



debbie tucker green

Critical Perspectives

Edited by
Siân Adiseshiah · Jacqueline Bolton

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debbie tucker green

Also by Siân Adishesiah

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‘change ain’t fuckin polite, scuse my language’: Situating debbie tucker green

Siân Adiseshiah and Jacqueline Bolton

debbie tucker green’s theatre is rarely polite. Her aesthetically innovative, politically bracing work consistently stages emotionally emboldened scenes of social injustice, global inequalities and private trauma, mobilizing dramatic form in order to expose and attack the discriminatory operations of power that continue to structure the lived experience of specifically black, most often black female, subjectivities. Vociferous in its critique, eloquent in its resistance and compelling as a call to action, the language of tucker green’s plays is central to their political and affective project, the drama’s clarity and force of conviction released by a lyricism of expression as precise as it is penetrating. The quotation that titles our introduction comes from tucker green’s most recent play, *ear for eye* (2018). A coruscating puncturing of white privilege, *ear for eye* dramatizes with shattering boldness the lack of progress made with respect

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to racial equality since the horrors of slavery and racial segregation in nineteenth- and twentieth-century southern United States. ‘Change ain’t fuckin polite’ says Young Adult (tucker green 2018, p. 51)—though the language of tucker green’s theatre makes no excuses, or apologies, for this assertion.

tucker green’s mix of stylish poeticity, enlivening dramaturgy and pungent political subject matter has in recent years energized contemporary theatre scholarship. But until now, tucker green’s work has only been attended to in the short formats of book chapters and journal articles. Extended scrutiny of tucker green’s corpus is keenly awaited by students, scholars and spectators of contemporary theatre alike, a community who is attending and analysing her plays in ever-increasing numbers. Covering the period from 2000 (*Two Women*) to 2017 (*a profoundly affectionate, passionate devotion to someone (-noun)*), this first full-length treatment of tucker green’s work offers scholars and students the opportunity to appraise and engage in the spectrum of contemporary critical debate engendered by tucker green’s works for stage, television and radio. While always focused on the precision and detail of tucker green’s work, this collection—like its object of study—simultaneously seeks to reframe broader debates around contemporary drama and its politics, pose new questions of theatre and its making and provoke scholarly thinking in ways that, however obliquely, contribute to the change for which the plays agitate.

Since her professional debut, *dirty butterfly*, premiered at the Soho Theatre, London, in 2003, tucker green’s plays have been regularly staged by leading theatres for new writing in the UK, including Hampstead Theatre, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the Young Vic, the National Theatre and the Royal Court, where seven of her plays have premiered to date, four on the theatre’s main stage (*stoning mary* [2005], *random* [2010], *hang* [2015] and *ear for eye*). Unusually for a theatre culture in which playwright/artist-director/interpreter partnerships remain standard practice, tucker green is increasingly also the director of own plays: where earlier works were directed by emerging and established directors of new work such as Rufus Norris (*dirty butterfly*), Marianne Elliott (*stoning mary*) and Sacha Wares (*generations* [2005], *trade* [2004, 2005] and *random*), the premieres of *truth and reconciliation* (2011), *nut* (2013), *hang*, *a profoundly affectionate passionate devotion to someone (-noun)*, and *ear for eye* were all directed by tucker green. In a UK theatre culture where the whiteness of stages, production teams and audiences remains pervasive, these facts offer more than just biographical detail. In writing

and directing plays that centralize predominantly black women, tucker green's theatre intervenes in discourses of race and gender not only at the level of representation but also within the sphere of production, through the labour of realizing these works within an industry where, to appropriate a phrase from Deirdre Osborne in this volume, the presence of black female creatives remains 'unexpected'. The precise and deliberate specification of race and gender within tucker green's *dramatis personae* both insists upon and carefully calibrates the presence of black and female characters in plays—and, by extension, rehearsal rooms—that speak to and about the experiences of those whose lives are marginalized, disempowered and traumatized. Through female characters that are often determinedly antagonistic—spiky, disaffected, truculent—tucker green's plays redress a historic lack of commanding black female protagonists on UK stages while simultaneously rewriting and revising gendered and raced discourses of victimhood. In often intimate, though increasingly large-scale productions, theatre auditoria become the sites where majority-white audiences are brought into frequently uncomfortable, typically compelling, encounters with black rage—the affective power of which stands as an eloquent rebuke to twenty-first-century claims of a post-racial era, claims made in the context of the election of Barack Obama in the United States in 2008 (see James W. Caesar et al. 2009).

tucker green's potent fusion of experimental aesthetics, piercing politics, and an affective economy of cruelty have galvanized intellectual engagement with her work and contemporary theatre more broadly—not least with regard to where to position her work within British theatrical lineages. As Lynette Goddard observed in 2005, efforts to place tucker green within 'traditions of black British women playwrights' are troubled because her work 'is so very different from [...] the plays that have come before' (p. 380). tucker green's work does not feature themes of 'supportive sisterhood', 'spirituality' or 'feckless black men in the ghetto', and moves away from the 'insistence on providing "positive representations" of (black) women' identified as characteristic of black women's theatre in the 1980s and 1990s (Goddard 2005, p. 380). This breaking with tradition initially prompted Goddard to suggest that tucker green's 'complicated and layered plays' feature characters that 'happen to be black, or white, but could be from any culture' (2005, p. 380), an observation offered as a reason for her widespread appeal but from which Goddard moves away in this volume.

