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Questioning Narrative Authenticity in Kay Adshead's *The Bogus Woman*
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The recent turn towards documentary political theatre in Britain and internationally signals a dramatic preoccupation with people and events that are not simply reflective of, but directly drawn from, reality. Mandated by transcripts, textual sources and oral testimonies, documentary drama has come to dominate the theatrical landscape in recent years.¹ Within this docudramatic context, verbatim theatre, which is characterised by the word-for-word transposition of testimony into a theatre event, has become increasingly prominent. Often investigating contemporary political controversies, such as the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, verbatim plays work with testimony that has been acquired through interviews or legal tribunals, which is edited for presentation on the stage. Vocal advocates of documentary drama, and its capacity to re-energise political theatre in the post 'in-yer-face' age, are the theatre critic Michael Billington, and British playwright David Hare, who has himself written a number of docudramatic plays.² The former has long been a proponent of docudrama, arguing that the series of plays re-enacting high-profile tribunals at the Tricycle theatre in London serve to highlight 'the importance of establishing fact' while demonstrating that 'documentary drama can be aesthetically exciting as well as crucially informative'.³ Hare responds to criticism of documentary theatre in a note in the play text of Robin Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005), which dramatises a series of interviews with people who have been involved in terrorism. Hare poses the question: 'What could be more bracing or healthy than occasionally to offer authentic news of overlooked thought and feeling? Isn't it the noblest function of democracy to give a voice to a voiceless?'⁴ As these quotations demonstrate, discourses of authenticity are central to discussions of docudrama.

Criticism of these developments in political theatre is both aesthetic and ethical. In privileging historical accuracy over dramatic interpretation, documentary theatre often fails to

account for the ambiguity of its narrative sources and editorial processes. Stephen Bottoms highlights these concerns, arguing that the use of the word ‘verbatim’ ‘fetishize[s] the notion that we are getting things “word-for-word”’.⁵ Bottoms laments the lack of self-reflexivity in much documentary theatre, suggesting that such plays are deceptive as they do not acknowledge their dual and ambiguous status as both ‘document’ and ‘play’. Implicit in Bottoms’s critique is a problematisation of an uncritical acceptance of the secure epistemological status of source material. As Carol Martin notes, documentary theatre typically presents its texts and performances ‘not just as *a* version of what happened but *the* version of what happened’, thereby refusing to acknowledge the impact of editing and performance on the texts with which they work.⁶ Bottoms proceeds to question whether the recent wave of docudrama, mainly concerned with aspects of a post-9/11 world and George Bush and Tony Blair’s ‘war on terror’, emerges from the assumption that dramatic fiction cannot adequately respond to the current global political climate. I would argue that this question can be productively applied to representations of asylum seekers and refugees on the stage, whose experiences pose a challenge for cultural practitioners; not the least of which is the authority to re-imagine traumatic experiences dramatically.

Partly as a result of this perceived inexpressibility, and corresponding lack of authority to narrate, recent theatre of asylum in both Britain and internationally has also tended to ‘fetishize’ the idea of word-for-word by validating its dramatic representations with oral and written testimonies. Thus, Australian plays such as Ros Horin’s *Through the Wire* (2004) and *Citizen X* (2003) by Don Mamouney are based on testimonial sources and Sonja Linden’s *Asylum Monologues*, launched in London in 2006, presents first-hand accounts of the British asylum system voiced by actors. While the narratives in *Asylum Monologues* remain the same, the format is franchised to different groups of actors who continue to visit schools and communities, promoting rights for refugees and asylum seekers. Linden’s

primary concern is to act as an 'advocate' by both giving voice to, and representing, those who cannot do so themselves.⁷ Yet these aims rest uneasily side by side and her project is open to questions similar to those outlined by Bottoms above. A perceived lack of self-reflexivity over the technology of representation potentially undermines the truth claims of the theatre event. Of course, with this project, Linden's main concern is political transformation not theatrical innovation. Nonetheless, *Asylum Monologues* usefully illuminates the strategic use of a validating documentary base in contemporary theatre of asylum.

