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**MANIFESTATIONS OF TRAUMA AND INTEGRATION IN JUDITH
THOMPSON'S WATCHING GLORY DIE**

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Abstract

Trauma represents an everlasting impact of violent incidents that leave indelible scars affecting the victim's mind, psyche, and mental capacities. Judith Thompson is one of the famous Canadian playwrights whose plays portray psychological and mental disorders as manifestations of vehement events and death. In *Watching Glory Die*, she dramatises the dark corners in Canadian prisons and the violent way mental inmates are treated. Gory, the protagonist, goes through a cycle of constant victimisation that destroys her psychological and mental capacities. On the other hand, Thompson presents another character, Gail, a victim and victimiser. The study employs the concepts of traumatic memory and integrated memory of trauma to find out the traumatic effects of imprisonment and injustice.

Keywords: Trauma, Canadian institutionalism, Mental disorders, Victimisation, Integration.

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INTRODUCTION

Watching Glory Die was presented by Canadian Rep Theatre at Vancouver's The Clutch in 2014. It was directed by Ken Gass. In 2015, the play was staged by different Canadian theatres like Mulgrave Road Theatre, Fredericton, and St. John. In 2016, the play was staged internationally in England by Palindrome Productions.

According to Thompson, the play

is inspired by the tragic death of nineteen-year-old Ashley Smith in her isolation cell at Grand Valley Institution for Women in 2007; Smith had been in the Canadian correctional system since she was fourteen years old, and the system that destroyed her continues to destroy other Canadian women (Thompson, 2016).

In 2010, the documentaries about Smith emerged. Thomson was influenced by them (Farfan, 2017, p. 87). She wanted to immortalise the case of Smith to “transcend borders and have a longer and bigger life and be around in thirty years” (p. 93). She believed that Smith's death was a homicide.

The play depicts the suffering of three women: Glory, a mentally-ill and traumatised inmate and her mother Rosellen. The third character is Gail, a representative of Grand Valley guards. All the roles are performed by Thompson, as she believes that “we've all had moments when we are Glory—out of control” and the mother “in all of us—even if we're not mothers, the mother in us” (Farfan, 2017, P. 93). The guards' dehumanising abuse is attributed by Thompson to the institutional protocol, to the elite who prevent the guards from intervening when Glory commits suicide “until she has ceased breathing” (Thompson, 2016, p. 42). Gail is torn between her conscience and duty, yet she criticises the system. Thompson employs the technique of monologue to unfold the characters' inner anxieties.

Traumatic and Integrated Memories

According to Bessel A. van der Kolk (b. 1941) and Onno van der Hart (b. 1941), the trauma leaves everlasting effect on the traumatised's mind and psyche. They believe that traumatic memories are stored as —dissociated from conscious awareness and voluntary control ... fragments of these unintegrated experiences may later manifest recollections or behavioral reenactments (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 427).

Thus, manifestations of trauma can appear as “somatic sensations, behavioral reenactment, nightmares and flashbacks” (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 443). Some of common mechanisms of responses to fear and isolation are self-destruction, self-mutilation, and suicide. These mechanisms help suicidal attempts to increase, especially in the prisons and victims of physical violation (van der Kolk, 1996, p. 189).

While integration has logical role, it is not similar to the traumatic ones that go on in a constant cycle. Integrated memory refers to balance, to an attempt of reuniting (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 431). Integration process is important for the traumatised to transfer the fragmented memories of a traumatic incident into a united, logical narrative part, without accompanying psychological or mental disorders. When an individual succeeds to achieve integration, he/she does not need similar environment to narrate the trauma.

Social ties, hope, thinking of future, sense of safety and emotional attachment represent the “protection against feelings of helplessness and meaninglessness” in the traumatised’s mind (McFarlane & van der Kolk, 1996, p. 24). Some activities such as “play and exploration, artistic and creative pursuits, and some form of involvement with others” help the traumatised to overcome “issues of passivity and helplessness” (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p. 18).

Injustice and Corruption of Canadian Institutionalism

Brendan Healy and Monica Esteves are directors who assert that Canadian theatre has a distinguished role in investigating the “systems of injustice and violence” (*Black Lives Matter / Canadian Stage*, n.d.). Throughout the play, Thompson scrutinises the despicable system of Grand Valley whereby a victim like Glory is destined to suffer accumulated abuse and oppression. Through her monologues, Rosellen mentions the charges that led her daughter Glory to confinement, and frames Grand Valley as an epitome of a corrupt system. Rosellen states that Glory is “locked up like an animal since she was fourteen years old” (Thompson, 2016, p. 7). She is sentenced to six months but “has lasted for five years” due to additional “Eight hundred incident reports” (p. 8).

Rosellen compares her daughter’s charges to those of rapists’:

Five hundred “institutional charges.” And what do you think those charges were for? Swiping a pencil, telling a rough guard to eff off, maybe even spitting.

Oh you might be thinking but surely, surely she musta done something more serious to rack up all them charges, in this country even rapists get out after a year or two for good behaviour (Thompson, 2016, p. 8)

Glory's abnormality exacerbates her confinement. Rosellen asserts that the guards "don't like her, because she doesn't say, 'Yes sir no sir three bags full sir,' because she is fearless. My Glory fearless" (p. 9).

