou Terek's trial she realizes that her survival despite everything has lead to feelings of guilt, a lack of control, and deep suffering. Resisting and surviving the horror of war and rape has made Nawal an unwilling accomplice in incest and resulted in two tainted children, Jeanne and Simon. It is the twins' investigations into the past that allow Nawal to re-live and reiterate her experiences in order to finally achieve some form of redemption beyond the reconstruction of her fragmented narrative. The performance of salvation and the restoration of her fragmented narrative is demonstrated in the reading of sealed letters addressed to 'the father,' 'the son,' and 'the twins.'

Cathy Caruth furthers Lifton's examination of the survivor complex in narratives of trauma, "[a]t the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (Caruth 7). This dependency on the construction of a new narrative is similar to the needs of colonized subjects; the

rewriting of history allows both the survivors of trauma and colonial erasure to re-inscribe themselves into the world. It is the process of re-inscription that is explored in *Incendies* and dramatized both as the uttering of the written word, Nawal's final wishes and testimony captured in letters and a red notebook, as well as in ritual, especially in the ceremonies of birth and death. Nawal and her grandmother Nazira have very specific requests regarding the funeral services to be performed when they are to be buried, while these specifics are captured in stage directions – it pales in comparison to the potential explored in a performance. Mouawad's mise en scène in Montréal turns the ritual into an elaborate movement piece accompanied by an Arabic dirge, whereas in Rose's mise en scène it is stillness and frozen imagery which surrounds both funerals.

Caruth also notes the imperative push of victims to narrate the repeated experiences to others, "…the repeated failure to have seen in time – in itself a pure repetition compulsion, a repeated nightmare – can be transformed into the imperative of speaking that awakens others" (Caruth 108). This process requires the presence of an audience to validate the testimony of the survivor and to be impacted by the tale. This does not mean that the audience members must be transformed in order for the survivor to be healed by their testimony; it is the combined act of telling and receiving that is the critical point. Theatre becomes an ideal medium for this venture, as by its very nature it is an art form that exists in and is dependant upon the presence of an audience. Karen Malpede, elaborating on the theories advanced by Caruth, proposes a theatre of witness "which exists both as a not yet fully elucidated tradition of post-Holocaust playwriting and a

new aesthetic practice. These are plays that mature from the conjunction of the personal with the extremities of modern history and which make use of post-Freudian insights and strategies gained from testimony psychotherapies and trauma work with survivors of atrocity" (122). This process differs greatly from drama-therapy as the objective for the playwright and company is not the cleansing of personal daemons through an autobiographical exercise. The consequences of trauma are best understood within a specific cultural and political context, as created in the internal world of Mouawad's play. *Incendies*, although it contains many personal and autobiographical elements, remains a work of fiction that narrates a tale of self-discovery and a search for identity staged within multiple frames of ritual and performance.

Chapter Two consists of a close reading of the French play-script through the lenses of Postcolonial and Trauma theory following the chronological events explored in Nawal's life. Chapter Three focuses on a semiotic analysis of two productions of *Incendies*, Wajdi Mouawad's original staging in French and Richard Rose's in English. Methodologically, considering the text and performance as separate elements is useful in its support of a detailed textual analysis – permitting for an in depth meditation on the multiple, simultaneous elements at work in Mouawad's text. However, this may limit the analysis of the performances and there exists a risk of repetition in the third chapter. This thesis will perform an analysis of Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies* – the script as well as its performance - through the lenses of Postcolonial and Trauma theories in order to demonstrate how "the *Heimlich* historical subject […] cannot stop constituting the

Unheimlich knowledge of itself by compulsively relating one cultural episode to another in an infinitely repetitious sense of events that are metonymic and indeterminate" (Bhabha 195). At the reading of Nawal's will, Jeanne and Simon are confronted with new familial relations that complicate their identities and will forever transform their relationship with themselves and their mother. They must journey into Nawal's mysterious past in order to come to terms with a newfound present. Wajdi Mouawad has inserted multiple elements of his personal experiences into the fictional world of *Incendies* and has his characters relive these moments of trauma from an alternate perspective. He utilizes his disjointed and multicultural experiences in the creation and development process of *Incendies* as well as in the final product. His characters, especially the protagonist Nawal Marwan are also displaced colonial subjects who are survivors of trauma seeking to come to terms with their own survival and displaced identity.

Chapter II – Textual Analysis

The focus of this chapter is a textual analysis of Wajdi Mouawad's *Incendies*. The play will be considered in its original language, French. I propose to do a close reading of the text focusing on the structure, the character development, and explicit theatrical elements as they present themselves in the written text, and will do so through Postcolonial and Trauma theory. In order to perform a succinct study of the text, it is critical to understand the method with which it was created. I will also investigate the play's production history.

The creative undertaking for *Incendies* began in 2002, developed in the same way as *Littoral* through an intensive ten-month rehearsal process with a range of collaborating artists from Québec and France. In Mouawad's notes at the beginning of the French publication of *Incendies,* "Une consolation impitoyable," he commends the original acting ensemble for their extremely intimate and personal contributions:

> Simon n'aurait jamais été boxeur si Reda Guerini n'avait pas participé au project. Sawda n'aurait pas été aussi en colère sans Marie-Claude Langlois et Nihad n'aurait probablement pas chanté si je n'avais pas travaillé avec Éric Bernier. Il s'agissait de révéler l'acteur par le personnage et de révéler le personnage par l'acteur, pour qu'il n'y ait plus d'espace psychologique qui puisse les séparer. Le seul espace permettant à l'acteur et au personnage de ne pas totalement se confondre fut celui de la fiction, du faire semblant, de l'imagination.

Mouawad's personal experiences surface throughout *Incendies* not only in events, such as the burning of a bus full of civilians, but also in the presence of the Arabic language in his characters' experiences and their names. Mouawad's first language was Arabic; however, he has forgotten most of his mother-tongue since

his displacement to France at the age of 7, and again to Québec at the age of 15; "…je prends conscience que l'immigration ne s'est pas faite sans que j'y laisse des plumes: ne plus maîtriser ma langue maternelle, ni à l'oral, ni à l'écrit, est peut-être un des pertes le plus dommageables" (Côté 70). Having adopted French as his language of communication and creation, he still struggles to re-insert Arabic into his own life. His father and sister still speak Arabic with each other and in his solo piece *Seuls* (2008), his character Harwan gives voice to the frustrations of not being able to remember simple words in Arabic, such as the word for "window." The ritual of learning a new language and turning those letters into words, the words into phrases, and the phrases into complete thoughts becomes an act of rebellion and a symbol of strength. "Or pour Wajdi Mouawad," and for Nawal and Sawda in particular, "parler, nommer, et à plus forte raison écrire, c'est s'inscrire, justement, dans ce système de croyance qui fait de la parole un acte de porteur sense et de conséquences" (Godin 101). Much of the critical reception on Wajdi Mouawad's oeuvre comments on the autobiographical nature of his theatre, "[i]l y a sans doute autant de raisons de nier que d'affirmer la dimension autobiographique de la dramaturgie de Wajdi Mouawad. La seule chose qui apparaisse certain, c'est que l'autobiographie ne saurant revoyer à la précision événementielle" (Hérault 97).

Incendies has enjoyed productions at a range of theatres in Québec and France from 2003-2007 including: Hexagone (Meylan, France: March 14th 2003 – March 18th 2005), Théâtre 71 (Malakoff, France: January 13th – February 2nd 2004) Théâtre Quat'Sous – Festival TransAmérique (Montréal: April 12th – May

29th 2004), Comédie de Clermont-Ferrand (France: April 12th – April 15th 2005), Théâtre Jean Lurçat (Aubusson, France: April 28th 2005), and Théâtre du Nouveau Monde (TNM, Montréal: October 31st – December 2nd 2006; January 26th – February 20th 2007) to name a few. With a recent translation into English by Linda Gaboriau, *Scorched* was produced at the Tarragon Theatre (Toronto: February 2007) directed by Richard Rose. The production toured across Canada in 2008-2009 to Montréal (Centaur Theatre), Winnipeg (Manitoba Theatre Centre), and Edmonton (Citadel Theatre). *Scorched* enjoyed its Australian premiere in July of 2007 by the Company B troupe at the Belvoir St. Theatre in Sydney. *Incendies* has also been introduced to the German stage; translated by Uli Menke in 2005, *Verbrennungen* premiered at the Münchner Volkstheater on the 25th of January 2008. Due to its popularity the show was added to the theatre's repertoire for the 2008-2009 season in Munich, Germany. *Incendies* has been produced around the world including stages in: Austria, England, the United States, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Italy, Mexico and Switzerland. Above and beyond the many awards garnered by Mouawad and his other works, *Incendies* has received the following awards: le Prix de l'Association Québécoise des critiques de théâtre (Montréal 2004), Palme de la meilleure production extérieure – Cercle des critiques de la capitale (Ottawa 2004), Prix du Syndicat de la critique (meilleur spectacle en langue française) (France 2004), Prix de la Francophonie – société des auteur et compositeurs dramatiques (SACD France 2004), et le Prix Gascon-Roux (2007). The success of *Incendies/Scorched* in Canada and abroad has helped to solidify Wajdi Mouawad's place in Canadian theatre history.

Incendies is the story of multiple journeys of self-discovery taken by characters seeking to better understand their own history and present identity, as it exists within a complex socio-political web. The central argument according to Mouawad is:

> Une femme vient de mourrir. Elle s'appelait Nawal Marwan. Elle a laissé à ses jumeaux un cahier rouge, une veste en toile bleue et deux enveloppes porteuses d'une demande lourde de conséquences: autant de boîtes de Pandore dévoilées devant notaire et qui ouvriront l'accès à son silence et ses secrets, autant de sources de maux et de merveilles, dont le contenu entraînera Jeanne et Simon dans une odysée initiatique vers un passé inconnu, vers un continent lointain, vers une seconde naissance… (Programme, TNM)

The play begins with the death of Nawal Marwan; she bequeaths her twin children, Jeanne and Simon, two letters – one that must be delivered to their father, the other to their brother. With the aid of Hermile Lebel, the Notaire, the twins travel to their mother's native land in search of previously unknown familial relations. Simultaneous to the children's' journey towards their family is Nawal's life story, beginning with an unplanned pregnancy at age 14. When her lover and the baby are taken away from her, Nawal vows that no matter what, she will find her son and love him forever. Nawal learns to read and write; she gains a friend and companion in Sawda, the woman who sings. Together the women battle against the civil war in a quest to find Nawal's child until Sawda is killed and Nawal is jailed, tortured, and finally set free. In the end both pilgrimages come full circle. It is revealed that Nawal's captor and rapist, Abou Terek, is her son, Nihad, as well as Jeanne and Simon's father. The play is populated by a variety of other characters including such figures as the modern-day prison tour guide, a

doctor at one of the refugee camps, militia men, Nawal's mother Jihane, her grandmother Nazira, as well as Chamseddine – the farmer who saved the twins' lives over twenty years ago.

The play's principal journey is the life story of Nawal Marwan. She is the *agent provocateur* for the entire play, putting everything into motion with her death and the reading of her will. In all stages of her life she is defiant of the patriarchal weight that tries to silence her and render her submissive in the form of great obstacles. This pilgrimage is introduced in the first instance of what will be a trend of simultaneity and temporal disjunction in the play. The juxtaposition of the past and the present becomes integral in our understanding of Nawal, her character and history are revealed as her children immerse themselves in a previously unknown past. This re-living of events is an example of what Homi K. Bhabha refers to as one of the techniques used in the formation of identity. "In restaging the past, it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition" (Bhabha 2). This articulation of memory, emerging in a moment of transformation, marks an important negotiation by the subject, in this case Nawal, of their own identity as a construction of the experiences they have accumulated in a lifetime. Nawal's life story is spread out over the length of the play, the resolution of multiple conflicts and her full knowledge of self are not revealed until the end of the fourth act, *Incendie de Sarwane.* This constructed contrasting of past and present is then abandoned in favor of simultaneity, Nawal becomes the consummate observer of her children as they piece together their respective histories through the oral tradition of people they encounter. Tracing

Nawal Marwan's history and charting the transitions from the perspective of her journey best demonstrate the effectiveness of this technique. The first occurrence is in Scene 4: *La conjecture à résoudre.*

Jeanne has returned to the Hermile Lebel's office to pick up the letter she is to give to her brother. When asked about why she has finally chosen to undertake this investigation into the past her reply is curt and grounded:

> En mathématiques, 1+1 ne font pas 1, 9, ou 2,2. Ils font 2. Que vous soyez de bonne humeur ou très malheureux, 1 et 1 font 2. Nous appartenons tous à un polygone. Je croyais connaître ma place dans le polygone auquel j'appertiens. Je croyais être ce point qui ne voit que son frère Simon et sa mère Nawal. Aujourd'hui, j'apprends qu'il est possible que du point de vue que j'occupe, je puisse voir aussi mon père; j'apprends aussi qu'il existe un autre membre à ce polygone, un autre frère. Le graphe de visibilité que j'ai toujours tracé est nul et faux. Quelle est ma place dans le polygone? Pour trouver, il faut me résoudre une conjecture. (*Incendies* 21)

Jeanne's worldview is grounded in mathematical fact; she uses numbers, figures, and equations to explain her position relative to the rest of society. While teaching her course on graph theory at the university she turns the discussion into a microcosm of her current familial dilemma, she reiterates this to Lebel. Near the end of the play, once the incestuous family tree has been revealed, Simon must resort to a mathematical proof in order to get his sister to understand the truth. The stage directions in this scene reveal the first moment of simultaneity: "*Jeanne sort. Nawal (14 ans) est dans le bureau"* (21). An overlapping of names occurs as we transition into Scene 5: *Ce qui est là*; Nawal (age 14) calls out to her young lover, Wahab; Wahab in turn calls out to Nawal; and the Notaire calls out to Jeanne, finally resorting to dialing her on the phone, "[v]otre mère a connu votre

père lorsqu'elle était très jeune" (ibid). The shift is facilitated with dialogue. The techniques used in various performances in support of the dialogue will be further examined in Chapter 3. The next five scenes of the play belong to young Nawal, the initial uttering of her promises, as well as her familial relationships, especially those along the matriarchal line.