Operating both within and against this docudramatic mode, Kay Adshead's play *The Bogus Woman* (2001) presents a vigorous critique of the asylum system in the UK through self-consciously dramatic means. Indeed, by harnessing the narrative capacities of dramatic representation in addressing the intricacies of the often traumatic, and always indeterminate, asylum process in Britain, I would argue that Adshead stages a more politically transformative interaction with asylum narratives than can be achieved by the restrictive conventions of docudrama. In this paper I consider how far *The Bogus Woman*, in its negotiation of narrative at the intersection of text, performer and audience, challenges the discourse of authenticity common to both documentary theatre and the British asylum regime.

The tension between dramatic and documentary storytelling forms the basis of Adshead's critique of the British asylum determination process in *The Bogus Woman*, which explores how asylum narratives are troubled by both trauma and a coercive legal process that seeks to uncover a historically accurate version of events. First performed at the Edinburgh Festival in 2000, *The Bogus Woman* tells the story of a young journalist and poet who is forced to seek asylum in Britain after her incendiary writing causes her family, including her newborn baby, to be murdered. The nameless 'Young Woman' is taken into detention as soon

as she arrives in the UK, where she is subjected to further physical and mental abuse. *The Bogus Woman* is a one-woman show in which the actress playing the 'Young Woman' also plays the parts of the multiple characters with whom she interacts including immigration officials, fellow detainees and volunteers. This performance strategy, which multiplies the referents of the singular performing body, figures the fracture that often characterises narratives of traumatic experience and, in doing so, calls into question the possibility of uncovering a verifiable and historically accurate version of events leading to an asylum claim.

The poetic register and complex formal structure of *The Bogus Woman* distance it from the discourses of authenticity that have come to define much documentary theatre, indicating that an exploration of narrative possibility is a key part of Adshead's theatrical inquiry. However, despite the playwright's abandonment of the naturalism that characterises docudrama, her extensive research and use of source materials in writing the play is highlighted in extra-theatrical material such as the programme and the author's note at the front of the play text. This research was seen by many critics as furnishing Adshead with the authority to dramatise the events depicted in *The Bogus Woman*, which take place in existing detention centres and refer to protests that occurred at Campsfield immigration removal centre in 1997.⁸ Some scholarly criticism of *The Bogus Woman* has also focused on its authentic rendering of the asylum regime as it operates in Britain. Discussing the production of the play that took place at the Royal Exchange in Manchester, Elaine Aston notes that its studio setting, and the resulting proximity between actress and audience, was 'important to establishing the young woman's truth-claim' and gave 'authority to the young woman's position as official teller of *true* stories'.⁹ In idealising its truth-telling capacity, Aston positions the verifiability of the Young Woman's story as the primary thematic impulse of *The Bogus Woman*. However, as I will elaborate below, such truth-claims – which underpin

the asylum decision-making process in Britain – are precisely what the play seeks to problematise.¹⁰

The focus on the authenticity of Adshead's play overlooks a fundamental aspect of her critique of the contemporary context of asylum. Rather than engendering the audience's empathy through its claims to truth, *The Bogus Woman* examines and condemns the operation of the British asylum decision-making process, which depends on the verification of the asylum seeker's narrative through textual evidence. In the reading of *The Bogus Woman* that follows, I consider the ways in which the Young Woman's narrative is threatened with effacement both by the traumatic nature of the experiences she describes and by the officialdom represented in the play. Drawing on cultural criticism of the relationship between trauma and narrative, I argue that *The Bogus Woman* foregrounds the challenge of narrating experience through its temporal fragmentation, formal complexity and poetic linguistic register. Yet the play also explores how narrative can be threatened through institutional means. In seeking a verifiable version of events, the asylum determination process enacts a secondary trauma on the Young Woman's narrative and, I suggest, illustrates the link between an empirically driven asylum process and the narrative imperatives of docudrama. Ultimately, what emerges from Adshead's concern with narrative expression is a tension between narrating experience as a means of asserting political agency and the challenges that exist in doing so.