The (white) critical establishment, after an initial period of questioning whether or not her lyrical dramas could properly be considered ‘plays’ (see Lucy Tyler’s chapter in this volume for an extended discussion of this), have connected tucker green’s innovations in form and language with such playwrights of (white) canonical status as Samuel Beckett, Caryl Churchill, Sarah Kane and Harold Pinter. While acknowledging the influence of these writers, Deirdre Osborne’s interventions into this critical narrative (2010, 2011, 2015), have urged the necessity of taking into account ‘the variegated experiential and aesthetic influences which fall outside traditions of British theatre criticism’ (2011, p. 201). tucker green herself cites as her main influences the works of black playwright and poet Ntozake Shange, Jamaican poet Louise Bennett and singer-songwriters Jill Scott and Lauryn Hill (Goddard 2013, p. 191). Osborne identifies this blend of African-diasporic and European intellectual inheritances as central to tucker green’s ‘genre-refusenik’ style (2011, p. x)—a style Osborne credits with effecting ‘substantial forays into dismantling the identity-politics or issues-based contingencies in which Black drama in Britain traditionally has been housed—to the point of claustrophobia’ (2010, p. 32). For Osborne, tucker green’s linguistic and formal inventiveness has presented a ‘blitz on the comfort zones of theatrical realism’ (2010, p. 32), advancing a bold aesthetic which itself performs a politically vital intervention into white-led cultural production in the UK.

While tucker green’s work is widely recognized in discussions of contemporary black theatre (see Goddard 2007, 2015; Brewer et al. 2014; Pearce 2017), a number of scholars have moved outside these parameters to advance analyses of individual plays that illuminate a series of other live debates in theatre and performance studies. Theatre scholars engaging with ethical philosophy, in particular, have produced some valuable critical work on tucker green’s oeuvre, for which the postmodern ethics of Emmanuel Levinas has provided a foundational framework. Over the last decade, a number of academics—including Marisia Fragkou, Lynette Goddard, Mireia Aragay, Enric Monforte, Martin Middeke, Martin Riedelsheimer and Korbinian Stöckl—have augmented Levinasian thought to offer readings that identify an ethical imperative towards ‘the other’ as central to the affective efficacy of tucker green’s plays. Fragkou, for example, has drawn upon work by Judith Butler on grief and precariousness and Hans-Thies Lehmann on the politics of perception to argue that, through complex acts of spectatorial witnessing, tucker green’s plays ‘mobilize a collective response-ibility vis-à-vis

the value of human life' (2010, p. 23). Mireia Aragay and Enric Monforte have extended Fragkou's discussion of spectatorship, witnessing and ethical responsibility through a reading of *random* informed by Jacques Rancière's concepts of the 'emancipated spectator' and the 'distribution of the sensible' (Rancière 2004, 2009). In their analysis, the experimental form of tucker green's drama invites participation in 'ethico-political acts of spectatorial resubjectivization' which may 'challenge established discourses and ways of seeing' in relation to issues of race and violence (Aragay and Monforte 2013, p. 96, p. 111)—a conclusion echoed by Martin Middeke's 2014 essay on the ethical potential of contemporary drama which, in its analysis of *truth and reconciliation*, draws on the philosophy of not only Levinas but also Zygmunt Bauman, Alain Badiou and Jacques Derrida. Martin Riedelsheimer and Korbinian Stöckle have also turned to Butler, together with Kwame Anthony Appiah's work on cosmopolitanism, to propose that tucker green's plays 'make a cosmopolitan ethical appeal' to a world in which 'entanglements of mutual dependence—both economic and emotional' register trans-geographically (2017, p. 112, p. 121).