Nawal has conceived a child with her lover Wahab. When she returns home to share the news with her family she is immediately challenged by her mother, Jihane. Nawal's relationship with her mother is already strained at best and the two argue at length over the young girl's right to carry her child in Scene 6: *Carnage.* Nawal remains firmly connected to her body, "[o]n n'oublie pas son ventre!" (25), despite her mother's insistent denials. Jihane demonstrates her dominance over her daughter by forcing her to kneel, "[q]uitte-moi nue, avec ton ventre et la vie qu'il renferme. Ou bien reste et agenouille-toi, Nawal, agenouille-toi" (25). In return for her submission, Nawal is allowed to carry the child to term before the midwife, Elhame, takes the boy away to an orphanage. This moment of separation, the removal of the son, marks the first promise Nawal makes that will shape and drive her for the rest of her life, "Pour toi et pour moi je lui dirai. Je lui soufflerai à l'oreille: 'Quoi qu'il arrive, je t'aimerais toujours.' …et l'enfance sera un couteau que je me planterai dans la gorge" (27).

The anger that boils from this confrontation is an inherited trait. Nazira, Nawal's grandmother, informs her of the endless hatred between mothers and daughters which has cursed their family from the beginning. She begs that Nawal learn to read and write, that she enter the world as an educated woman in order to

thwart the fact that "les femmes de notre famille, sommes engluées dans la colère depuis si longtemps" (29) and therefore breaking apart the web of anger. This plea can also be seen as a tactic used by Nazira to push her granddaughter to move beyond the horrors of this quotidian life. She knows that if Nawal wanders the country alone in search of her son that no good can come from that quest. In her dying breaths she plunges Nawal into her second promise, "[t]oi, Nawal, quand tu sauras [écrire], reviens et grave mon mom sur la pierre. Grave mon nom car j'ai tenu mes promesses" (29).

Scene 10: *Enterrement de Nawal* marks the second temporal transition, this one back into the present day. The rituals surrounding death and burial are the link between Nazira and the Nawal of the present who has died. In her will Nawal asks to be buried naked, face down in the grave, without a coffin. Jeanne, Simon, and the Notaire are to each throw a pail of water upon her body and fill the grave with dirt. Furthermore, "[a]ucune pierre sera posée sur ma tombe / Et mon nom gravé nulle part. / Pas d'épitaphe pour ceux qui ne tiennent pas leurs promesses" (14). The simple stage directions surrounding Nazira's funeral are the echo of Nawal's requests first read by the Notaire: "*On la pose dans un trou. Chacun lance sur son corps un seau d'eau"* (29) Rather than dialogue, it is the sound of Hermile Lebel's, cell phone that links the past with the present; *"Jeanne. Simon dans un cimitière. Hermile Lebel décroche"* (ibid).

The repetition of this ritual with a difference, marks an example of a technique not only used by postcolonial subjects but also those changed by trauma in order to re-construct their history and consequential identity. Walter Benjamin,

in his many treaties on memory, argues strongly "the present dictates the past we use and remember; the past is called forth and "saved" by the needs of now" (Malkin 26). He uses the term *Jetztzeit*, the literal translation is "now-time", to refer to a moment which exists without history, outside of time in order "to demonstrate the relation of the truth of history to language and representation and thereby affirm[s] our more recent critical awareness that every representation of the past has specifiable ideological implications" (Seyhan 232). Much of the temporal world of *Incendies* exists in this liminal *Jetztzeit* time. The constant transitions from past to present, from memory to action, are integral to the techniques utilized by Mouawad in his exploration of identity through a variety of theatrical and theoretical means. In terms of this moment at Nawal's funeral, the participants do not need to understand the historical implications of the ritual to be affected by the starkness of the request or the rejection of a funeral that would provide comfort to those in attendance. Simon's selfish outburst at the initial reading of the will confirms his desire to be rid of his mother's corpse:

> Ça me tente pas de discuter avec vous! Ça ne me tente pas! On va l'enterrer et c'est tout! On va aller voir un salon funéraire, on va acheter un cercueil, on va la mettre dans le cercueil, mettre le cercueil dans le trou, la terre dans le trou, une pierre sur la terre et son nom sur la pierre, et on décrisses toute la gang! (*Incendies* 16)

This emotional explosion is Simon's way of dealing with the world and more specifically his mother's silence. While Jeanne transforms all her dilemmas into mathematical problems, Simon is a boxer who tackles the majority of his problems with his fists. When he cannot solve the issue with a physical

confrontation he resorts to yelling and cursing. His outbursts may also be attributed to a lack of understanding of the language and silence his mother uses to confront the world. When Nawal died Simon assumed he would be able to move on in life, and yet the demands in the will have kept him bound to her. Instead of closing the door on Nawal, the funeral marks the completion of the first in the list of demands she made in her will. Hermile Lebel, the Notaire, becomes the advocate of this re-creation – insisting that every part of the will be followed to the letter. He will continue to work with the children as Nawal's advocate until each stipulation in her final testament has been completed.

The closing scene to the first act, *Incendie de Nawal*, involves Jeanne and Antoine, the man who was a nurse for Nawal during her dying days. Prior to her death, Nawal lapsed into a period of silence that remained unbroken for five years until moments before her death. Intrigued by this phenomenon, Antoine hid a cassette recorder beneath the aged woman's bed when he left at night; "[j]'ai hésité. Je n'avais pas le droit. Si elle parle seule, c'est son choix. Alors je me suis promis de ne jamais écouter. Enregistrer sans jamais savoir. Enregristrer" (32). Jeanne stops by the theatre where Antoine now works to inquire as to whether or not her mother spoke any other words besides those last few, "[m]aintenant que nous sommes ensemble ça va mieux" (42). Antoine hands over the blank cassette tapes that Jeanne listens to for the remainder of the play. Throughout the next two acts**,** Jeanne passes silently through moments of Nawal's life listening to the recorded silence. For example, in Scene 23: *La vie autour du couteau*, when Nawal and Sawda are threatened by two militiamen the confrontation ends when

"*Sawda sort un pistolet et tire deux coups, coup sur coup. Les miliciens tombent. Jeanne passe, écoutant le silence de sa mère*" (55). The stage directions indicate that the action freezes for a moment between both times before Sawda takes up her dialogue again and the women must leave. It is in moments such as here that Nawal's presence on stage is split between the physical bodies of the performers sharing the role and her silence. These instances of simultaneity mark an important juxtaposition of the verbal Nawal from the past who uses language to defy the world and the solipsistic Nawal who lives beyond death in the written word of her final testament and in her recorded silence. By having Jeanne pass through critical moments of Nawal's past while listening to the recorded silence, Mouawad is allowing Nawal to relive her experiences with a difference; she is now a surviving observer, rather than a victim of the experience. As a hybrid subject, Nawal's dual presence "intervenes in the exercise of authority not merely to indicate the impossibility of its [the hybrid subject's] identity, but to represent the unpredictability of its presence" (Bhabha 114). Her silent presence will also have a strong impact on Jeanne.

In Scene 14: *Frère et soeur,* Simon has come to face Jeanne; she has been retreating from the world, not showing up at work or at the university. He accuses her of following in their mother's footsteps, withdrawing into complete solipsism. She has become enraptured by her mother's silence and tries to get Simon to hear what she hears,

> JEANNE: Là. Écoute. On l'entend respirer. On l'entend bouger.
>
> SIMON: Tu écoutes du silence!...

> JEANNE: C'est son silence à elle. Derrière ce silence, il y a des choses qui sont là mais qu'on n'entend pas.
>
> *Nawal (19 ans) apprend à Sawda l'alphabet arabe.* (*Incendies* 37)

As Jeanne comes to appreciate her mother's silence, Nawal has entered the world of language and the following act, *Incendie de l'enfance,* begins with Nawal's use of the written word.

Nawal, now 19 years old, returns to the village of her birth to fulfill her promise to Nazira – she engraves her grandmother's name on the blank stone lain on the tomb. Prior to this moment Nazira has never been named, only referred to as 'grand-mère' by Nawal when they speak. The name Nazira means onlooker in Arabic, it also has roots in the name Nasir, which means helper. Nazira's name embodies her role in Nawal's life, a fact that is not revealed until Nawal inscribes her name in stone. This act of writing proves her acquired knowledge, elevates her beyond the base life she found herself in before leaving, and marks a subversion of traditional gender roles. She has defied Jihane and will never kneel again, "[j]e suis entrée dans le village en passant par la route du bas. Ma mère était là, au milieu du chemin. Elle m'attendait, je crois. Elle devait se douter. À cause de la date. On s'est regardées comme deux étrangères" (33). Now she must actualize the promise she spoke to her son as he was taken from her, "[q]uoi qu'il arrive, je t'aimerai toujours" (ibid). The act of engraving marks a pivotal change in Nawal's growth and development, it demonstrates her use of language in the act of providing someone with a foundational piece of their identity; while she was incapable of naming her own son, she had the power to engrave Nazira's name on

her tombstone. It also marks the beginning of the phase in her life where she will utilize language as a weapon – both in the oral mode of narrating memory and the more concrete form of writing. As she leaves the village to begin her journey a woman named Sawda, who will become an inexorable part of Nawal's life, joins her.

Sawda is another female on a journey to confirm her identity. She hears that Nawal has returned and knew how to read and write; amazed by this news she follows Nawal and is amazed by what she sees. "[j]e t'ai vue frapper l'homme avec le livre, et j'ai regardé le livre trembler au bout de ta main et j'ai pensé à tous les mots, à toutes les lettres, chauffés à blanc par la colère qui habitait ton visage. Tu es partie, je t'ai suivie" (34). She insists on travelling with Nawal, not only because she requires a companion and they can only be stronger together as two women against the world; but more importantly she too would like to learn to read and write. Until this point in her life, whenever she asked questions people refused to answer her or they explained that these horrors were a nightmare she had invented. "Et la vie passe et tout est opaque. J'ai vu les lettres que tu as gravées et j'ai pensé: voici un prénom. Comme si la pierre était devenue transparente. Un mot et tout s'éclaire" (35). Sawda believes that language, reading and writing, hold the key to understanding this world and moving beyond the war her parents would rather she forget. She heard Wahab calling Nawal's name as they took him away into the night, it too was a moment of inspiration: "Moi, si on m'enlevait, aucun prénom me viendrait à ma gorge. Aucun. Comment aimer ici?" (35). Hearing Wahab call out to Nawal meant there was love, there was hope and

perhaps there could be more to the world. On the other side of love for Sawda is forgetting, "[j]'oublierai le village, les montagnes et le camp et le visage de ma mère, et les yeux ravagés de mon père" (35). Her story touches Nawal, she agrees to take Sawda on as a student and as a companion with an important caveat, "[o]n n'oublie pas, Sawda, je te jure. On aimerait, mais on n'oublie pas" (35). Nawal is deeply affected by any insistence that she forget a part of herself, as this was the second command issued to her by Jihane, she was told to kneel and forget the life growing inside her belly. As insistent that Sawda is about her ability to forget it is the nightmares of the torture she will witness that will return to haunt her later. It will transform Sawda's acquired appreciation of language into a desire for bloody revenge. Cathy Caruth explores this recall phenomena in the effect is has on survivors of trauma and their experiences, "[t]his truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language" (Caruth 4). Despite the tools of language Nawal endows Sawda with, the latter will inevitably succumb to the world of violence that surrounds them. As the play transitions into Scene 15: *Alphabet*, Mouawad bequeaths his own experiences with violence and language on to his character Nawal.