As in most European countries, the right to asylum in Britain is based on the Geneva Convention of 1951 and the 1967 protocol, which outline the legal definition of a refugee to which the asylum seeker must conform if they are to be granted refugee status. In meeting the convention's criteria, an asylum seeker must have a 'well-founded fear of being persecuted'.¹¹ In this context, 'well-founded' is usually interpreted as the requirement of proof or evidence of the persecution from which the refugee is fleeing. Thus, as enshrined in

the convention at least, the contemporary concept of the refugee as developed in Europe is founded upon an accompanying and validating narrative.¹² If the current conception of the right to asylum is based on the refugee's ability to prove the authenticity of their claim, then the credibility of the original asylum narrative becomes pivotal to the juridical structure of the asylum determination process. However, the significance of this asylum narrative (the reasons why the refugee has fled their country) resides not only in its function as a passport to refuge. The voicing of their stories – often of injustice, persecution and torture – can equip refugees with a powerful means of opposing and resisting oppression. It is this duality that Adshead explores in *The Bogus Woman*, in which the Young Woman struggles to regain ownership of her narrative both from the traumatising impact of the events themselves and from institutional appropriation.

The privileging of historical, rather than emotional, accuracy in asylum narratives is problematic because it fails to account for the ways in which narrative is troubled by trauma. In seeking to uncover and express an authentic narrative of asylum, both the asylum determination process and discourses of documentary theatre elide the intricacies of narrativised responses to experience, which reveal a singular and subjective truth. In his book *The Trauma Question*, Roger Luckhurst identifies three converging elements in cultural theory that relate to trauma: the problem of aesthetics 'after Auschwitz'; the aporia of representation in poststructuralism; and the multiple Freudian models of trauma.¹³ Luckhurst explains that the dominant aesthetic theory in the area of trauma reads it as an inability to represent. Emphasising difficulty, rupture and impossibility, Luckhurst characterises trauma as 'anti-narrative' in its shock impact, and argues that it 'issues a challenge to the capacities of narrative knowledge'.¹⁴ As I will explore below, this is precisely the challenge played out in *The Bogus Woman*. The Young Woman's struggle to tell her story exposes the tension between the destabilisation of narrative – through both trauma and institutional coercion –

and the concurrent imperative to verbalise experience coherently as a means of self-determination.

The significance of narrative within the asylum process is, as we saw above, inscribed in the very foundations of the contemporary concept of the refugee. Forced to narrate themselves into a position of legitimacy, the asylum claimant must have a verifiable account of events preceding their arrival, which is presented orally at an initial immigration interview and at all subsequent hearings and appeals. Jan Blommaert describes the process of textualising this original oral asylum claim as a ‘text trajectory’, in which the narrative is first transcribed and then ‘remoulded, remodelled and re-narrated’ by lawyers, welfare workers and immigration officials, all of whom then create summaries, notes and translations.¹⁵ Despite this revisionary process the various documents produced are still ascribed to a single individual’s asylum claim and are perceived as unproblematically representative of the original asylum narrative presented at the initial immigration interview. However, as Adshead’s play chillingly demonstrates, this pursuit of a definitive, narratable experience is often another kind of violence which fails to address the impact that trauma may have on the ability of the asylum seeker to recount his or her experiences.