The principle of 'fundamental human sameness' (2017, p. 115) that Riedelsheimer and Stöckle perceive as central to the ethical power of tucker green's plays has been invoked by scholars and theatre critics whose interventions move outside of (what has been posited as) the constraining parameters of identity politics. Scholars thus have made sense of tucker green's work in ways that emphasize an idea of human commonality able to speak to audiences 'irrespective of identity and class categories' (Fragkou 2010, p. 83). In analyses of *random*, for example, several scholars have sought to highlight what they see as the play's insistence upon 'the human ordinariness of the lives of others', its invitation to engage emotionally and imaginatively 'in ways that go far beyond race, class, age [and] gender' (Aragay and Monforte 2013, p. 111). Goddard has suggested that audiences of *random* witness 'a human story, rather than one specific to black communities' (2009, p. 308) and Fragkou has proposed that 'to argue that [this] play is relevant mostly for a particular audience would negate its wider political scope that reaches out beyond the black community' (Fragkou 2010, p. 80). For Nicola Abram, tucker green's 'vital subject matter and its vivid delivery place her plays above this parochial quality', 'this parochial quality' referring to celebration of the playwright as one of the most significant *black* British playwrights (2014, p. 126).

Race and identity, however, remain touchstones for scholarship on tucker green—Elaine Aston (2008), for example, strongly foregrounds race, gender and class in her reading of *trade* as a black feminist critique of liberal white Western feminism, and Trish Reid (2018) similarly locates black feminist discourse as central to her analysis of *hang*. Indeed, Goddard herself has revisited her stance on the universality or otherwise of the stories tucker green stages, articulating a resistance towards views that would regard a focus on identity politics as necessarily reductive. For Goddard, the distinctive contribution that tucker green makes to contemporary (black British) theatre is her staging of ‘black experience as “universal”’—a move that synchronously foregrounds ‘black rights’ as ‘human rights’ (2015, p. 17). In this volume, and in concert with chapters by Michael Pearce and Lucy Tyler, Goddard argues that ‘discussions about race are often not as central to analysis of her plays as they should be’, critiquing contemporary British playwriting scholarship for being interested in tucker green’s work because of its connections with (white) canonical playwriting traditions and its ability to speak to ‘trending themes of twenty-first century British theatre scholarship’ (such as concerns about crisis, ethics, precarity and human rights). In her chapter, Osborne similarly objects to what she describes as the ‘hegemonic critical and aesthetic frameworks that are habitually applied to (and even “post-colonize” black British writers and their writing)’ and Elaine Aston contributes to this debate by offering ‘a black-cultural and feminist foray’ into tucker green’s work that draws primarily on black—‘in the broadest, inclusive sense’—scholarly and artistic sources.

The edited collection—a format designed to host a range of perspectives, sometimes congruent, at other times dissonant—strikes us as the most appropriate form for the first full-length study of the work of this field-changing writer and practitioner of theatre. This collection offers a dynamic colloquium around questions of identity and race but also deliberately accommodates approaches to tucker green’s work that proceed from other critical vantage points. Indeed, one of the primary interests of the collection is not only to articulate the central importance of debbie tucker green as a black woman playwright (along with the ways that that identity permeates her work), but also to recognize and reflect the exciting range of responses to her work that move outside questions of identity to consider issues of neoliberalism, precarity, subjectivity and community. In bringing together a diverse range of established, mid-career and emerging scholars in this volume, we are delighted to host a range

of theoretical approaches to the work of tucker green that draws on such figures as Sara Ahmed, Judith Butler, Tricia Rose, Audre Lorde, Hannah Arendt, Marina Garcés, María Lugones, Eilon Morris, Victor Turner, Raymond Williams, Édouard Glissant, Homi K. Bhaba, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Marc Nichanian and Jacques Derrida. After all, debbie tucker green is—as Trish Reid’s chapter frames her—a ‘willful subject’; her plays challenge, provoke, upset and disturb. We intend for this collection to reflect some of that difficulty in its internal exchanges and critical encounters.

Michael Pearce opens ‘Part I: Dramaturgies of Resistance’ with ‘Black Rage: Diasporic Empathy and Ritual in debbie tucker green’s *hang*’, a dramaturgical analysis of the play which, in contrast to its reception by UK broadsheet theatre critics, reads race and racism as central to its formal and thematic concerns. Situating the play within African-American traditions of activism and art, Pearce interprets *hang* through a history of ‘black rage’ as articulated in William Grier and Price Cobb’s 1969 study of ‘the damaging psychological effects of white racism that manifested internalized feelings of rage’. Registering feminist debates regarding its political utility, Pearce further observes how the articulation and mediation of ‘black rage’ through the contemporaneous Black Arts Movement—an organization that proclaimed itself “‘the aesthetic and spiritual sister” (Neal 1968, p. 29) of Black Power’—served to focus the relationship between African-American politics and art. Drawing attention to the energy of ‘rage’ and ‘ritual elements’ within tucker green’s work (particularly repetition and liminality), and identifying Ntozake Shange as an important predecessor, Pearce places tucker green within ‘a tradition of African American artists and activists who have leveraged black rage as a creative and consciousness-raising force’, arguing that *hang* “‘animates” a *transatlantic* “black political collectivity” (Colbert 2016, p. 338) that operates through US/UK networks of political identification and influence consolidated since the post-war period. In a statement that anticipates tucker green’s *ear for eye*, Pearce describes *hang* as ‘a transatlantic and transhistorical meditation on racism, gender and criminal (in)justice’, a work of twenty-first-century black British drama which testifies to the longevity and complexity of black diasporic identity and solidarity. For Pearce, ‘the play empathetically speaks to—calls and responds to—black diasporic dramatic traditions while affirming black women’s experiences and, to quote the political slogan, emphasizing that “Black Lives Matter”’.