As the two women travel "*sur une route de chaleur*" (*Incendies* 38) Sawda is able to recite the entire Arabic alphabet; these sounds become their mantra to give them strength as they travel along the dangerous roads. There is a slight inconsistency in the text that permits for yet another window into Mouawad's autobiography. Nawal teaches Sawda twenty-nine letters, however in the Arabic

alphabet proper there are only twenty-eight.[2] Lamaleph is not an official letter in the alphabet, however when teaching the language to children it is frequently added to the lesson in order to give them a stronger working foundation. The fact that Nawal teaches Sawda the twenty-nine letters may come from the personal history of the playwright, as he only learned Arabic as a child and is in the process of re-teaching the letters to himself in his personal life. This point aside, Nawal hands over strict instructions for their usage, "[c]e sont tes munitions. Tes cartouches. Tu dois toujours les connaître" (38). Sawda successfully spells her name aloud, demonstrating her authority to name herself. Sawda's acquiring of language, as per Judith Butler, "accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices" (*Bodies* 227). The use of oral language is only the beginning step in Sawda's learning process. Nawal continues onward, "[b]ientôt je t'apprendrai à reconnaître les signes qui représentent chaque lettre. Ces signes sont les munitions de l'écriture" (*Incendies* 38). By teaching Sawda the twenty-ninth letter, Nawal is arming her companion with an additional bullet, another tool in her battle against the world with language. This association of language with violence, of words with weapons describes Mouawad's own discovery of writing as a child:

> …lorsque je m'endormais, je rêvais du jour encore lointain où j'aurais ma propre kalachnikov et où j'appartiendrai enfin à une vaillante milice, laquelle, après plusieurs massacres dont j'aurais été le génie et l'architecte, me ferait maître de sa destinée. […] Alors, à force d'impatience, j'ai tendu la main et j'ai attrapé le premier objet qui pouvait, un tant soit peu, ressembler à un kalachnikov, et ce fut un crayon Pilote taille fine V5. Les

[2] See Appendix I

> mots allaient devenir des cartouches; les phrases, les chargeurs; les acteurs, les mitrailleuses… (Je t'embrasse 177)

Indelibly bound with his writing, war and violence are two motifs that feature prominently in Mouawad's work; in *Incendies* they almost become allegorical characters.

When asked about the influence of war in his writing, Mouawad "en parle comme d'une tante un peu spéciale, avec de drôles de manières et particulièrement violente. Cette tante, elle fait partie de sa famille, de son identité. Plutôt que d'être un thème, la guerre est un personnage qu'il connaît et qui est venu lui rendre visite pendant qu'il racontait une histoire" (Blais 154). *Incendies* features civil war as a direct obstacle in the face of a journey for a lost son – manifested in the monologues of those who try and repair the damage it has caused, such as the workers in the many refugee camps and orphanages; and in the form of destruction and devastation which leads to an all consuming desire for revenge, as we will see with Sawda; as well as the corruption and impossibility of innocence, as will be revealed in the identity of Nawal's son.

Nawal's first confrontation with the civil war happens in Scene 17: *Orphelinat Kfar Rayat.* At the orphanage, Nawal and Sawda encounter the Médecin who worked with the children who were brought there. When asked if he might know of Nawal's son, he says there are no children here because of the war. When pressed further he elaborates on the senseless nature of the conflict surrounding them, and the never-ending cycle it engenders.

> […] Pourquoi les miliciens ont détruit le puits? Parce que des réfugiés avaient brûlé une récolte du côté du fleuve au chien. Pourquoi ont-ils brûlé la récolte? Il y a certainement une raison, ma mémoire s'arrête là, je ne peux pas monter plus haut, mais l'histoire peut se poursuivre encore longtemps, de fil en aiguille, de colère en colère, de peine en tristesse, de viol en meutre, jusqu'au début du monde. (*Incendies* 40)

The senselessness and lack of information becomes too much for Nawal; having acquired language and knowledge she is dependant on logic in her search for her son. She and Sawda had previously visited one orphanage and they were told to come further south to Kfar Rayat, this is where Elhame brought children from Nawal's native village. The Médecin's testimony confirms her worst fears; war has trumped logic and order. There is no register to confirm whether her son stayed here or not, they have made no progress. Defeated, Nawal lays down on the floor, seemingly where the children who stayed there slept, and calls out to her son, "[m]aintenant que nous sommes ensembles, ça va mieux" (42). This phrase is then linked to the moment she broke her five-year silence, the last words she spoke before her death in the presence of the nurse, Antoine Ducharme. Antoine appears on-stage, hearing the words spoken by Nawal and races to the phone to contact Jeanne. In the following Scene 18: *Photographie et autobus du Sud*, Antoine has enlarged a photo of Nawal and Sawda Jeanne has discovered in her mother's things.

The revelations discovered in the photograph propel the action forward and foreshadow what is to be remembered and re-played in the next few scenes. Firstly Antoine explains to Jeanne the geographic information he is able to pull from the photograph, the details he provides regarding the vegetation confirm,

"[o]n est au pays de votre mère" (42). Secondly, he discusses the remnants of a burnt bus in the background; he is able to distinguish "*Réfugiés de Kfar Rayat*" inscribed on the side of the bus. Jeanne confirms that in her research surrounding the civil rights trials her mother was attending, there was a significant section on a prison built in Kfar Rayat. The burnt shell of the bus foreshadows a particularly disturbing event we will encounter in the following scene. Thirdly, both women are concealing guns beneath their clothing, which foreshadows their abandonment of language in favor of bloodshed. The words Nawal first referred to as bullets against a violent regime will become actual bullets that endanger the women's' lives. This evidence of violence disturbs Jeanne:

> ANTOINE: Ça va? Ça va, Jeanne? Ça va?
> JEANNE: Non, ça ne va pas.
> ANTOINE: De quoi avez-vous peur, Jeanne?
> JEANNE: De trouver.
> ANTOINE: Qu'est-ce que vous allez faire maintenant?
> JEANNE: Acheter un billet d'avion. (43)

The scene closes with a return to Nawal (age 19) and Sawda arguing about getting on a bus outside the refugee camp Kfar Ryat. Nawal's focus to find her son blinds her to the reality of her dangerous and violent surroundings; she abandons Sawda despite the instability of what lies ahead.

Scene 19: *Les pelouses de banlieue* takes place in Hermile Lebel's garden/backyard; he apologizes for displacing his meeting with the twins to his home due to the renovation work being done at his office. Ironically there is also

construction work being done on the street outside his home. As Lebel turns on the sprinkler to water his lawn, the stage directions indicate "*bruit de marteaux-piqueurs"* (45), a sound that will punctuate the length of the scene. In his ramblings Lebel reveals his knowledge of their mother's bus phobia, a direct recalling to the image of the burned bus captured in the photograph from the previous scene. As the stichomythia between all three characters continues it is also revealed to Simon that Jeanne has collected her letter and is preparing for a trip to their mother's home country. Clinging to the bus phobia, Jeanne ignores Simon's pestering questions, begging Lebel to tell the story of Nawal's terrible encounter with a bus. As Lebel begins explaining how a group of men stopped a bus she was riding and soaked it with gasoline, "*[l]ongue séquence de bruits de marteaux-piqueurs, qui couvrent entièrement la voix d'Hermile Lebel. Les arrosoirs crachent du sang et inondent tout. Jeanne s'en va*" (48). It is the voice of a character, Nawal, that marks the transition into the past; Nawal cries out to Sawda, entering the scene and then recounts what she has survived: the burning of the bus full of women and children and subsequent merciless execution of those not killed by the fire. Two critical elements in this scene link it to Mouawad's personal autobiography; the first is the site of the garden, the second is the slaughter of the passengers on the bus.

When asked about his own experience with civil war, as noted earlier, Mouawad refers to it as an aunt who visits him when he writes. This personalization reflects his own opinions regarding the presentation of the concept of war to an audience:

> Ainsi, lorsqu'une femme raconte qu'un autobus a été incendié avec tous ses passagers, lorsqu'une bombe détruit le jardin où un garçon arrosait délicatement des fines herbes, ou encore lorsqu'un franc-tireur interprète une chanson d'une groupe américain qui a marqué notre adolescence avec une mitraillette en guise de micro, la guerre devient moins abstraite. (Blais 158)

When Mouawad was 6 years old and his family was still living in Beirut, a bomb exploded in their backyard. With innocence only a child could possess he raced outside to try and save the garden, his father tackled him – pinning him inside the house, saving his life. "Grâce à lui, j'ai pu pleurer lorsqu'une bombe est venue tout déraciner. Avec son souffle de soufre, il ne restait plus rien qu'un grand trou noire" (Je t'embrasse 175). This incident marks the moment his family began contemplating leaving Lebanon. The second time war came calling inside his family's domestic space was in an incident many consider to be the catalyst which began the civil war in Lebanon in 1975;

> …outraged Gemayyel supporters ambushed a bus carrying Palestinians to the nearby Tel al-Zaatar refugee camp. Twenty-seven of the bus passengers were killed, and a further twenty were wounded. From this further crisis, the Lebanese system could no longer recover. The whole country was henceforth drawn into a sinkhole of civil disorder from which it was unable to emerge for many long years thereafter. (Cobban 120)

For reasons which remain unexplained, the bus took an unexpected detour through the main streets of Beirut, and was stopped in the street beneath the balcony of the Mouawad family's home. On a trip back to Beirut for a performance of *Littoral*, Mouawad returned to his home and was given permission by the family currently occupying the space to stand for a moment on the balcony. In his interview with J.F. Côté, Mouawad reveals:

> C'était en bas, dans le rue. Tous les Libanais s'en souviennent. Un autobus rempli de civils palestiniens a été mitraillé par des milices chrétiennes pour venger l'assasinat de leur chef par des milices palestiniennes. Ils ont arrêté un autobus et ils ont tiré. Je l'ai vue depuis le balcon. Je me suis placé là où j'étais quand, petit, j'ai regardé ce massacre; j'ai regardé dans la rue et j'ai essayé de me souvenir comment l'autobus était positionné et où était placé l'un des tireurs. C'était très clair. (Côté 79)

While the specific name of the country is never addressed in the play, due to his personal history, many critics believe the country of Nawal's birth to be the Lebanon of Mouawad's childhood. Nevertheless, in interviews about *Incendies* Stéphane Lépine points out, "…jamais il ne parle du Liban. Il parle plutôt de déchirures et de divisions intérieurs, il parle de résistence et de combat moraux, de guerres intestines, c'est-à-dire difficiles à avaler et à expectorer, à mettre en mots ou à chier" (85). As to the modification and reconfiguration of personal experience into the playtext, Mouawad explains his reasoning in an interview with Laura Dubois:

> J'ai besoin de ne pas nommer trop les choses, de laisser une certaine ouverture pour que les gens ne disent pas, "Ah, tiens, c'est sur la guerre au Liban!" Au fond, ce n'est jamais ça qui est vraiment important, c'est surtout un contexte dans lequel évoluent des personnages qui sont pris par des questions autres, l'amitié, l'amour, la promesse, la mort, les relations humains… Ce ne sont pas des pièces qui traitent de la guerre, ce sont des pièces qui parlent de la tentative de rester humain dans un contexte inhumain. (Dubois www.evene.fr)

There exists personal testimony, in all shapes and forms, inside Mouawad's texts – from his own life experience as well as from the lives lived by his company members.

Testimony exists not only in monologue, as with the retelling of the burning of the bus, but also in writing. Having acquired the tools of language, Nawal uses them as her weapons against the domineering force of the civil war by establishing a newspaper with Sawda as a voice against the violence. The newspaper becomes a tool to inspire her people in defiance of the war that is actively destroying everything they know. The third act, *Incendie de Jannaane*, begins with Scene 21: *La guerre de cent ans* where Nawal (age 40) and Sawda discover the murdered bodies of the supporters and contributors to their newspaper. Nawal boldly states in the face of destruction and murder, "[i]ls ont détruit le journal, on en fera un autre. Il s'appelait *La lumière du jour*, on l'appellera *Le chant du levant*[3]. On n'est pas sans ressources. Les mots sont horribles. Il faut rester lucide. Voir clair" (*Incendies* 52). Nawal's creation and distribution of a newspaper is also her subversion of a language and power of the abuser, in the Postcolonial sense. Adopting the dominant language, in this case the written word, and then manipulating it into a tool of rebellion marks a first step in the creation of Bhabha's hybrid state. The women have succeeded in mimicking the authority of the dominant language in a publication that presents an alternate philosophy to the war and violence. The only response possible for the dominant force is to reply with increased savagery, resulting in the extermination of those associated with Nawal and Sawda. While the paper is strong enough to provoke a response which marks a victory for the repressed, it does not succeed in ending

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[3] This may be a historical reference to the French-Lebanese newspaper *L'Orient Le Jour* whose office was destroyed by militia during the civil war.

the cycle of violence – but rather places both women in imminent danger as they are now the hunted as well as the oppressed.