Early on in *The Bogus Woman*, the Young Woman shares elements of her experiences with the audience as a result of, but not in dialogue with, the questions an immigration officer poses. Addressing the audience members directly, she prepares them with a caveat: ‘I will tell you my story | some bits you won’t believe’ (p. 40). With these words the Young Woman pre-empts an incredulous response and sets the terms for the play’s engagement with narrative credibility. This initial presentation of her story continues to foreground its instability, explicitly referring to the impact of trauma on her memory of events. She warns: ‘Don’t expect dates, | times, | places | or names | [...] | Here and there, a day, a week | goes missing’ (p. 40). The frequent line breaks here, enabled by the poetic register of the play,

figure the fractured narrative the Young Woman is embarking on and draw attention to trauma's disobedience to the unities of time and space. Hinting at the aporia described by Luckhurst, the 'missing' days and weeks connote the temporal disjunction that characterises the play as a whole, which switches abruptly between time frames, refusing to give an explicit sense of time passing. While often the 'days | are like snails' (p. 70), at other times 'the ferocious days | dance' (p. 76). This emphasis on temporal uncertainty that runs throughout *The Bogus Woman* is at odds with the codified and organised knowledge demanded by the asylum determination process.

Throughout her first address to the audience, the Young Woman's narrative is interwoven with stories of her grandparents and ancestors; at one point she expresses a desire to 'write a history | of my people' (p. 39). While such contextualising details are permitted within the intimate audience address in this scene, they are discouraged in the Young Woman's dialogues with immigration officials, which articulate a distinctly different mode of narrativisation and expose her narrative to exploitation:

YOUNG WOMAN AS IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL	You still claim not to know which organisation the 'soldiers'... came from specifically
YOUNG WOMAN	No.
YOUNG WOMAN AS IMMIGRATION OFFICIAL	They <i>were</i> soldiers were they?
YOUNG WOMAN	Yes. I don't know. (p. 14)

In this scene, the Young Woman's narrative becomes a 'claim', a lexical shift that indicates the imbalance of power produced by the element of disbelief expressed by the Official, whose scepticism is marked in the text through italics and inverted commas. However, for the Young Woman there is no extant truth to which she can turn, only her fleeting and traumatic

experience. As Cathy Caruth notes, one of the defining characteristics of trauma is its unavailability to knowledge: ‘the most direct seeing of a violent event may occur as an absolute inability to know it’.¹⁶ Drawing on Freudian models of trauma, Caruth explains that traumatic events are often not fully grasped as they occur, but instead ‘return later in repeated flashbacks, nightmares, and other repetitive phenomena.’¹⁷ As I have noted, the fluid formal structure of *The Bogus Woman*, which refuses to delineate neat divisions between the temporal settings of scenes, seeks to convey the fraught process of shaping traumatic experiences into a coherent narrative and illustrates the random incursion of violent memories. However, more than simply demonstrating the struggle to recall and narrate traumatic events, the Young Woman’s dialogues with officials configure the immigration interview as an additional trauma, in which the attempt to ascertain accurate facts becomes an act of violence.

Such violence finds clearest expression in the play’s central interrogation scene, in which a rationalised epistemology comes into conflict with the Young Woman’s attempts to give an account of events preceding her arrival in Britain. In this scene the Young Woman is in dialogue with a nameless ‘Interrogator’, an appellation which hints at a relationship between the British asylum regime and the dynamics of torture, strengthening Adshead’s critique:

YOUNG WOMAN	They’d stopped shooting
YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR	Really?
YOUNG WOMAN	Yes
YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR	And had the men seen you yet?
YOUNG WOMAN	I...
YOUNG WOMAN AS INTERROGATOR	Yes?