In Chapter 3—“‘What about the burn their bra bitches?’: debbie tucker green as the Willfully Emotional Subject’—Trish Reid considers *born bad* (2003), *hang*, *stoning mary*, *random* and (briefly) *a profoundly affectionate, passionate devotion to someone (-noun)* in her framing of tucker green’s work as an example of ‘willfulness’, the American spelling deliberately retained so as (after Ahmed 2014) to keep the word ‘will’ prominently in view. For Reid, tucker green’s willfulness is discernible in the presence of ‘anger, defiance, irrationality, obstinacy and self-love’ and these are interpreted as ‘forms of resistance’ which ‘underwrite the work’s affective and political power’. In addition to the subject matter, action and characterization, willfulness is also present in tucker green’s experimental dramatic form: a linguistic unruliness—equally poetic and political—contributes to ‘a larger moral and affective landscape that works to expose the operations of power’. Strong emotion—the underpinning force of tucker green’s willfulness—is understood by Reid to pose an important feminist departure from the privileging of reason: ‘the emotions of the oppressed are often helpful rather than inimical to acquiring knowledge’. Reid locates willfulness not just in tucker green’s dramaturgy but also as a mode of self-presentation: that tucker green seldom gives interviews, spells her name and play titles in lower case letters and (until recently) rarely grants permission for subsequent productions of her plays, collectively constitutes a refusal to perform the kind of geniality, graciousness or gratitude expected from (black, female) playwrights. tucker green’s lack of public disclosure—combined with the obstreperousness of her drama—produces ‘a kind of willful practice’ as it ‘exposes uncomfortable connections between the subjective and the social, the emotional and the political’.

Chapter 4 is the first of two co-authored chapters in the collection, the act of co-authorship in this example an echo of the duologue that provides the essay’s theoretical framework. Siân Adishesiah and Jacqueline Bolton’s ‘debbie tucker green and (the Dialectics of) Dispossession: Reframing the Ethical Encounter’ engages with Judith Butler and Athena Athanasiou’s rich interchange, *Dispossession: The Performative in the Political* (2013), to assist them in rethinking the ethical encounter in tucker green’s *dirty butterfly* and *hang*. Butler and Athanasiou articulate dispossession in two senses: ‘as the material and lived experiences of marginalized subjects’ and ‘as the performative refutation of concepts of personhood which reify the unitary sovereign subject and its propriety’. The challenge in this political moment, as Butler writes, is to find ‘ethical

and political ways of objecting to forcible and coercive dispossession that do not depend upon a valorization of possessive individualism' (Butler and Athanasiou 2013, p. 7). In their chapter, Adiseshiah and Bolton trace this double sense of dispossession in tucker green's drama, in which, they argue, 'the violence of material, physical and psychological dispossession is permanently centralized' but there is 'simultaneously a refusal to account for it in terms of a liberal ethics of care' itself premised on possessive individualism. In a marked divergence from a scholarly consensus that interprets the drama as providing edifying ethical experiences for spectators, Adiseshiah and Bolton instead suggest that tucker green's plays 'not only withhold a straightforward ethical encounter but make such a withholding a key way through which the political power of the play is expressed'. The chapter considers there to be 'a dialectical movement between the discursive mediation of violent dispossession and victim-protagonists whose self-possession is (always) in question', a process that invites audiences 'to think/feel the violence of this negation'. Their final conclusion is that this 'radical withholding of resolution—ontological, ethical or political'—creates, ultimately, an 'aggressive, but energizing demand for a different form of relationality'.