This suggested subversion of the dominant language calls into question the conceit of language in *Incendies.* There are at least four languages or systems of communication at work in *Incendies*: Arabic, English, French, and silence. Each of these languages plays a specific role in the development and establishment of identity. Silence is the language of realization, Nawal and all three of her children lapse into a similar solipsistic state when their violent and incestuous origins are confirmed. While Nawal remains inside her solipsistic state for five years, Jeanne and Simon break their silences in order to communicate their knowledge with each other. Jeanne informs Simon of her plans to journey abroad when he comes to visit her in her apartment and Simon breaks his silence to explain what Chamseddine has told him of their father to Jeanne. Mathematics is Jeanne's language and one of concrete truth – there is a clear solution at the end of the equation, a fact that allows Jeanne to come to terms with her father's identity. Nihad is the only character that speaks English and he does so in the context of two imaginary interviews with a figure he names Kirk, host of the Star T.V. Show. Nihad performs both sides of the exchange, elaborating on his identity as a sniper and the rules that shape his relationships with the world. It is also the primary language of communication used by the media, especially American journalists who historically were eager to interview members of the Lebanese militia for their viewers at home. Arabic is the language Nawal learns to write and consequently the one she teachers to Sawda; it is also used in song, such as the

recitation of the poem *Al Atlal.* The play is in French, and we understand the convention that much of it is actually said in Arabic – especially whenever the scene moves to the Middle Eastern setting, yet, there is little effort made in making clear what is part of the language conceit (French representing Arabic), and what is verisimilar in the use of language (French as French). When English is used, on the contrary, or Arabic, for that matter, there is no confusion between what we are hearing and what language is spoken. Nawal engraves Nazira's name in Arabic on her tombstone, "*Noûn, Aleph, zaïn, yē, rra! Nazira"* (*Incendies* 33). However, when Jeanne, Simon, and Lebel travel to the homeland they are successfully able to communicate with the inhabitants despite their origins in a French-Canadian culture. If we are to assume that Nawal's homeland is the Lebanon of Mouawad's childhood, it is a country with a history of French colonization and therefore counts French among the principal languages of communication used by its citizens. Nevertheless, this does not account for Mouawad's decision to have Nawal and Sawda use the Arabic alphabet as their mantra when traveling and those letters as the ammunition they will use against the violence of the civil war that surrounds them. Is the use of Arabic a reflection of Mouawad's personal childhood experiences; or is it a nostalgic reference to his lost history? The use of Arabic in Mouawad's canon may be a symptom of what Robert Lifton refers to as survivor's guilt. In his reflection on Hiroshima survivors, Lifton posits:

> He [the survivor] has constant difficulty separating 'exportable' aspects of that knowledge from his own harsh-self judgments. He constantly asks himself, however unconsciously, 'Was it really as bad for me as I say it was? Do I have the right to be saying these things at all?' Only the dead,

> he inwardly believes, possess genuine organic knowledge, and his effort to represent them makes him feel something of an imposter. Neither by speaking out nor by refusing to can he fully assuage his guilt. (Lifton 304)

By including his personal loss in *Incendies*, Mouawad may be trying to regain his familiarity with his mother tongue and consequently his own past in the repetition and performance of a character that uses and teaches Arabic, as does Nawal, and one who learns it, Sawda.

Sawda's response to the destruction of the newspaper and the murder of their acquaintances is to sing; the scene closes with "*Sawda chante comme on prie*" (*Incendies* 52). Their use of song becomes another rebellion against the dominant force; it dissociates language into an aesthetic tool used to provide comfort and peace in the face of great fear and danger. Singing within a violent structure is a gesture equivalent to putting a flower inside the butt of a gun. The singing in *Incendies* is done in Arabic, never in English – another choice distinctly linked to Mouawad's personal heritage. "L'arabe est une langue très riche sur le plan sonore, les sonorités peuvent nuancer le récit. On me racontait ces histoires pour m'endormir, et donc cette langue est aussi liée à la nuit: elle est devenue pour moi la langue du rêve, de l'imagination" (Côté 72). When Nawal and Sawda become two mythologized figures in popular history, they will share the moniker "the woman who sings." This title embodies not only the rebellious act of singing in the face of violence, but in the prison Kfar Rayat it also represents one of the many victims of torture. When Jeanne delivers her letter to the father, Abou Terek the torturer, at the end of the play, Nawal signs it, "La

femme qui chante/ Pute n°72 à la Prison de Kfar Rayat" (*Incendies* 86). This double identity connects the subversive figure of the one who sings with the survivor of rape. It is *la femme qui chante* who perseveres; Nawal will use this title when she testifies at Abou Terek's trial. For Judith Butler the act of being called a name situates a subject within a discourse, however the act of taking up the term marks a rebellion against the dominant force that called out the subject. "Occupied by such terms and yet occupying them oneself risks a complicity, a repetition, a relapse into injury, but it is also the occasion to work the mobilizing power of injury, or an interpellation one never chose" (*Bodies* 123). Nawal succeeds, if only briefly, in using words and song as a reprieve from the horrors surrounding her.

The destruction of the newspaper, and consequently the word, is the catalyst for the transformations that overtake Nawal and Sawda and plunge them into a world of violence; both women commit murder in the name of revenge, though Sawda commits the first act of savagery in self-defense. In Scene 23: *La vie est autour du couteau* both women are stopped along the road by two militiamen. They are wanted, "[t]oute notre milice les cherche, et les militaires venus du pays du sud, ceux qui nous aident, les cherchent aussi. Elles écrivent et mettent des idées dans la tête des gens" (*Incendies* 54). Nawal and Sawda are not only stirring rebellion by printing a newspaper, but they have defied their traditional gender roles in the acquiring and disseminating of language and knowledge. The first soldier paints a vivid description of the torture he would like to inflict on them, he darkly reflects on how hard it is to commit a first kill, but

how easy it becomes after that. This is the first time in *Incendies* we encounter the direct confrontation between the male and female worlds. The two soldiers threaten the women with guns, a knife, and subsequent torture. Nawal is reduced to shouting commands, "Recule!" and "N'avance pas!" (54), her command of language fails her against this physical threat. Suddenly Sawda pulls out a gun and shoots both men, point blank. It is only by replying in kind, violence with violence that Sawda is able to save their lives. Consequently, Sawda begins to the faith in language she was taught by Nawal.

> SAWDA: Nawal, j'ai peur que le soldat ait raison. Tu as entendu ce qu'il a dit: "La première fois c'est dur, après c'est plus facile."
>
> NAWAL: Tu ne les as pas tués, tu nous as gardées en vie.
>
> SAWDA: Tout ça, ce sont des mots, rien que des mots et il y a toujours des cadavres couchés à nos pieds. (55)

The next time we see Sawda she is caught up in a mixture of grief and rage at the senseless slaughter that has invaded her domestic sphere. The rapid pace of the dialogue and the events in the script slow dramatically in Scene 25: *Amitiés.* The women argue at length about the philosophy and reality of the war, the violence that surrounds them and the path they must choose to take in order to overcome it. The argument takes the form of monologues which increase in length each time the conversation shifts from one woman to the other. Sawda vividly describes the insane acts perpetrated by the militia to civilians she has just witnessed, including forcing a mother to choose which one of her three sons they will spare.

> Avec ses seins trop lourds et son corps vieilli pour les avoir portés, ses trois fils. Et tout son corps hurlait: 'Alors à quoi bon les avoir portés si

> c'est pour les voir ensanglantés contre un mur!' Et le milicien criait toujours: 'Choisis! Choisis!' Alors ella l'a regardé et elle lui a dit, comme un dernier espoir: 'Comment peux-tu, regarde-moi, je pourrais être ta mère!' Alors il l'a frappée: 'N'insulte pas ma mère! Choisis' et ella a dit un nom, elle a dit 'Nidal. Nidal!' Et elle est tombée et le milicien a abbatu les deux plus jeunes. Il a laissé l'aîné en vie, tremblant! (58)

Everyone she knows has been killed, the world has lost all sense – Nawal's language and the alphabet itself cannot halt the inertia of death and murder that follows them wherever they go. She no longer wants to be the voice of reason, her singing has lost all reason – the only thing left is to join in the killing. "'Joli. Beau. Interéssant. Extraordinaire' sont des crachats au visage des victimes. Des mots! À quoi ça sert, les mots, dis-moi, si aujourd'hui je ne sais pas ce que je dois faire!" (59). Sawda's rejection of language in favor of storming into militia camps and opening fire echoes a strong characteristic of invincibility which Lifton recognizes in survivors of trauma. "The survivor's reinforced invulnerability, in other words, can be the most fragile of psychic entities. More likely to be pseudo than genuine master, it can readily reverse itself and expose the heightened sense of vulnerability that it tends to conceal" (Lifton 482). Sawda's guilt at not being able to save the civilians in the refugee camp manifests itself in a declaration of intended bravery, which is actually masking her fear. She turns on Nawal and consequently the language Nawal taught her because it no longer provides her with comfort or any form of guidance. Despite her companion's outburst, Nawal remains firm regarding her commitment to language and peace because of her promise to Nazira. However, when she realizes that words will no longer reach Sawda, she resorts to a plea before revealing her plan.

> NAWAL: Rappelle-toi, il y a longtemps, tu es venue me trouver, tu m'as dit: "Apprends-moi à lire et à écrire." Je t'ai dit non, puis je t'ai dit oui et j'ai tenu ma promesse. Je t'ai appris et ensemble on a appris à réflechir. Rappelle-toi. Alors, maintenant à ton tour de promettre. Promets-moi.
>
> SAWDA: Je te promets.
>
> NAWAL: Écoute. On va frapper (*Incendies* 60).

Nawal binds Sawda in a promise, the same way she was bound by her grandmother Nazira as a child. She proceeds to detail her plan to assasinate Chad, "le chef de toutes les milices" (61). Using her experience as a teacher, she will replace the woman who teaches his children. Once Nawal has infiltrated his family she will shoot him – firing two shots; "[u]ne pour toi, une pour moi. Une pour les réfugiés, l'autre pour les gens de mon pays. […] Deux balles jumelles" (ibid). These bullets replace the language she was using before as her ammunition against the war. In turn, she makes Sawda promise to live on – to sing and to use the alphabet and language to continue to change the world. Nawal has resigned herself to death; she speaks of having already brought life into this world and having lived a love with Wahab that people speak of only in dreams. She promises to sing in the face of fear, "[c]omme ça, on restera ensemble. Il n'y a rien de plus beau que d'être ensemble" (62). Nawal and Sawda will remain together in history, sharing the triumphs of the moniker *la femme qui chante.*

As the women part, never to see each other again, Jeanne is in the present day touring the prison at Kfar Rayat. A highlight of the tour is the cell of a legendary woman, "[c]'était la femme qui chante. Le numéro 72. Celle qui a assassiné le chef des milices. Deux balles. Le pays à tremblé" (63). Jeanne's fears

are realized as she visits a janitor who was once a jailer in the prison with the photo of her mother and the unnamed companion. The janitor reveals that the woman's companion became a suicide bomber and that the woman who was imprisoned was a favourite victim of the torturer Abou Terek, the man in charge of the prison. Jeanne takes the blue denim jacket her mother bequeathed to her and puts it on; this act marks the beginning of the end of her rage against her mother. "Pourquoi tu ne nous as rien dit? On t'aurait tellement aimée. Tellement été fiers de toi. Tellement défendue. Pourquoi tu nous as rien dit! Pourquoi je ne t'ai jamais entendue chanter, maman? (64). Jeanne's acceptance of the horrors her mother survived demonstrates the principal reason Nawal couldn't tell her story while she was alive. Judith Butler, in her article "Giving an Account of Oneself," explores the complications experienced by a subject as they try to constitute themselves.

> I am always recuperating, reconstructing, even as I produce myself differently in the very act of telling. My account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can have no definitive story. I cannot explain exactly why I have emerged this way, and my efforts at narrative reconstruction are always undergoing revision. (Oneself 27)

When Nawal was imprisoned, she was unable to construct her torture as it was happening to her. As a survivor of trauma she would have experienced a period of latency disabling her ability to frame the experience in a coherent narrative. Cathy Caruth explains, "…trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely *not known* in the first instance, but returns to haunt the

survivor later on" (4). By sending Jeanne and Simon on a journey into the past, it is Nawal's children who construct the narrative of her past by collecting stories retold by witnesses whose accounts are not distorted by a survivor's lapse in memory. Had Jeanne simply heard Nawal's story rather than experiencing it, she may never have come to understand the complexity of the issues at hand.

Consequently, Jeanne calls Simon and she orders him to collect his letter and the red notebook from Hermile Lebel. With a newfound strength and clothed in her mother's jean jacket bearing the number 72, she convinces Simon to fulfill his responsibilities from their mother's will. Simon opens the notebook and Scene 29: *La parole de Nawal* is a monologue delivered by the actress playing Nawal at age 60; it is her testimony at Abou Terek's trial. A victim of torture and rape, Nawal regains the strength she demonstrated in the face of her mother at the age of 14 with her refusal to forget her body; she will not be silenced by these violations. Standing before a public forum, Nawal is able to use the tools of language she acquired because of her promise to Nazira in order to condemn Abou Terek. Her entire life she has battled with the power associated with the act of naming someone, of giving them the foundation of their identity. At 14, when Nawal's son was taken from her, she was unable to name the baby boy and spent her life on a quest to find him and teach him who he was, where he came from, and most importantly give him the heritage of his father's name and explain to him that despite it all he was conceived in love. In her 40s she created a newspaper with Sawda to educate her people about the world around them, only to have those efforts destroyed by the militia and have her life threatened. When

logic failed to save her from her own anger, she committed murder and wound up in prison – only to give birth to twins who were named by the peasant who saved them from death. Now, at the age of 60 she is finally able to name herself and bear witness to the acts committed against her body:

> La femme qui chante, vouz vouz souvenez maintenant, vouz savez les vérités de votre colère sur moi, lorsque vouz m'avez suspendue par les pieds, lorsque l'eau, mélangée à l'électricité, lorsque les clous sous les ongles, lorsque le pistolet chargé à blanc dirigé vers moi. Le coup du pistolet et puis la mort qui participe à la torture, et l'urine sur mon corps, la vôtre, dans ma bouche, sur mon sexe et votre sexe dans mon sexe, une fois, deux fois, trois fois, et si souvent que le temps s'est fracturé. (*Incendies* 68)

Her testimony marks the last transition in the play between the past and the present. There will be no more juxtaposition between past and present in the scenes, now that the truth has been revealed characters from the past will appear simultaneously with those in the present.