YOUNG WOMAN I...
I don't know (p. 79-80)

In contrast to the first instance of telling, in which she addresses the audience, here the Young Woman appears at a loss for words in response to the closed questions the Interrogator asks. Not only does her interlocutor shed doubt on the narrative's veracity – 'Really?' – but he or she also demands information the Young Woman cannot possibly know, such as, 'Why did they rape you? | and not kill you' (p. 86); a question which subordinates the actions signified by the words 'rape' and 'kill' to the pursuit of an objective truth. The Interrogator's strategy here is both to question the Young Woman's account and to codify the information she gives into a pre-defined framework dictated by legal criteria. The Young Woman's empty responses in this dialogue illustrate a process of effacement, which eventually results in the capitulation of her role in the story-telling process. The Interrogator actually supersedes the Young Woman as author of the narrative: 'How extraordinary. | Why take the trouble | of suddenly bayoneting | someone | when you're in the middle | of spraying bullets | from your rifle.' (p. 79). With this comment the Interrogator not only renders the violence described as banal, but also appropriates the story by seeking to rationalise the actions of the protagonists as a way of casting doubt on the Young Woman's version of events. Making little concession to circumstantial and emotional factors, the interrogative conditions depicted in this scene erode the Young Woman's descriptive capacity and thus have a clear impact on the resulting narrative. In this light the institutional procedures of the asylum system, which seek a singular, historically accurate version of events prove a challenge to narrative expression.

If, as the above excerpts demonstrate, the Young Woman is unable to narrate within the framework of the asylum regime, then she also struggles to do so on her own terms due to the extreme nature of her experiences. As I noted above, the use of unfinished sentences and ellipses figure the exhaustion of the Young Woman's capacity for expression. In her book

The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World Elaine Scarry argues that because the body is anterior to language, corporeal pain is verbally inexpressible. In reference to torture Scarry notes that one of its effects is to efface its own witness by depriving them of the means of narrating their experiences through language: 'Intense pain is also language-destroying: as the content of one's world disintegrates, so the content of one's language disintegrates'.¹⁸ Throughout *The Bogus Woman* the Young Woman is consistently confronted with the challenge of expressing her pain, creating an incarcerating prison of suffering that reflects her material imprisonment in the detention centre. Sheltering with her friends the day after the massacre of her family, the Young Woman notes that 'Tragedy | has opened up | a chasm | between us.' She highlights her wordless response to her experience: 'The music | of pain | is silence | and shame' (p. 29). The 'language-destroying' capacity of violence and suffering is further evidenced when the Young Woman explains that 'sometimes the pictures shiver, | and the voices shriek, | in my head. | sometimes they shred' (p. 40). Again, the 'pictures' of her experiences are mobile and unstable figuring the memorial fractures of trauma. Similarly, the violence implicit in the words 'shiver', 'shriek' and 'shred' indicates emotional rather than historical exactitude, and suggests the violence enacted on her story by the asylum procedure, which counterbalances the alliterated verbs with its own vocabulary of fixity: 'substantiate', 'evidence' and 'claim' (p. 17).

In tension with the challenges of narrating traumatic experience in *The Bogus Woman* is the necessity of attempting to do so; both as a means of protest and to counteract the process of abjection initiated by the enactment of institutional power. Thus, in light of Scarry's insights into the inexpressibility of pain, the act of narrating in Adshead's play becomes a moral and political task designed to re-make the Young Woman's world which has been destroyed. Despite her experiences, the Young Woman remains cognisant of the need to narrate, document and record the abuse she is subject to in detention. After a series of

riots at the Campsfield detention centre where she is imprisoned, the Young Woman explains that, while ‘some will lose their voice | at the injustice of it’ (p. 60), she will document what is occurring: ‘I am writing it down | I am keeping a record’ (p. 64). Yet the Young Woman’s account remains vulnerable to appropriation. The ‘record’ she keeps of events at Campsfield is rewritten by the authorities: ‘We were never denied access to lawyers – | a misunderstanding | it seems, | not locked in – | but confined’ (p. 74). The semantic shift between ‘locked in’ and ‘confined’ illustrates the challenges of uncovering an objective truth through recourse to lexical specificity; as the Young Woman notes, events can turn on ‘one dangerous word’ (p. 37). This attention to the unreliable nature of words negotiates between the political value of accounting for events through narrative and a necessary wariness of elevating documentation as an index of authenticity. The Young Woman’s unrelenting urge to document thus remains faithful to the importance of narrativisation while critiquing its capacity to fix and textualise the truth.