Chapter 5 is Harry Derbyshire and Loveday Hodson's 'Engaging with Human Rights: *truth and reconciliation and hang*', an analysis that combines the respective expertise of a theatre and a law scholar in its framing of these plays in relation to human rights. Their argument is that tucker green's plays move beyond educating audiences of the facts of injustices to stage 'complex ethical questions that stem from the specific and subjective experience of those affected', this encounter encouraging audiences 'towards a deeper understanding of their individual and collective responsibilities in an often unjust world'. More particularly, Derbyshire and Hodson argue, tucker green's plays engender an awareness among spectators of not only the characters' but also their own location in the 'axes of power'—an awareness that in turn encourages empathy and understanding of human rights issues. While this chapter is substantively different from the ideas in Chapter 4, one area of convergence is around the figures of the victim and perpetrator. Essential to the discourse of human rights—but most often framed in a static, binaristic passive/innocent and active/guilty opposition in this institutional discourse—the figures of the victim and perpetrator are revised in tucker green's work. Spectators 'engage with the subjective experience of victims of violence while problematizing habitual modes of

response to perpetrators'. Drawing on Hannah Arendt, Derbyshire and Hodson advance an evaluation of what they see as tucker green's 'refusal to demonize' the latter, while at the same time emphasizing the work's centralizing of strong, eloquent and active victims. In the alignment of spectators with the particularity of characters' positions in relation to axes of power, spectators thus undergo a process of 'resubjectivization' which produces an awareness of self in relation to other identities. As such, *truth and reconciliation* and *hang* induce the embracing of 'new, more self-reflective, subject positions which encourage the acknowledgement of individual and collective responsibility for human rights abuses'.

Chapter 6, Lynette Goddard's "I'm a black woman. I write black characters": Black Mothers, the Police, and Social Justice in *random* and *hang*' centralizes race in tucker green's plays by focusing on black mothers, an identity that reoccurs in several of her plays. Doreen Lawrence—mother of black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, who was victim of a racist murder in London in 1993—forms an important figure for contextualizing the writing, characterization and performances of tucker green's black mothers. As well as the stage play *random*, Goddard analyses the television version (Channel 4, 2011), also directed by tucker green, and identifies several parallels between these two versions and the Stephen Lawrence case: 'tucker green's focus on the mother and family of a black teenager facing the police is evidence of a play that is firmly rendered through a black rhetoric for those who recognize it'. Similarly, *hang*'s connection to the Lawrences is particularly strong in the performance of Marianne Jean-Baptiste who played both the character 'Three' in the Royal Court production of *hang* and Doreen Lawrence in the television drama *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* (ITV, 1999). For Goddard, this explicit referencing of a racist murder and subsequent blunderings and mishandlings of the police (the Macpherson report, conducted after the murder of Stephen Lawrence, found the police to be institutionally racist) registers 'specific black experiences' which extend 'beyond the de-raced or post-racial approaches of some analyses of tucker green's work to ground interpretations within race-aware narratives that link the texts to (potential) contexts and highlight the social, political and emotional impact of the plays'.

Lucy Tyler's "Almost, but not quite": Reading debbie tucker green's Dramaturgy inside British Playwriting Studies' directs our attention to the pedagogy of teaching playwriting within the academy. In Chapter 7, Tyler observes an 'incompatibility' between the plays of tucker green and the

'dramaturgical reading practices' advanced by existing pedagogical texts on playwriting which 'provide theoretical explorations of the structural and aesthetic components of Western dramatic form'. Focusing primarily on Alan Ayckbourn's *The Crafty Art of Playmaking* (2004), Tim Fountain's *So You Want to Be a Playwright?* (2007), David Edgar's *How Plays Work* (2009) and Steve Waters's *The Secret Life of Plays* (2010), Tyler demonstrates that 'by primarily citing plays from the history of European and British drama' (the works of Chekhov, Ibsen, Shaw and Strindberg, for instance) these playwriting guides 'produce a dominant discourse that defines the idea of a well-made play in relation to Aristotelian dramaturgy and the parameters of the naturalist and realist aesthetic'. Her chapter reads tucker green's work against this critical and pedagogical literature, advancing a 'counter-discursive' approach drawn from postcolonial studies and, in particular, Homi K. Bhabha's concept of 'hybridity'. Focusing her analysis specifically on discussions of structure, language and representation within playwriting studies, Tyler argues that tucker green's writing offers 'a hybrid postcolonial dramaturgy—a composite of the dramatic models advanced in these playwriting guides *and* transnational black aesthetics that are not explored in this tradition'. Tyler concludes her chapter by providing 'a counter-discursive reading' of two of tucker green's plays: *trade* and *generations*, demonstrating that this hybrid postcolonial dramaturgy allows tucker green 'to explore the politics of race in ways that would not be possible from within the confines of hegemonic dramatic models referenced in and produced by playwriting guides'.