While Nawal's oral testimony at the trial of Abou Terek marks a critical return to her faith in language, it is after her death and in the written word that she is able to resolve all the issues at hand. Her most successful rebellions have been those captured in the written word, such as the newspaper, her final testament, and her letters: one to the father, one to the son, and the final one to the twins. It is in these letters that she is able to reconstruct the horrors of history into something with the hope of beauty. The reading of the letters is a performative act inside a public space that, the recipient and the deliverer, as well as the theatre audience. The power of the written word is critical for Bhabha in terms of its impact on identity and history. "What emerges between mimesis and mimicry is *writing*, a

mode of representation that marginalizes the monumentality of history, quite simply mocks its power to be a model, that power which supposedly makes it imitable" (Bhabha 87). Writing, in the form of her letters, her notebook, and her final testament, is Nawal's post-mortem invocation of her displaced identity. It is important to note that it is Nawal (age 65) who speaks the written words of the letters at 65, the same woman who was able to give her testimony at Abou Terek's trials in the first place. Everything has been revealed and the final performative and restorative act of writing can now take place – Nawal's name will be engraved on her tombstone.

Wajdi Mouawad's play *Incendies* is a complex tale of love and the pursuit of identity, violently juxtaposed against a backdrop of civil war, betrayal, and rape. Through various postcolonial techniques including: the manipulation of language, both oral and written; the transformation of autobiography and history; as well as theatrical techniques such as *mise en abyme* and simultaneity – Mouawad, according to Jane Moss "bears witness to the national tragedy of Lebanon, works through the trauma it caused, and offers hope to the survivors instead of inspiring dread, fears, horror, and pity leading to catharsis" (*Survival*). In the subsequent chapter I will explore the techniques utilized in two performances which compliment Wajdi Mouawad's desire to anchor his work in "la politique de la douleur humaine."

Chapter III – Performance analysis

This chapter focuses on the choices and strategies used in two specific productions of *Incendies* that further the establishment and creation of identity in the face of erasure. The performance analysis will be two-fold; the first is a foundational semiotic examination of the mise en scènes using questionnaires developed by Patrice Pavis and Anne Ubersfeld. These questionnaires will facilitate a thorough dramaturgical analysis with a "return to the body of the performance" while also delineating "its contours and itineraries from the perspective of the desiring, observing subject" (Pavis 20). Pavis' questionnaire considers both the internal and external elements of the mise en scène, from the physical characteristics of the design to the impact of the performance on the audience. Ubersfeld's questionnaire compliments a Pavisian analysis by taking into account the material elements of the performance, from access points to the communication of ideological issues within the playtext. When used together these questionnaires will permit for a thorough scrutiny of the entire context of both performances. The goal of the analysis is to, "explode, semiotically and textually, the dominant discourse – the acquired discourse – which places between text and performance a whole invisible screen of prejudices, of characters, and of passions" (Ubersfeld xxii). I acknowledge the problems associated with a semiological analysis as it alludes to a hierarchy behind the elements of signification. However, by expanding the close reading from the previous chapter into the realm of performance this allows for a complete analysis of *Incendies* as a

theatrical endeavor including the ideological elements of the mise en scène that expound those found in the text.

The second element is a furthering of the analysis performed in the previous chapter through the lenses of Postcolonial and Trauma theory. Key issues are those surrounding the displacement of identity and the techniques utilized through narrative in the reestablishment of self. This process of remembering, for Homi Bhabha, "is never a quiet act of introspection or retrospection. It is a painful remembering, a putting together of the dismembered past to make sense of the trauma of the present" (Bhabha 63). The link between Postcolonial and Trauma theory exists not only in a return to the past in order to move beyond it, but also in the testimony and witnessing of this experience. For scholars such as Robert J Lifton and Cathy Caruth, "[a]s 'performed literature' drama can, at least ideally, supply vivid renditions of these events and at the same time build emotions around them that transform them into works of art" (Lifton 451). A successful testimony requires the presence of an audience who will receive and consequently be changed by the hearing; in *Incendies* this audience is present in the form of characters inside the drama as well as a community of audience members witnessing the production. The mise en scène for *Incendies* is also critical to Mouawad and his characters for the establishing of traditions with the introduction of ritual as an extension of the text. For Freud,

> Incomplete and dim memories of the past, which we call tradition, are great incentive to the artist, for he is free to fill in the gaps in the memories according to the behests of his imagination and to firm his own purpose for the image of the time he has undertaken to reproduce. One might

> almost say that the more shadowy tradition has become, the more meat it is for the poet's use. (*Moses* 89)

I will examine two mise en scènes in this chapter: Wajdi Mouawad's and Richard Rose's, each demonstrating a different artistic realization of Nawal Marwan and her twin children Simon and Jeanne's journey towards an understanding of their own identities in the face of a violent past.

The first production is a remount of Wajdi Mouawad's original production of *Incendies* at the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde theatre in Montréal, Québec, Canada that I attended on November 25th 2006. The first incarnation of the production premiered in France on March 14th 2003 at the Hexagone Scène Nationale de Meylan and in Canada on May 23rd 2003 at the Théâtre de Quat'Sous as part of the Festival TransAmériques. A creation of Théâtre de Quat'Sous *Incendies* was developed in co-production with Théâtre Ô Parleur (Montréal, QC), le Festival TransAmériques, l'Hexagone Scène Nationale de Meylan (France), le Dôme Théâtre d'Albertville Scène Conventionnée (France), le Théâtre Jean Lurçat Scène Nationale d'Aubusson (France), le Festival des théâtres francophones en Limousin (France), and le Théâtre 71 Scène Nationale de Malakoff (France). *Incendies* garnered rave reviews from the press in its first tour of Québec and France from critics such as David Lefebvre:

> Cette pièce est si simple et si complexe à la fois, si universelle qu'elle se doit d'être vue par le plus grand nombre de personnes possible. Malgré ses trois heures, le tout passe si rapidement, et l'histoire est si fascinante qu'on accroche facilement, et l'intérêt reste jusqu'à la tombée du rideau. Incandescent (www.montheatre.qc.ca)

The production at Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, which ran from October 31st to November 25th 2006, was remounted with the same creative and acting team as the original run and was held-over until December 2nd due to popular demand. The run was also extended further into the season, running from January 26th through February 20th 2007. The remount was also met with praise from the community, "[a] landmark production, it's a work of serious substance, as opposed to the customary "there was love in the rehearsal room" hype and piffle that nourishes more ordinary main stage offerings" (Radz).

Wajdi Mouawad's directorial history is comprised of over twenty productions, many of which have won awards including *Macbeth* (Théâtre Ô Parleur), *Les Trois Soeurs* (Théâtre du Trident), and *Six personnages en quête d'auteur* (Théâtre de Quat'Sous). Despite a solid résumé, he feels that "[e]ssentiellement, je ne suis pas metteur en scène. Je suis metteur en scène pour mieux écrire, pour mieux monter mes propres pièces" (Rioux 74). In regards to his plays:

> J'avais besoin de mettre d'abord mes propres textes en scène avant de les laisser aller. Si je ne faisais pas la mise en scène de mes pièces, je pouvais facilement devenir violent, ce qui n'est pas nécessairement une bonne chose. Je suis donc obligé de la faire parce que ça me met dans des états incroyables, je grimpe au plafond. (74)

This need can be attributed to the creative process with which *Incendies* and the rest of his theatrical oeuvre has been created; performance and play are integral to the development of each piece. With a workshop period spread over a couple of months, the frame of the performance may very well have already taken shape

before the script has been finalized. With a directorial style grounded in ritual, these extra-textual elements provide further examples of techniques utilized for the establishment of identity. The strongest strategies in Mouawad's mise en scène of *Incendies* are the rhythm and fluid design of the performance, and the added elements of ritual surrounding moments of birth, death, as well as the revelation of origins. The Montréal staging is also characterized by strong performances of witnessing delivered by characters that are survivors of violence.

The second production I will examine is Richard Rose's *Scorched*. Translated by Linda Gaboriau, *Scorched* was commissioned and developed by the Tarragon Theatre in collaboration with Canada's National Arts Centre English Theatre (Ottawa). This English language premiere ran at the Tarragon Theatre (Toronto) from February 27th 2007 until March 31st 2007. The production was met with mixed reviews in the Toronto Press. Robert Cushman's critique in the *National Post* comments on *Scorched*'s dependence on metaphor, "[t]here are things in *Scorched* I respect, but I didn't much like it. It's another Quebec play (Mouawad is Lebanese-Canadian) in which abstraction trumps action. […] Like much else, it starts out impressive and ends up obscure" (TO21). Whereas Richard Ouzounian of *The Toronto Star* praises the complexity of the writing, "*Scorched* is one of the most complex, ambitious plays I have seen in recent years, bursting with emotion and ideas but also written in a language capable of staggering poetic images" (E14). Either way, *Scorched* proudly boasts two 2007 Dora Mavor Moore Awards, one for Best Production and the other for Outstanding Direction.

In 2008-2009 the production was remounted in Toronto and toured to the Centaur Theatre (Montréal), the Manitoba Theatre Centre (Winnipeg), and the Citadel Theatre (Edmonton). For the tour there were a few changes in the acting company at each venue; at the Citadel Theatre the changes were Gareth Potter (Simon/Wahab), Sarah Orenstein (Jihane/Nawal 40-45), Diana Leblanc (Nazira/Nawal 60-65), and Paul Rainville (Alphonse/Militia Man). *Scorched*, was mounted at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton, Alberta, and ran from January 10th until February 1st 2009. Reviews in the press are also varied in Edmonton. Colin McLean's five out of five sun review in the *Edmonton Sun* gushes, "[s]tark. Heart-wrenching and utterly gripping, the play certainly lives up to the flowing reviews it has generated wherever it has played" (*Sun*). While Liz Nicholls expresses concerns with language that echo Robert Cushman's review:

> There are things about *Scorched* that seem arid. The elegant mathematical metaphor, polygon versus circle, seems a little overworked. The catharsis seems to be at the service of formal intricacies: I don't quite believe it. But blaming a play for its reach sees, in the end, petty. (*Edmonton Journal* D6)

Richard Rose, founding Artistic Director of Toronto's Necessary Angel Theatre where he directed over 30 plays, has been the Artistic Director of the Tarragon Theatre since 2002. In his interview with Catherine Lawson of the *Ottawa Citizen* about his production of *Scorched*, " "Rose says he did some tinkering here, by adding even more playful language than was in the original. He made a few further changes […] compounding some scenes where he thought the audience was getting ahead of the play" (Lawson C7). He explains that the changes to the play were "all part of the process of bringing Mouawad's play to an Anglophone

audience" (ibid). There are some distinct differences between the English and French texts, but few are as striking as the decision to omit the final scene from the play.

Linda Gaboriau prefaces her translation of *Scorched* with a note regarding her process of making this play accessible to English speaking audiences, a similar note is present in the majority of her translations:

> For the benefit of readers who might wish to compare this translation with the original as published by Leméac/Actes Sud-Papier (2003), it is important to note that, at the playwright's request, the translation is based on the script as it was revised by the author, after the publication of the French original. (*Scorched* 2)

In contrast to *Scorched*, *Incendies* ends with Scene 39: *La dernière cassette;* "*Il se met à pleuvoir. Hermile Lebel va chercher une bâche en plastique pour se couvrir avec eux de la pluie. Au-delà du silence, une voix leur parvient. Il pleut"* (*Incendies 90)*. Nawal speaks about the love of her life, Wahab. She describes their reunion as she imagines it should be - they have kept their promises and saved each other. "Maintenant que nous sommes tous ensemble, / Ça va mieux, il a répondu / Et je suis tombée par terre, / Plus bas encore, / Au creux même de l'océan, / C'est-à-dire au fond, au plus profond de mes larmes de bonheur. *Pluie torrentielle" (*92). This ending allows Nawal to return to the place of love she sought as a youth and experience the bliss she shared with Wahab. It also places her speech above her silence, giving her the final word and closing the circle of testimony. This is a completion of her *Trauerarbeit,* "[a]s part of the "work of mourning" Freud described the survivor's need to come to gradual recognition of

the new reality, a world which no longer contains that which has been lost" (Lifton 525). All of Nawal's journeys are complete: the letters have been delivered, her silence has been broken, and she is reunited with Wahab.

In the English translation, *Scorched* ends with Scene 38: *Letter to the twins*. "SIMON: Janine, let me hear her silence. *JANINE and SIMON listen to their mother's silence. Torrential rain. The end" (Scorched* 83). It is Simon who has the final word and it returns Nawal to a site of solipsism, she remains embodied by her silence. In an interview with Linda Gaboriau, I inquired about the decision to omit the final scene; was it her choice to alter the ending? Her response is vague, "I seem to remember that he felt it was a false note to end with a poetic, almost-happy moment" (Gaboriau). While Nawal's story of her reunion with Wahab can be read as overly saccharine, I feel that her speech closes the circle of language in her life. Having kept her promise to Nazira to use and acquire language, Nawal is able to use her words to end the cycle of hatred and reflect on a life of love rather than one of violence. Overall, it remains unclear whether this decision was made as part of the changes contrived in bringing the densely poetic text to an English audience. In 2009, Wajdi Mouawad revised and edited the first three plays in his tetralogy, *Le Sang des promesses*. They were staged together in a marathon production of the tetralogy at the Festival d'Avignon. As the script has just recently been published, I am unable to include these changes in my analysis of *Incendies*.