As a poet and journalist, the character of the Young Woman highlights the process by which experience is narrativised and dramatised. This meta-theatricality is integral to *The Bogus Woman*, as demonstrated by its presentational performance mode. The Young Woman addresses the audience directly, a technique that clearly positions the play as an act of dramatic protest against the treatment of asylum seekers in Britain. Towards the end of *The Bogus Woman* the Young Woman dedicates her words to Anele, her lost daughter: ‘I am a poet | why do you smile? | words are hot wax | and this poem-play | is a candle I light | for Anele’ (p. 126). With these words the Young Woman articulates the transformative impact of narrativisation: the ‘poem-play’ is able to elucidate the Young Woman’s experiences through the narrative capacity of words and provide a lasting testament to her mistreatment. Yet, her image of words as ‘hot wax’ also implies that language can be used as an instrument of torture and that, like wax, words are malleable. The moment thus recalls the play’s

preoccupation with the inherent tension between the necessity of narration and its vulnerability to appropriation.

When she is taken to hospital during her hunger strike the Young Woman is subject to verbal abuse from the nurses caring for her. After her recovery, the Young Woman decides to write a letter of complaint against the women:

I eat
a perfect yellow plum
it would bruise
to my thumb
[...]
I wipe my hands
and take a sheet
of creamy paper.
[...]
The words;
so long
locked up,
are
dry and hard,
like
shrivelled nuts.
I roll
them between
thumb and forefinger
in the warm damp
palms of my hand. (p. 53)

Drawing parallels between the plum with which she breaks her hunger strike and the words with which she breaks her silence, the Young Woman articulates her hope for bodily and spiritual renewal through the act of narrativisation. In contrast to the ‘sticky and sweet’ juice of the plum she eats, the words are hard. Yet in the writing and use, they become soft in her ‘warm damp’ hands – the words, like food, are sustenance, strengthening her capacity for protest. The Young Woman’s defiant act here indicates her continuing faith in the power of words to instigate change; a conviction reflected in the political aims of the play itself. Yet, crucially, *The Bogus Woman* conveys its confidence in the process of narrativisation without appealing to the notion of absolute truth. As we have seen, while acknowledging the

necessity of narrative explication, the play exposes how and when the language used to do this is menaced through institutional means, or through the limiting nature of encoding traumatic experience into a verifiable story. For Adshead, then, dramatic representation provides an alternative to the restrictive narrative conditions of the asylum regime and is also able to accommodate the fraught process of expressing pain and trauma. In this light, *The Bogus Woman* diverges from the empirical imperatives of documentary drama because, by highlighting the vulnerability of language to interpretation, editing and elision, the play contests the reliance on refugee testimony in much theatre of asylum. Thus, *The Bogus Woman* not only constitutes a criticism of Britain's treatment of asylum seekers, but also of documentary theatre's obsession with authenticity. Potentially colluding with an asylum regime that seeks a verifiable truth, for Adshead, documentary theatre has only a limited capacity to address the challenges of representing narratives of forced migration. In responding to these limitations, Adshead privileges dramatic interpretation over the pursuit of authenticity by foregrounding narrative inconsistency and pursuing emotional rather than historical accuracy. In doing so, she demonstrates that dramatic representation is able to intervene politically in ongoing debates around forced migration by bearing witness to the asylum experience without conforming to the positivist demands of the adjudication process in its search for a linear, verifiable and authentic narrative of asylum.

Notes

¹ See special edition of *The Drama Review* 'Documentary Theatre', 50:3 (2006); *Verbatim, Verbatim: Techniques in Contemporary Documentary Theatre* eds., Will Hammond and Dan Steward (London: Oberon Books Ltd, 2008); *Political Performances: Theory and Practice*, ed., Susan C. Haedicke et al., (New York: Rodopi, 2009).