Elaine Aston's 'Yarns and Yearnings: Story-Layering, Signifyin', and debbie tucker green's *Black Feminist Anger*' closes the first part of the collection. In some ways, Chapter 8 applies to tucker green's work the hybridity of playwriting approaches that Tyler in Chapter 7 claims is part of tucker green's distinctive aesthetic. In an echo of many of tucker green's plays, Aston employs a three-part structure, taking *dirty butterfly*, *born bad*, *trade*, *stoning mary* and *nut* as her case studies. The first section focuses on dramatic form and, informed by Tricia Rose's study of rap and black culture, *Black Noise* (1994), Aston observes that it is 'the story-layering in tucker green's work that invites her audiences to knot together the narrative threads'. The second section concentrates on tucker green's use of language and here Aston is influenced by Henry Louis Gates Jr.—in particular what he terms 'black Signifyin' practices', which Aston reads as tucker green's 'eschewal of standard English usage and styling of the vernacular that signifies a black-cultural difference'.

This, the chapter argues, is a helpful way to understand the significance of tucker green's 'braided form and demotic-poetic style of talking'. The third and final section engages with María Lugones' reflections on women and what she describes as 'hard-to-handle anger' (2003, pp. 103–118), where orders of anger can be both directed at oppressors but also circulate destructively within oppressed communities. Together these three parts perform the weaving and braiding that Aston sees as central to tucker green's art: 'tucker green creates flows of narrative and verbal energy: deploys circular, layered stories and linguistic rhythms that can repeat, rupture, and repeat'. In an echo of both Pearce and Reid, Aston observes tucker green's angry black feminist aesthetic as having the ability to convey 'urgently felt [...] political anger'.

Maggie Inchley's 'sticking in the throat/keyword bitch: aesthetic discharge in debbie tucker green's *stoning mary* and *hang*' is the title of Chapter 9 and the first essay in 'Part II: Affective Encounters'. Influenced by Sara Ahmed's work on affect and Raymond Williams' seminal work, *Keywords* (1976), Inchley traces the affective power of tucker green's language which 'carries material histories of pain'. Audiences, she contends, 'undergo aesthetic experiences that "stick in the throat"—a discomfort that disturbs the aesthetic of pleasure with which otherwise voracious audiences might swallow her work'. Inchley explores what she terms the 'unpalatability of tucker green's aesthetic offering' in relation to *stoning mary* and *hang*, providing readings of the plays that draw attention to the affects of an 'aesthetic discharge' understood as 'both a hurtful action, and a remainder to be carried—a burden or responsibility that sticks'. A particularly striking application of this is an extended discussion of the famous 'bitches' speech in *stoning mary*, where, as part of her reading, Inchley explains the etymology of 'bitch' and discusses the significance of the name 'Mary'. The chapter pays a similar assiduous attention to the language in *hang*, which it sees as 'tortured carefully, precisely and lovingly'; it is 'a language which insists on the irresolvable quality of pain, and whose alliterative patterning expresses the cyclicity and persistence through time of the consequences of violence for its victims'. Like Aston, Inchley emphasizes tucker green's language as 'layered with material histories', a language that aligns spectators with insights into the experiences from which it has originated. In a similar appraisal to that reached by Adiseshiah and Bolton, Inchley concludes that 'the unpalatability of [tucker green's linguistic discharges] demands a structural response that goes beyond an expression of empathy either from other characters or from individual audience members'.

Musical tropes set the context for David Ian Rabey's discussion of tucker green's radio drama *lament* (2016), *hang* and *a profoundly affectionate, passionate devotion to someone (-noun)* in Chapter 10, 'Jumping to (and Away from) Conclusions: Rhythm and Temporality in debbie tucker green's Drama'. Developing existing observations in tucker green scholarship regarding the lyricism of tucker green's writing, Rabey focuses on 'rhythm as a crucial factor in her plays: not as metrical standardization demanding unification and/or unison but as an active contrapuntal complexity and agency avoiding predictability'. Applying ideas from Eilon Morris's *Rhythm in Acting and Performance* (2017) to tucker green's work, Rabey illuminates the various workings of rhythm and temporality in performance. He isolates in particular 'specific[s] of physical detail' (the shake of Three's hand in *hang*); rhythmic deployment of 'active silences' (an idea Elisabeth Massana develops in Chapter 13); and rhythm as 'an intensity'—what Morris describes as 'a charged quality of relationship between the actor's intentions and their environment' (Morris 2017, p. 69), and which Rabey perceives in the 'irregular rhythms' of characters who refuse to abide by externally imposed tempos (Morris 2017, p. 203). Rabey also reads rhythm as both aesthetic and theme in *lament*, a 'quartet of variations' that traces 'how an intimate knowledge of another's rhythms (of self-presentation, expressive emotion, reaction, conciliation, separation) can generate impatience and pre-emptive anticipatory challenges, which in turn generate further resentments'. Analysing these plays through structures of rhythm and temporality, Rabey offers an alternative to biographical character studies, citing tucker green's 'rhythmic (and political) vitality as a writer and director' in her careful specification of 'causal connections between what is personally experienced and the external social world'.