The complexity of the multiple languages at work in *Incendies* is a challenge for any translator. The conceit of language remains unclear in a text

complicated by the presence of three languages (French, Arabic, and English) in its original French. Critical response to Gaboriau's work is as varied as responses to the production itself. Natasha Gauthier, in her review, "*Scorched* suffers a little in English Translation," feels that, "[t]ranslator Linda Gaboriau does a sensitive job with the author's startling visual imagery ("childhood is like a knife stuck in the throat") and virtuoso way of rhythm, although Mouawad's fondness for repetition sometimes come across as odd in English" (H10). Whereas Kamal Al-Solaylee points out that in English, "[i]t's by no means a polished piece of writing in the traditional, consummate sense. It features lines such as, 'Let me hear her silence' and 'I searched amidst a flock of birds' that are too French, cringe-worthy, or both" (White-hot R4). I feel that while there still exist challenges in the translation, Gaboriau's *Scorched* is a sensitive and for the most part, accurate treatment of a dense, tri-lingual text. I acknowledge the unexplored complications associated with the translation of any text, this portion of the thesis will remain focused on the strategies utilized in two specific productions of *Incendies*, in French directed by Wajdi Mouawad and in English staged by Richard Rose.

As examined in the previous chapter, speech, silence and song are critical elements in *Incendies*. Nawal promises Nazira she will acquire the tools of language and learn to read, write, and think; she teaches Sawda how to use the elements of language as her newfound weapons; she creates and publishes a newspaper in defiance of the military forces; she testifies at the trial of her rapist and torturer; and finally Nawal Marwan reveals the truth of her children's' histories in letters bequeathed to their father and brother in her final testament.

These acts of testimony are juxtaposed against the silence that characterizes the last five years of Nawal's life and shapes her relationship with her twin children Jeanne and Simon. Due to the importance of speech and silence in the playtext, it is critical to analyze how these elements are realized in a mise en scène and what they contribute to the rhythm of the performance.

Rose and Mouawad's stagings utilize silence differently in establishing the tempo of their productions. In the Montréal production (Mouawad's) the lights fade up to reveal Notaire Hermile Lebel standing alone centre stage, laterally facing stage left. After a moment of silence, Lebel launches into his monologue yelling at the top of his lungs and speaking so quickly that it took me a moment as an audience member to register what he was saying. Richard Thériault brilliantly delivers the entire monologue in a loud monotone at a break-neck speed. He pauses for only a brief beat at the end before bursting into ostentatious sobbing noises. This sound of sobbing continues as Jeanne, played by Isabelle Leblanc, and Simon, played by Reda Guernik, enter the stage – Lebel moves seamlessly from sobbing into his next monologue regarding the reading of Nawal Marwan's will. The decision to have the monologue delivered at such an incredible speed and to transition immediately into the second scene sets up the unrelenting pace of Mouawad's staging. Besides the intermission, taken between the second (*Incendie de l'enfance*) and third (*Incendie de Jannaane*) acts, there is virtually no break in the action. The rapid-paced dialogue is interrupted by strong moments of silence, which stand out significantly against the endless torrent of language. The first instance of this occurs in the middle of Scene 2: *Dernières volontés* after Lebel

has finished reading Nawal's will. Simon holds a full minute before exploding in a fit of profanities, far more graphic than the outburst in the playtext, which lasts long enough to cause audience members around me to shift uncomfortably in their seats. Guernik then continues with Simon's enraged response to his mother's last testament, punctuating each thought with a punch or a kick against the upstage glass wall of the set. Simon's way of dealing with the world, in contrast to Jeanne's mathematical logic and Nawal's use of language that is explored in the previous chapter, is with his fists. His violent outburst foreshadows the motif of violence that dominates the world of the play later on.

Richard Rose's production also begins in silence, however it is experienced by a collective rather than by an individual. When the house closes, the entire acting company enters the performance space and stands as a mute ensemble staring out at the audience. This strategy introduces the audience to the important concept in *Incendies* as well as in postcolonial theatre, which is the explosion of private space into the public sphere. Homi Bhabha explains that in the context of colonial work

> The recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting. (9)

After a moment they retreat behind the scene – leaving Hermile Lebel and the twins standing and staring awkwardly at each other over a large desk. Rose's staging continues from this point on in a similar quick-paced rhythmic vein as

Mouawad's. However there are no sustained lapses into silence between long strings of dialogue, Rose's focus appears to be speech rather than silence.

In the didascalia the most important element in the soundscape is Nawal's silence. The majority of the instances of simultaneity feature Jeanne crossing through Nawal's past listening to her mother's silence, "*Jeanne passe, écoutant le silence de sa mère*" (*Incendies* 54). The journey Jeanne and Simon undertake is set into motion because of their mother's silence in combination with the mysterious demands in her final testament. Her silence is captured by ex-nurse Antoine Ducharme, who presents Jeanne with a crate of tapes full of recorded silence. Jeanne carries the tapes around with her for the remainder of the play, "*Jeanne écoute dans un walkman les cassettes qu'Antoine lui a données. Le silence de sa mère emplit toute sa tête*" (33). Mouawad's staging includes the silence in the soundscape for the audience to hear. The sound is similar to a light rain shower or running water, another audience member linked it to the white noise from a television that isn't receiving a signal any longer. It plays for the first time when Simon comes to confront Jeanne about her solipsistic behavior.

> Tu te tais. Tu ne dis plus rien. Comme elle. Elle rentre en jour et elle s'enferme dans sa chambre. Elle reste assise. Un jour. Deux jours. Trois jours. Ne mange pas. Ne boit pas. Disparaît. Une fois. Deux fois. Trois fois. Quatre fois. Revient. Se tait. Vend ses meubles. T'as plus de meubles. Son téléphone sonnait, elle ne répondait pas. Ton téléphone sonne, tu ne réponds pas. Elle s'enfermait. Tu t'enfermes. Tu te tais. (36)

As an audience member I understood Simon's frustrated out-burst towards his sister because there are no distinguishing features to mark the silence. However,

by including the silence in the soundscape it becomes something the audience cannot dismiss or ignore. Shoshana Felman, in reference to author Yehiel Dinur who used the pen name K. Tzetnik, comments on the value of silence, "[m]uteness in art, however, can be fraught with meaning. It is *out of muteness* that K. Tzetnik's writing in this passage *speaks*. It is out of its silence that his testimonial art delivers its literary power. *Art* is what makes silence speak [author's emphasis]" (*Juridical* 154). Mouawad's staging captures and utilizes silence; especially at the end of the play after both letters have been delivered to Nihad/Abou Terek. In the final moments, after the letters have been read aloud Nawal's silence is played; it then begins to rain on stage. The sound of the rain and the silence are virtually identical; the silence bleeds into the sound of rain that grows louder when Lebel gathers a plastic tarp and all the members of the company sit beneath it while the light rain becomes a torrential downpour. The silence lapses into the speech from Nawal's final tape, as discussed above.

Incendies also utilizes song as a defiance of the dominant military force. Nawal and Sawda both occupy the title of 'the woman who sings' in the face of violence and torture. Song is strongly linked to Mouawad's childhood, "[l]'influence arabe, chez moi, est liée au rhythme, car la langue arabe, je l'ai surtout entendu. Entendu parler, entendu chanter" (Côté 72). Mouawad utilizes two types of song in his mise en scène – those with words and those without. Nawal (40) and Sawda sing a song in Arabic at the end of Scene 25: *Amitiés*. *Al*

Atlal, often translated as *The Ruins* or *The Remains*[4], is a classical Arabic love poem composed by Egyptian poet Ibrahim Naji describing the traces left behind by a departed lover. The two women share this final declaration of love before they separate, never to see each other again. This use of song is a return to the inception of Nawal and Sawda's relationship, "[j]e sais voyager et à deux on sera plus fortes. Deux femmes côté à côté. Emporte-moi. Si tu es triste, je chanterai, si tu es faible, je t'aiderai, je te porterai" (*Incendies* 35). Song is introduced as a source of consolation; Sawda loses faith in language and song at the beginning of Scene 25 when she can no longer ignore the violence around her. "Le monde tel que nous l'ont légué nos pères apparaît donc chez Mouawad comme une sorte de prélude à l'Enfer, immense vallée des larmes et de douleurs que nulle consolation ne peut apaiser, si ce n'est l'espoir d'un renouveau soumis à l'appel de la rédemption" (Godin 105). Singing the song in Arabic is a realization of the sharing of Nawal and Sawda's identities – Nawal is the woman who uses the Arabic language and Sawda is the woman who sings.

> Récite-le chaque fois que je te manquerai, et quand tu auras besoin de courage, tu réciteras l'alphabet. Et moi, quand j'aurai besoin de courage, je chanterai, je chanterai, Sawda, comme tu m'as appris à le faire. Et ma voix sera ta voix et ta voix sera ma voix. Comme ça, on restera ensemble. Il n'y a rien de plus beau que d'être ensemble. (*Incendies* 62)

Richard Rose's staging also includes the singing of *Al Atlal* in Arabic. The melody was composed for the production of *Scorched*.

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[4] See Appendix II for an English translation

The other two songs with lyrics are from British bands, Supertramp's *Logical Song* and *Roxanne* by The Police; both of which are a tongue in cheek reference to the cultural violence evoked by Western rock music. As a part of Michel Coté's sound design in Mouawad's staging, both songs are played over the theatre's sound system at a deafening level, whereas Todd Charlton's sound design for Richard Rose does not include canned music for either song. Alex Poch-Goldin, who plays Nihad, sings fragments of both songs *a capella*. In both productions, Nihad, wearing a 1980s model Walkman, sings along very badly while using his sniper rifle as a guitar. "NIHAD: *(Marquant la guitare puis chantant à tue-tête) Kankinkankan, boudou. Kankinkankan, boudou. Kankinkankan, boudou. Kankinkankan, boudou. (Lorsque la chanson débute, son fusil passe du statut de guitare à celui de micro. Son anglais est approximatif)* (*Incendies* 73). This moment functions as a complex performance on multiple levels; firstly as song – an element previously used as an act of rebellion and as a tool for consolation. Nihad uses this song as his soundtrack while he assassinates people he sees in the distance. His singing is punctuated by gunshots, and the song ends abruptly when he exits the stage and returns, dragging a wounded photographer in by the hair. Secondly, the song marks the introduction of not only the missing father/son figure, but also the third language in *Incendies*. Mouawad completes his incestuous triumvirate with an ironic *double-entendre*. Nihad sings, "[w]on't you please, please tell me what we've learned / I know it sounds absurd / But please tell me who I am" (Supertramp). The use of these lyrics by Nihad also reinforces Judith Butler's theories regarding the difficulty faced by subjects in the

process of interpellation. "…the impossibility of a full recognition, that is, of ever fully inhabiting the name by which one's social identity is inaugurated and mobilized, implies the instability and the incompleteness of subject formation" (*Bodies* 226). Not only does Mouawad have Nihad use English song lyrics to express himself, a language not previously used in the text, but he will also share multiple identities in his multiple names as he is identified according to others; Nihad – the son and brother, Abou Terek – the torturer and father. The scene ends with Nihad plugging his Walkman back in his ears and singing a distorted version of *Roxanne* by The Police because, "You know, well, I wrote this song when it was war. War on my country. Yes, one day a women that I love die. Yes / Shouting by sniper. I feel big crash in my hart. My hart colasp. Yes / I crie. And I wrote this song" (*Incendies* 75).

A melody without words is only indicated once in the stage directions, at the end of Scene 21: *La guerre de cent ans*. Sawda and Nawal come across the bodies of two men who were assisting them with their newspaper. Kneeling over their bodies she weeps, which evolves into keening; "*Sawda chante comme on prie*" (52). This loss of words and consequential transition into a state beyond language is a common occurrence for survivors of trauma. Karen Malpede explores silence in contrast to speech in the dynamics of survivor testimony, "[e]nduring suffering and causing suffering are part of the witnessing dynamic. So is simply being overwhelmed and unable to take in or speak another word" (131). Mouawad's staging of *Incendies* returns to song as an extension of prayer in his ritualistic scenes - which will be explored later - include the birth of Nihad and the

death of Nazira. On the other hand, Richard Rose remains focused on the dynamic language of the play – evoking ritual and transformation in the design elements.