² 'in-yer-face' was a term used by Aleks Sierz to describe the use of shocking violence as a strategy of political theatre in the 1990s, see *In-yer-face Theatre: British Drama Today* (London: Faber, 2001). David Hare's docudramatic plays include *Stuff Happens* (2004), which recounts the lead-up to the Iraq war, and *The Permanent Way* (2003) about the privatisation of the British railways.

³ Michael Billington, 'Theatre of War', *The Guardian*, 17 February 2001, p. 4.

⁴ David Hare, '...on factual theatre', in Robin Soans, *Talking to Terrorists* (London: Oberon Books Ltd., 2005), pp. 111-113.

⁵ Stephen Bottoms, 'Putting the Document into Documentary: An Unwelcome Corrective?', *The Drama Review*, 50:3 (2006), 56-68 (p. 59).

⁶ Carol Martin, 'Bodies of Evidence', *The Drama Review* 50:3 (2006), 8-15, (p. 11), [italics added].

⁷ See interview with Sonja Linden in a documentary about the development of the *Asylum Monologues*: <<http://iceandfire.co.uk/index.php/outreach/about-us/>> accessed 01.08.09. Linden has also written two other plays based on asylum seeker testimonies, *I Have Before Me a Remarkable Document Given to Me By a Young Lady From Rwanda* (Eastbourne: Aurora Metro Publications Ltd., 2004) and *Crocodile Seeking Refuge* (Eastbourne: Aurora Metro Publications Ltd., 2005).

⁸ Hunger strikes and riots took place at Campsfield in 1997, since then it has experienced continued unrest, see <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/6449465.stm>> [accessed 2 September 2009]. For reviews of *The Bogus Woman* see Ian Johns, *The Times*, 14 February 2001; Brian Logan, 'The Unkindness of Strangers', *The Guardian*, 10 August 2000, p. 14 and Michael Billington, *The Guardian*, 9 August 2000, p. 14.

⁹ Elaine Aston, 'The "Bogus Woman": Feminism and Asylum Theatre', *Modern Drama*, 46:1 (2003), 5-21, (p. 11-12), [italics in original].

¹⁰ David Farrier includes a reading of *The Bogus Woman* in chapter three of his book *Postcolonial Asylum: Seeking Sanctuary Before the Law* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2011).

¹¹ See the United Nations High Commission for Refugees website, which hosts the text of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees <www.unhcr.org/pages/49da0e466.html> [accessed 9 November 2008].

¹² The idea of an accompanying narrative to claims for asylum is further complicated by the original context in which the convention was conceived. While European refugees created as a result of WWII had recourse to a single narrative of persecution, in contemporary times, each request for asylum relates to a specific and complex set of socio-political circumstances. For a detailed historical analysis of the definition of the refugee see Peter Gatrell *The Making of the Modern Refugee* [forthcoming] (London: Yale University Press).

¹³ Luckhurst refers here to Theodore Adorno's dictum that: 'to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric', *Prisms*, trans., Samuel and Shierry Weber (London: Spearman, 1967), p. 34.

¹⁴ Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 79. See also, Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 1996), Nancy K. Miller and Jason Tougaw [eds.] *Extremities: Trauma, Testimony and Community* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

¹⁵ Jan Blommaert, 'Investigating Narrative Inequality: African Asylum Seekers' Stories in Belgium', *Discourse and Society*, 12:4 (2001), 413-449, (p. 438). The Belgian asylum procedure is similar to that of the UK in relation to the significance of the initial immigration interview; see also Katrijn Maryns, *The Asylum Speaker: Language in the Belgian Asylum Procedure* (Manchester: St Jerome, 2006). For the British context see Anthony Good *Anthropology and Expertise in the Asylum Courts* (Abingdon: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007).

¹⁶ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 91-2.

¹⁷ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 91.

¹⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 35.