Chapter 11, Lea Sawyers's 'Trading Voice and Voicing Trades: Musicality in debbie tucker green's *trade*' complements Rabey's focus on rhythm and temporality by deploying 'musicality' as 'an epistemological tool to uncover mechanisms of meaning-making' beyond Western logocentric signifying practices. In her analysis of the intricate 'vocal arrangements' ('the distribution of the actors' voices and the orchestration of the characters' speech') of tucker green's *trade*, Sawyers combines David Roesner's work on musicality in theatre with studies by Edward Kamau Brathwaite on Caribbean oral traditions, Martin Munro on rhythm and sound 'as primary modes of Caribbean agency and expressions of subjectivity', and Samuel A. Floyd on call-and-response to argue that 'the

use of voice in *trade* performs, articulates and interrogates the tensions between male and female, black and white, Western and Other, local and global, “here” and “there” in ways that productively resonate with the play’s themes. Regarding voice as simultaneously ‘a physical manifestation of the body [...] a support for language and an expression of subjectivity’, Sawyers analyses what she describes as the ‘rhizomatic system’ of linguistic/acoustic motifs laced throughout the text and explores ‘polyvocality’ as produced by ‘choric voicing, the performance of call-and-response and [actor/character] ventriloquism’. Sawyers’s blending of theoretical frameworks drawn from musicology, performance, and studies in Caribbean identity and culture (in particular Gladys M. Francis’s work on Caribbean women writers) structures a reading of *trade* that, in a manner similar to Rabey, reveals a model of characterization underpinned by an experience of subjectivity as ‘fluid and relational’, characterized by a ‘constitutive ability to resonate with, relay to and relate to the Other’.

Continuing these discussions of sound and subjectivity, in Chapter 12 Deirdre Osborne’s “‘Hearing Voices” and Performing the Mind in debbie tucker green’s Dramatic-Poetics’ also attends to the ‘dissonant ways in which sound relates to meaning’ in the playwright’s work. Osborne begins by introducing Charles Bernstein’s contrast between an *aurality* which emphasizes ‘the sounding of the writing’ and *orality* with ‘its emphasis on breath, voice and speech’ (1998, p. 13) in order to highlight the performativity of tucker green’s language as encountered both on the page in reading or on the stage in live performance. Osborne’s exploration of ‘performing the mind’ in the unpublished work *Two Women* as well as *dirty butterfly*, *stoning mary* and *nut*, also presses at the edges of understandings of ‘character’. In these plays, Osborne suggests, tucker green ‘refines her dramatic strategy for staging her characters’ minds as physicalized externalizations’: the mind, in Osborne’s words, ‘becomes sounded, a character, the conduit for what we hear (or read) [as well as] for what we see’. This technique, Osborne argues, possesses political significance as it ‘provokes a theatricalized dismantling of the totalizing limits of Cartesian mind–body duality, by which black people’s subjectivity has been oppressively constructed as primarily corporeal’. Indeed, Osborne’s chapter is framed by ‘three socio-cultural acknowledgements’ that she contends are ‘requisite for examining tucker green’s creative impact’. These emphasize ‘the considerable influences of post-war Caribbean poetic heritage, the ongoing after-shock of colonization as being crucial to conceptions of contemporary British culture, and the “right to opacity”’ (Glissant 1997),

the latter of which Osborne locates in tucker green's resistance to participate in public discourse about, or provide explanatory frameworks for, her work. tucker green's aesthetic, Osborne concludes, centres black people's perspectives in ways 'conducive to disabling the application of generalizing, socio-cultural and critical assumptions'. By speaking to a 'collective experience of the consequences of the British Empire's aftermath and the vast inequalities caused by its legacy' tucker green's drama embeds any particular story told within these broader socio-cultural processes.

Chapter 13 is Elisabeth Massana's 'Cartographies of Silence in debbie tucker green's *truth and reconciliation*', the first clause of the title referencing Adrienne Rich's 1975 poem 'Cartographies of Silence' which Massana utilizes as a framework for analysing the conspicuous pervasiveness of silences in tucker green's *truth and reconciliation*. As well as Rich's poem, the chapter is also informed by Rich's *Arts of the Possible* (2001) and Aimee Carrillo Rowe and Sheena Malhotra's work on silence and feminism. Charting the ways in which silence can be a source of strength or liberation and not just of passivity, the central claim of this chapter is that silences in tucker green's work are 'ambivalent and nuanced sites of ethical articulation that can be simultaneously oppressive and liberating'. Influenced by Martin Middeke, Massana treats tucker green's silences as 'ethical spaces of unrest'; '[t]hrough a mobilization of silences' *truth and reconciliation* 'opens up alternative spaces for the spectators—namely spaces of in-between-ness—whose work might be to decode the silences embedded in the text/performance, and, most importantly, bear the "unrest" caused by certain silences'. The chapter moves on to engage with the work of Catalan philosopher Marina Garcés and her notion of 'unfinished histories'. For Garcés, 'unfinishing' denotes what Massana describes as 'the emotional labour necessary to unpack official history, [this] usually carried out by those more vulnerable'. For Massana, *truth and reconciliation* 'invites us to unfinish the official version of history by making us revisit the consequences of racial discrimination and religious wars'. Importantly, it is not the oppressed who carry the burden of this 'dissassembling' but the more prosperous, predominantly white audiences who frequent the Royal Court. The project of 'unfinishing' potentially becomes 'a gesture of radical change', encouraging audiences to reflect on their social obligations towards these historical narratives and 'push[ing] [them] towards a fuller realization of [their] ethico-political selves'.