Graeme S. Thomson's set design for Rose's *Scorched* is the most dynamic component of the mise en scène. Centre stage sits a large, older, metal desk and a box for file folders, while a light beige coloured wall divided in sections to facilitate entrances and exit, borders the upstage edges of the performance space. Its texture is rough, it appears at first glance to be made out of paper maché and is used as a surface for projections. At the top of the show and during intermission a series of images that suggest Arabic writing are projected on the walls, Jeanne's graph theory analysis is projected during Scene 3: *Graph theory, peripheral vision*, and just prior to intermission there is the projected image of flames. Thomson covers the floor of the performance space in what appears to be sand; upon closer inspection it is pellets of plastic or cork but for the sake of the analysis will be referred to as sand, as this is surely the intended reading. The sand transforms and creates an endless series of meanings that compliment the play. For example, as the audience enters the performance space they are presented with the potent image of an hourglass. Centre stage left at the edge of the desk, a thin column of sand falls from the fly and is illuminated by a focused beam of light. Sitting in their seats, the audience watches the pile of sand on the stage grow progressively larger and larger, almost reaching the top of the desk at the performance I attended. It is a visual confirmation of time, echoing the fact that the present always immediately becomes the past and this liminal notion of time is utilized in Mouawad's play as various moments in the past and present coexist

simultaneously on the stage. Once time has elapsed inside an hourglass, it can be turned over and the countdown can begin anew. This is similar to the experience of survivors of trauma and postcolonial subjects and the characters in *Incendies*, as "the history of the traumatized individual, is nothing other than the determined repetition of the event of destruction" (Caruth 63).

Thomson's set also foregrounds the scorched nature of earth as an important element that supports Mouawad's title of *Incendies* and burning of his characters. The desk and box centre stage are partially buried in the sand, Nawal's will is unearthed from the box in order to be read. In this case the sand foregrounds the archeological nature of the play, a journey into the past in order to uncover meaning for the present day. The sand also highlights the impermanent quality of life and trauma, the incomplete traces left in the sand are a realization of, "[t]he unhomely moment [that] relates the traumatic ambivalences of a personal, psychic history to the wider disjunctions of political existence" (Bhabha 11). When Nawal and Sawda first meet, the performers march in a circular pattern around the centre of the stage, dragging their feet in the sand they leave a trace of their journey that is then erased by the entrance of another performer who over-writes this path with their own. This pattern is captured on a smaller scale by The Janitor, played by Jerry Franken, as he mops the floor in Scene 26: *The blue denim jacket*. Despite his best attempts to leave the surface undisturbed, every movement of the mop inevitably leaves a trail in the sand where it has passed. Puzzled, he tries again and again to smooth the surface of the sand without leaving a trace – he winds up leaving the space without achieving his task. "Rose

brings the play's theme out with creative visuals. He has his actors spring around Graeme Thomson's sand-covered set, creating a well-worn circular path around the fringes that is a physical embodiment of the country's never-ending spiral of violence" (Nestruck R3). The eternal paths in the sand are also proof of the eternal effects of the past. Despite any colonized subject's best attempts to transform the past into a new present, it remains in traces as part of their identity. The sand acts as a visible map, where imprints of the past accumulate throughout the performance.

In contrast to Thomson's design that evokes a rural, desert country; Isabelle Larivière's set for Mouawad's staging is characterized by its rigid architecture. It consists of a centered upstage wall made of translucent stained glass. The floor of the performance space is an extension of the glass, a square identical in dimensions consisting of a mosaic of beige, tan, and sand coloured ceramic tile. The only pieces of set dressing are seven wooden chairs in a variety of colours and design, a wooden ladder no more than five tall, and a metal ladder approximately seven feet tall. The chairs are carried on and off stage as part of a performer's path and are used to designate specific locations such as the Notaire's office space, the rocks and trees of Nawal and Wahab's secret meeting place, or Nawal and Nazira's tombs. The ladders are used in the ceremony of Nihad's birth, and again in a repetition of the same ceremony with all three children once the letter to the father and the letter to the son are read. Mouawad decision to use elements commonly found in a domestic space as his set rest upon his belief in the transformative nature of theatre.

> …mais au théâtre la réalité est toujours rêvée. La tasse ne représente pas toujours une tasse. Dans ma pièce *Incendies*, il y a ce moment où un comédien est assis sur une chaise, dos au public. Il indique un escabeau en bois en disant à une comédienne: 'Tu vois l'arbre qui est là? Il a cent ans. C'est un cerisier.' Les spectateurs, pendant une fraction de seconde, se détourne pour voir l'escabeau et revienne vers le comédien, comme si rien n'était. (*Méchant* 127)

In general the spatial forms of Larivière's set are very cold and urban; however, they are easily transformed by Éric Champoux's lighting design.

Overall the lighting for the play is dark and is further clouded by the constant presence of smoke in the theatre. A hazer is located off stage and fills the theatre with a constant cloud of haze that does not dissipate until it rains at the end of the play. This is the only physical suggestion of fire in Mouawad's staging of *Incendies*. Richard Rose's production also utilizes a hazer in *Scorched*, however he also chooses to have fire present on the stage in two forms: the projected image at the end of the first act as well as the burning of paper. In Scene 17: *Orphanage in Kfar Rayat* when Nawal and Sawda question a doctor about male children who passed through his care, the performer is sitting on a chair burning sheets of paper that have pictures of children's faces and Arabic writing on them. He begins this action while describing the endless cycle of violence surrounding them, "I can't retrace it any further, but the story can go on forever, one thing leading to another, from anger to anger, from sadness to grief, from rape to murder, back to the beginning of time" (*Scorched* 35). By the time Nawal asks her crucial question "[d]o you have records?" (36), the doctor's hands are empty and nothing remains of the records but a metal bucket with a few final flames licking the edges, "[n]o

more records" (ibid). The choice to use fire the mise en scène, especially in the destroying of written records reinforces Nawal's need to use language to create a dialogue and a history that defies the destructive power of the civil war. "In the face of no official narrative, or erased/distorted narrative, the individual narrative and memory become the source and representation of history" (Luca 135).

Champoux uses light in Mouawad's production to transform the urban architecture, for example the effect of light on the stained glass is similar to that on a scrim; when lit from the front it becomes solid, however when lit from behind, the audience can see performers in back of the scene. This translucent effect is best utilized in Scene 18: *Photographie et autobus du sud* when Antoine Ducharme, Nawal's ex-nurse played by Gérald Gagnon, has blown up the old photo Jeanne has brought to him. The performers playing Nawal (40) (Annick Bergeron) and Sawda (Marie-Claude Langlois) stand behind the wall and are lit from behind with a ghostly blue light. As Antoine describes the photograph he indicates the actual bodies of the performers; "[o]n sait que votre mère était, vers la fin des années 70, dans les environs du village Kfar Rayat où une prison à été construite. Elle avait une amie dont on ignore le nom et toutes deux portaient un pistolet" (*Incendies* 43). As an audience member, I am able to distinguish the style of clothes they wear and the outline of a concealed gun beneath their shirts. This moment foreshadows the splitting of Nawal into multiple roles played by multiple performers as well as the Middle Eastern style of the costumes that confirm the some characteristics of Nawal's homeland for the audience.

The costume design in both productions is very grounded in elements from Middle Eastern culture. Both Isabelle Larivière (*Incendies*) and Teresa Przybylski (*Scorched*) dress Nawal (14-45) and Sawda in loose, long-sleeved, shapeless tops over linen pants, beaten up hiking boots, and *hijābs*. A hijāb is a "traditional and widespread Muslim headscarf" (Marranci 148) worn by some women that covers the head while leaving a face, or a portion of the face clear. For a Canadian audience this choice evokes the Middle East, however any form of veil is also a controversial symbol, "for the Western media, the picture of a veiled woman visually defines both the mystery of Islamic culture and its backwardness" (Majid 111), a veritable symbol of Islamic oppression. While this may not be the intended reading, both costume designers complicate this symbol further by also using *burkhas*[5] (Mouawad's staging) or half *niqābs* (Rose's staging). Larivière clothes the women from young Nawal's life – Jihane, Nazira, and Elhame – in black burkhas. During the sequence when Nihad is born, Mouawad has the other performers also don burkhas to participate in the ceremonies of birth and death. A burkha is "a Muslim woman's outfit that is very common among certain Afghan tribes (e.g. Pashtun)" (Marranci 147). The most concealing of veils; it covers the entire body and features a mesh screen for the wearer to see through. It is generally worn overtop of quotidian clothing only when women leave the sanctuary of the household. It is interesting for Isabelle Larivière to clothe Mouawad's performers in garb associated with public life when they are performing in domestic ceremonies kept within the privacy of a female social

[5] Also spelled *burqu', burqua, burqa* or *burka*

circle. The practical element of this costume choice allows the male performers to pass as female during Nihad's birth and Nazira's death. These 'women only' celebrations involve strong articulation of gender and the roles allocated to women in this cultural context. As Judith Butler posits, "[i]dentifying with a gender under contemporary regimes of power involves identifying with a set of norms that are and are not realizable, and whose power and status precede the identifications which are insistently approximated" (*Bodies* 126). Perhaps the choice to use burkhas was in order to evoke a very traditional and conservative household, which would make Nawal's defiance of her gender role by learning to read and write a greater disgrace for her mother to bear. If this is the case, then Teresa Przybylski's choice to use niquābs undermines this meaning. A half niquāb is similar to a burkha in design, however a portion of the wearer's eyes and forehead are visible. In Rose's production Jerry Franken, who plays multiple roles, is part of the suggested all female chorus – however his masculine features stand out in the crowd of women which disturbs the important gender division suggested by these ceremonies.

Wajdi Mouawad's staging of *Incendies* is grounded in a series of rituals that are not elaborated upon in his didascalia. For example, when Nawal (14) gives birth to Nihad it is reductively described as "*[a]ccouchement de Nawal"* (*Incendies* 27). The ceremony of childbirth is presented to the audience as a transformative event. The metal ladder is brought on to the stage when Nawal doubles over in pain, clutching her belly and crying out. She climbs to the top and remains perched there while the midwife, Elhame, takes a wet, red towel rolled

into a bundle and in the triangular space between both uprights, slowly lowers it from the space beneath Nawal to the floor. Simultaneous to this, the members of the company don burkhas, and enter the space chanting, trilling, and banging drumsticks against metal garbage cans. Their energy and rhythm is one of celebration that drowns out the Nawal's painful screams and she gives birth to her child. When the bundle is handed to her, she tenderly holds her baby and tucks a clown nose into its wrappings. This clown nose becomes Nihad/Abou Terek's identifying mark and the only piece of his past before his adoption that he is able to retain. Moments later, the baby is snatched from her arms and carelessly tossed into a metal bucket before being whisked off-stage. Many audience members winced audibly as the wet towel thudded into the bottom of the bucket. As the figures leave the stage with Elhame, Nawal is left weeping from her perch atop the ladder and Nazira leans against it below, mourning her granddaughter's loss. "Son ventre est parti et moi, je sens l'appel de la vieille terre. Trop de douleur depuis longtemps m'accompagne. Donnez-moi le lit. Avec le fin de l'hiver, j'entends le pas de la mort dans l'eau courante des ruisseaux" (28). Nazira collapses and Nawal helps her into a bed made of four chairs; it is in this moment that Nawal promises to learn how to read, to write, and to think.

The ceremony of Nazira's death is given a similar reductive description in the playtext as the birth sequences, "*Nazira meurt. / On la lève du lit. / On la pose dans un trou. / Chacun lance sur son corps un seau d'eau. / C'est la nuit. / Chacun se recueille"* (29). In the mise en scène, Nazira dies and the burkha-clad figures return. However, this time they sing a wordless dirge as they lift Nazira's

body high above their heads. Her body is then lowered within their mob, out of sight from the audience. A red wooden chair is raised in the same fashion as Nazira's corpse was before being gently lain to rest centre stage with the bottom facing downstage. From within the group three buckets of water appear; two buckets worth of water is tossed high in the air before splashing down in front of the chair. This visual foreshadows the rain that will clear the air and put out the fires of the past. The anonymous female figures recuse themselves as Nawal gently pours the third bucket of water over her mother's grave; she exits the stage as a cell phone rings and the Notaire, followed by Jeanne and Simon enter the graveyard for Nawal's funeral.

These rituals perform the important function of reinforcing the endless cycle of life and death in life while capturing the emotional complexity of loss in ceremony and song. This experience is critical for Mouawad both in terms of his characters as well as his audience, "[s]ans l'exercice d'être sa propre douleur, impossible de supporter la douleur, impossible d'agrandir le monde. Impossible d'ouvrir la porte. Car où est la clé qui saurait ouvrir cette porte du domestique au locataire d'aller vers sa vie sauvage? Comment trouver la clé?" (*Immeubles* 4). Nawal's experience of loss in her private sphere in combination with her promise to Nawal propels her forward into the world. The experience for the character is grounded not only in the intellectual world of language but also in the physical realm of the body. Christopher Balme explores the incorporation of ritual in performance as a key element of postcolonial drama, "[a] characteristic feature of syncretic theatre is the incorporation of rituals and myth-based material into a

theatrico-aesthetic context. The highly problematic undertaking involves demarcating the blurry crossover points between theatre and ritual" (66). Mouawad's theatrical rituals exist in the performance space between lines of his dialogue, using melody, percussive rhythm and guttural cries to narrate an experience beyond words.