The fourteenth and final essay in the collection, Sam Haddow's 'debbie tucker green and the Work of Mourning', continues this meditation on silence. Haddow frames his discussion of tucker green's theatre through Derrida's theorizing in *The Politics of Friendship* (2005) of the 'universal singularity' of grief—a singularity which, despite being universally experienced, transcends all notions of the universal because no one manifestation of grief is reducible to another'. Derrida leads us to 'the work of mourning' by drawing attention to the 'intersections of an absolute personal singularity and the conditions of public address'. This 'tension between singularity and articulation, and the incessant deferral of silence in order to delay its victory' forms the crux of what Haddow terms 'a hermeneutics of grief and mourning' which he reads in four of tucker green's plays: *hang*, *stoning mary*, *random* and *truth and reconciliation*. By attending to these hermeneutics—which Haddow further parses into the Derridean preoccupations of 'rehearsal', 'trace', 'silence' and 'ghosts'—we can, he suggests, more precisely appreciate the ways in which we undertake 'to translate the agonizing, impossible grief saturating these plays into works of mourning that are then manifested within our own contexts, and spheres of interpretation'. In facing and interpreting texts 'replete with characters whose experiences place them outside of the capacities of articulation but who speak anyway', a hermeneutics of grief and mourning can help 'audiences of the future [...] try to make sense of grief in order to remake a world that we can inhabit'.

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The publication of this collection follows the first wave of significant revivals of tucker green's work. In May 2018, Chichester Festival Theatre produced a double bill of tucker green's *random* and *generations* directed by Tinuke Craig and in September 2017, *hang* received its regional premiere at The Other Room, Cardiff, in a production directed by Izzy Rabey. Indeed, this collection benefits from the inclusion of Chapter 15, an interview with Rabey, whose insights speak eloquently to many of the themes in this volume. These themes also reappear in tucker green's extraordinary work *ear for eye*. At 135 pages long, and with a running time of two hours ten minutes, *ear for eye* is tucker green's longest play by a notable margin, its considerable size reflecting its politico-aesthetic ambition. The increase in length of work and size of cast—sixteen actors, of which fifteen were actors of colour—provided an appropriately large canvas for this monumental, state-of-the-nation work

(or, more accurately, 'state-of-the-nations', as the play's reach was transatlantic). *ear for eye* arrived at a crucial moment in black struggle and feminist politics. The #blacklivesmatter movement, established in 2013 by Patrisse Kahn-Cullors, Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi, constitutes 'an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise' (<https://blacklivesmatter.com/about/herstory/>). The #MeToo hashtag that went viral on Twitter in October 2017 was first established in 2006 by Tarana Burke to 'help survivors of sexual violence, particularly Black women and girls, and other young women of color from low wealth communities, find pathways to healing' (<https://metoomvmt.org/about/>). The elections of Donald Trump in 2016, and far-right racists Matteo Salvini (deputy prime minister of Italy since June 2018) and Jair Bolsonaro (president of Brazil since October 2018) combine with the anti-immigrant politics of 'Brexit Britain' to form the social and political scene of toxicity in which tucker green's plays intervene.

tucker green's ability to penetrate the socio-political textures of the now in such dramaturgically invigorating and distinctive ways positions her as one of the most significant playwrights in contemporary times. We hope that this volume pays due tribute to her astonishing body of work, and establishes the wider importance of her drama for theatre studies, contemporary feminisms, critical race studies and political critique more broadly. This collection intends both to synthesize tendencies in tucker green scholarship and open up fresh lines of inquiry, providing a dynamic new framework for appreciating both past and future work. Progress may be, as Young Adult claims in *ear for eye*, 'a slow bitch with a wandering mind that drags her bare feet' (p. 49)—but the interventions of tucker green's remarkable dramaturgies carry with them the latency of transformative change. After all, as Young Adult continues: '[c]hange ain't waitin on no permission/no one's permissions' (p. 49).

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