In *Scorched*, Richard Rose grounds ritual in circumstances rich with dialogue. His mise en scène of Nihad's birth is as simple as the stage directions; Nawal (15) cries out as Elhame pulls a bundled scarf from between performer Janick Hébert's legs. She is left crawling in the sand, wailing and sobbing as Elhame exits with the bundle and Nawal reflects upon her loss. Nazira's death is treated with the same brevity; Diana Leblanc, as Nazira, lays prostrate on the desk centre stage as Nawal kneels downstage of her clutching her hand. The final proclamation is delivered in a melodramatic-laboured fashion, "[l]earn to read, write, count and speak. Learn to think, Nawal. Learn" (*Scorched* 22), and with a final gasp of breath Nazira collapses, dead. The choral figures clad in black niqābs who were first introduced holding white tree branches to designate Nawal and Wahab's secret meeting place return. Together three figures gather up a black cloth, carry it downstage left and drop it rather unceremoniously into an open trap. Young Nawal stands apart from the women as each gather a bucket of water as each person gently pours the liquid into the opening. It is only Jihane, played by Sarah Orenstein, who refuses to participate in the ceremony and instead carries her still-full bucket with her as they silently exit the stage. The brevity of ritual in these key moments transforms their significance; instead of marking the critical

periods of life – the beginning and the end – these events are treated as quotidian activities. They become no more remarkable than brief instances of Simon's boxing training. Both women are specific regarding the treatment of their bodies because of the experiences bestowed upon them in life; a ritualistic ceremony marking their deaths ensures that the distinguishing features of their requests are carried out. There is a transformative element added to the mise en scène by the introduction of ritual that reminds the audience of the transformative power of not only art but also history. While a neglect of this heightened emphasis may ground the events more firmly in the realm of realism, I feel that it negates an important mythical part of Wajdi Mouawad's storytelling.

Richard Rose's introduction of ritual in Scene 25: *Friendships,* does add new dimensions to Mouawad's text. While Nawal (40) and Sawda argue the merits of language in the face of violence, Sawda (played by Valerie Buhagiar) busies herself with preparations for war. Buhagiar has collected an impressive collection of weapons, ranging from an AK-47 to hand grenades, which she cleans and loads during the scene. Nawal, played by Sarah Orenstein, stands centre stage left during their argument and watches in horror as her companion goes as far as applying dark green and black zinc camouflage make-up to her face in preparation for her revenge. While this blocking gives at least one performer a series of tasks to perform during long monologues, the impact of the presence of weapons on the audience remains ambivalent. Was Rose's to disturb the audience with Sawda's comfort with weapons and her eagerness to arm and insert herself into the violent conflict? Or was it to ground Mouawad's poetic description of

violence into a concrete form that an assumed audience unfamiliar with war in their own country would better understand? I feel that whatever Richard Rose's intent; the result was a distracting piece of comedic ritual that detracted from the use and manipulation of language by both women. In the end Nawal announces that she will assassinate the leader of the militia as long as Sawda continues to use language as her weapons against the tyrannical forces. Rose has Sawda exit the stage with the AK-47, which foreshadows her neglect of her promise and her inevitable death.

Wajdi Mouawad's mise en scène also transforms water from a cleansing element used in Nazira and Nawal's funerals into a tool of violence that overlaps with the first instance of survivor testimony. In Scene 19: *Les pelouses de banlieue*, Hermile Lebel is watering his lawn at home where the twins come to visit him. The sound of jackhammers dominates the air; frequently interrupting Lebel's speech – it is so loud that nothing can be heard over the din. Richard Thériault carries on a bright yellow oscillating sprinkler that he places at centre stage, the head pointing upstage, and turns on – the water sprays off the upstage wall in a rhythmic pattern. Mouawad's stage directions indicate a "*[l]ongue séquence de bruits de marteaux piqueurs qui couvrent entièrement la voix d'Hermile Lebel. Les arrosoirs crachent du sang et inondent tout" (Incendies* 48); the realization in his mise en scène is far more complex. As Simon, Jeanne, and Lebel exit the scene Nawal (19) enters upstage left and crosses slowly to centre stage walking along the wall. Once she reaches centre stage, she turns to face the audience and begins retelling her survival of the bus massacre. Isabelle Roy

speaks in a soft but firm voice gradually becoming drenched by the sprinkler. The sound of the water pounding against her skin and the stained glass wall behind her evokes the haunting sound of bullets ricocheting against metal and flesh, of civilians being massacred by machine guns. The water is quieter than the deafening recording of jack hammering but even more disturbing for myself as an audience member. She is also bathed in red light which casts ghostly shadows around her and makes the water look like blood. When Nawal has finished, she turns to face stage right and quietly walks off, dripping water and sloshing through a trough at the back of the stage that has caught the water from the sprinkler. Water, which was previously the element of solace becomes not only the fuel that Nawal and the other passengers of the bus were soaked with but also the blood of the deceased as those who do not die when they are lit on fire are shot to death by the militia. Nawal survives because she was able to get off the bus – the delivery of the monologue in a detached, neutral voice transforms the testimony into a factual recounting of a horrific event and allows the audience to experience the horror in our own minds. This is also an example of what Lifton refers to as survivor's guilt which he describes in the context of Hiroshima survivor testimony, "…we begin to get a sense of the importance of the pattern of 'guilt over survival priority,' which will shall see to be a major theme of the experience, and also of the strength of the residual sense of victimization" (Lifton 7).

This effect is diminished in Richard Rose's mise en scène of *Scorched*. Nawal screams Sawda's name as she races into the scene through the upstage

centre entrance. As she does she is squirted with what appears to be a jet of blood, which also sprays onstage. The effect is similar to the squeezing of a full ketchup bottle; a controlled stream paints a short, erratic pattern on the wall. Still screaming and in hysterics, Nawal collapses in Sawda's arms downstage centre and barely manages to deliver the monologue due to her heightened state. The Edmonton audience was still affected by the brutal details of the story; however, I felt that the power of the language was diminished by what Robert Cushman refers to in his review as "unfocused rhetorical acting" (TO21). This is not helped by the strong smell of strawberry syrup emanating from Hébert's costume, which negated any affect induced by the presence of blood.

Overall, as evident in reviews, both productions were well received by audiences in French and English Canada. Richard Rose's mise en scène employs strategies grounded in his interpretation of Mouawad's stage directions and text; these choices are rooted in an observation made by Kamal Al-Solaylee.

> Rose also knows that we in English theatre are not about to go easy on our demands for emotionally rooted performances from a bevy of fine actors on stage. Hell, no. We want psychological realism even in a non-linear piece of theatre. He gives it to us, without changing the essence of the work. (White-hot R4)

While this statement is broad generalization of English Canadian theatre audiences, I feel that it is a realistic reflection of many tendencies in Western Canadian mainstream theatres. Both translator Linda Gaboriau and Richard Rose admit to making choices because, "[i]t was all part of the process of bringing Mouawad's play to an Anglophone audience" (Lawson C7). Graeme S.

Thomson's set creates a dynamic and transformative world for Rose's performers to march through, marking and erasing their journeys through time and space. While Isabelle Larivière's set design is not as dynamic as Thomson's, it remains difficult for me not to favour Wajdi Mouawad's staging of *Incendies*. His elaborate use of ritual in instances such as Nihad's birth and Nazira's death are an actualization of the images that must have been in his head while writing the play but are not directly articulated in the didascalia. The similarities and differences between these productions serve to emphasize the plural reading of *Incendies* as an entire piece of theatre encapsulating Nawal Marwan's complex life, the journey undertaken by her children Jeanne and Simon, and the constantly shifting idea of identity within a world of violence. Geneviève Blais reminds us that

> L'auteur ne cherche pas à identifier le conflit et ses acteurs ni à en préciser la source. Il dépeint une guerre qui met en scène principalement des civils, aveuglés par la haïne, issus du même pays et du même sang, puisqu'il s'interesse surtout au témoignage d'individus broyés par la spirale absurde de la violence et de l'intransigeance. (156)

In conjunction with language, these mise en scènes stage the many techniques used by hybrid subjects in the construction of identity and performance of memory.

Conclusion

At the end of *Incendies*, Nawal Marwan succeeds in recovering and restoring her identity through a re-living of her history, the delivering of oral testimony in the face of her rapist, and the re-uttering of her written testimony in letters to Nihad/Abou Terek as well as Jeanne and Simon. There are multiple witnesses present to receive the final testament of the letters – the characters within the drama, as well as the theatre audience. Mouawad's mise en scène captures the revelation of identity in a ritualized ceremony. All three performers interpreting Nawal are present on the stage to share in the choral uttering of her written words as well as witness the transformation undergone by her children as they learn their lineage. The languages of mathmatics and silence are featured in the final moments. Simon, after his meeting with Chamseddine has lapsed into a silence that frightens Lebel,

> Chamseddine n'a rien voulu me dire. Je savais que vous étiez à Kfar Rayat. Je ne voulais pas vous déranger. Je ne voulais pas vous arracher à votre solitude, je savais que vous en aviez besoin. Mais c'est important. Simon s'est tu, Jeanne, et j'ai peur. On a peut-être trop poussé pour connaître la vérité. Il avait peut-être raison, Simon: ne rien toucher, ne rien bouger, enterrer votre mère et partir. (*Incendies* 81)

Simon breaks this silence when he is confronted by Jeanne in favor of her language of numbers and figures to allow her to solve the problem on her own terms. The result is the confirmation of a complex mathematical proof, one plus one can equal one and Jeanne's return to silence: "JEANNE: …on divise par 2, 2, on divise par 2, 1. Peu importe le chiffre de départ, on arrive toujours à… SIMON: Tu te tais. Comme je me suis tu quand j'ai compris" (82). Jeanne

collapses into the arms of all three Nawals who cover her eyes, her ears, and her lips in the famous image of 'see no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil.' When Oedipus realizes his inestuous crimes, he blinds himself – the characters in *Incendies*, subjects of a plurality of languages that have given them their identity, mute themselves.

Scorched by the horrors of war, it appears that only a torrential rain can extinguish the burnings that have taken place in *Incendies*. As falling water drenches the stage and the performers, there is a return to a state of *Jetztzeit* after the recitation of the final casette. Mouawad's mise en scène uses the sound of water to replace the sound of recorded silence, all of the performers except Nihad, are sitting in chairs side by side centre stage facing the audience. Richard Thériault (Hermile Lebel) gathers a white tarp and the actors pull it over their heads while Nihad stands downstage and observes. The sound of rain falling on the tarp has the same aural quality of the recording of Nawal's silence, an effect that links the peace achieved in silence by the characters and the extinguishing of fire by water. As an audience member I was unsure as to whether I was observing the uniting of characters or an intimate cast of performers as Éric Bernier (Nihad) removes his shoes and the company makes space for him to join them beneath the tarp. For a moment the company stares out at the audience and together we share in the sound of solace, or "*une consolation impitoyable*" if we return to Mouawad's notes at the beginning of the playtext, before the lights dim and the show is over. By ending the show in a state beyond time, Mouawad confirms the ambivalence and ambiguity that plagues the pursuit of identity – his characters are

still caught between who they are today and how that meaning transforms their histories and their futures.

The pursuit of a confirmed identity is a never-ending process that haunts postcolonial subjects and survivors of trauma alike. The building of a narrative in order to encompass the colonized experience is similar to the process utilized by survivors of trauma in a working through, or *Trauerarbeit* of their experience. In both cases, the subject requires a witness to hear the reconstructed and repeated narrative of memory in whatever forms it takes, be it oral, written, or dramatized. The quest for history and identity is the unstable cornerstone of Wajdi Mouawad's tetralogy, *Le Sang des promesses.* According to Mouawad, this pursuit of self is an endeavor undertaken by all of humanity, "depuis toujours, il existe en l'Homme une sort d'innocence qui le pousse à chercher, malgré la douleur, la perfection de son reflect. Oedipe s'est crevé les yeux. Qui verra jamais ce qu'a vu Oedipe?"

Theatre is an art of the social, grounded in the realities of the artists who collaborate to create it and the audience members who share in its performance. I experienced the transformative power of theatre in Wajdi Mouawad's work and look forward to further endeavors by this artist in his intellectual pursuit of self within the eternally changing world we find ourselves within.

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Appendix I – The Arabic Alphabet

Fig. 1. The Arabic Alphabet. 31 Aug 2009. <http://www.stanford.edu/dept/lc/arabic/alphabet/chart.html>

Appendix II – Al Atlal 'The Remains'

My love

don't ask me where is love

it was a big castle

of fantasy

which

collapsed

let me drink

on its remains

while my tears are falling

and please tell me

why all this love

became a story

I do not forget you

you tempted me

with a beautiful mouth

so tender

and a a hand

stretched

in waves

to a

drowning person

a love bird

was singing

a poem

and now I visit his place

you walked so slowly

like a spoiled child

like a tyrant

oh

love is burning my ribs

and seconds

are

hot coal

in my blood

give me my freedom

set me free

I gave you everything

your chains

are hurting my hands

so why do I keep them

when you did not keep me

why do I stay in prison

and the whole world is

around me

he was shy

full of pride

walking like a king

and he was beautifully tender

deliciously proud

charming

like a dream

I am a weak butterfly

who came near you

and love

was a messenger

between us

and

a friend

give me a cup

did love see

any drunken people

like us

my heart

don't ask me where is love

it was a big castke

of fantasy

that collapsed

**Translated by Dr. Mona Arab

*Programme - *Scorched*