Before transforming Glory into the federal penitentiary, the guards "used to reassure" Rosellen of how they "cared about" Glory (Thompson, 2016, p. 9). Now, they "can't tell" Rosellen "anything. Because she's over eighteen. Because of the confidentiality" (p. 9). Rosellen is no longer permitted to

visit her, hardly at all for this last YEAR. Well, they keep movin' her around—seventeen times in the last year—three times I have bought and paid for plane tickets only to be informed that she was no longer at that institution. And do you think they pay me back? Hah!

Her letters—oh I used to get her letters every day and they used to bring me such joy and also break my heart, because she tried to be so upbeat. With the little smiley faces, and hearts . . . But now, I don't get them at all. Since they took away her paper and her pencils. (p. 24)

The loss of contact aggravates the suffering of both Rosellen and Glory. Gabriele Schwab, a literary scholar, states that "forcible breaking up of families by keeping incommunicado" is one of the "extended forms of torture in prisons and detention camps" (2010, p. 159). Prison conditions may worsen or mitigate the effects on the inmate's family (Condry & Smith, 2018, P. 9). The corrupt system does not pay back Rosellen's tickets, nor afford her the opportunity to meet her daughter. Consequently, she loses her "trust in the system" (Thompson, 2016, p. 24).

Rosellen asserts that Glory "was just an ordinary kid" who "Never wanted to be away from Mom" (29). As she unfolds Glory's happy childhood, Rosellen attributes her daughter's current misery to the corrupt system of Grand Valley. There is a difference between having "a family member locked up in solitary confinement hundreds or even thousands of miles away compared to having a family member in an open prison nearby" (Condry & Smith, 2018, P. 9). Actually, Grand Valley is hundreds of miles away from Rosellen's home. Locked in such distant prison increases Rosellen's suffering due to Glory's solitary confinement:

ROSELLEN crosses towards centre stage, along *GAIL*'s hallway.

There is not an hour goes by where I don't imagine . . .

That I am in that segregation cell.

Inside my daughter.

I see the white walls.

I see the white floor.

The camera.

The little window, the evil eyes looking at me.

I am wearing the shift that she wears.

I am cold.

I know she is cold. (Thompson, 2016, pp. 31-32)

Glory's life is subject to a persistent observation and control.

Glory's Trauma: From Avoidance to Reenactment and Suicide

Mentally-ill inmates naturally assault the staff physically or verbally (James & Glaze, 2006, p. 1). They tend to be very troubled within prisons and psycho-prisons. In its nature, "violence provokes counter-violence" (Diyaiy, 2020, p. 194). In fact, Glory's aggressive behavior results from accumulated abuse. She is a representative of those who reject "to be dictated by others" or submitted to the system rules (Diyaiy and Saleh, 2016, p. 2134). But the staff is always ready to punish her by inflicting different forms of abuse on her.

The mentally-ill inmates are not treated appropriately in Grand Valley. Gail states that "all that psychiatrist does is prescribe some worse-than-useless pill that has them drooling and shitting their pants" (Thompson, 2016, p. 26). The corrupt and unjust system brings Glory into a horrendous milieu. The traumatised person is essentially in need of gaining power and safety in order to pass his/her traumatic experience (van der Kolk, 1996, p. 197). Glory is entrapped in an institution which Gail describes as if "the world turned upside down" (Thompson, 2016, p. 27). She cannot stabilise her damaged psyche and trauma or eliminate hallucinations.

Segregation tends to invigorate negative ideas in the inmate's mind; but the "ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them form consciousness" (Herman, 2015, p. 1). As Glory appears, she has already spent years of her imprisonment, mostly in solitary confinement. Indeed, Glory suffers and searches for avoidance mechanisms so as not to be overwhelmed by past and present distresses. Going through egregious experiences of abuse and neglect, she resorts to the artistic and

literary activities which represent tactics of avoidance. She “*is onstage, drawing with her finger on her cell walls, an elaborate scene. She is writing a poem*” (Thompson, 2016, p. 5). Literary expressions increase potentiality for working through trauma (Onega, 2020, p. 91). Glory’s attempt is a representative tactic employed by the traumatised person to “gain mastery over intrusive recollections” and the present distress (van der Kolk et al., 2001, p. 15).

In solitary confinement, the inmates’ contact is only with the prison staff (Haney, 2020, p. 131). Schwab views torture as a factor turning the “torturer into a sadistic adult who claims sovereignty over the body and its freedom ... It is a practice aimed at the destruction of human dignity, that is, a form of dehumanization” (2010, p. 154). While she holds an absorbent cotton in the “shower,” the guards “get it in their heads that” she is “holding some kind of weapon” (Thompson, 2016, p. 22). The guards, as Glory says, “all pile in with their hockey helmets and that and I tell them, ‘Leave me alone, I want my privacy,’ but they keep after me, (*into megaphone*) ‘Give us the knife’” (p. 22). Schwab asserts that “deprivation of privacy and elimination of toilets are common devices to induce a primordial humiliation and shame” (2010, p. 156).

As the play progresses, Glory is exposed to other abusive practices. She refuses to hand the guards her absorbent cotton and she is threatened:

‘Glory, we are gonna pepper spray you if you don’t give us that item immediately,’ and I am like, ‘Do it, dudes! Go right ahead and blind me if it’ll make you feel better.’

So that’s what they did. They blinded me. For like thirty minutes, and it fu**ing hurt, I couldn’t see nothing.

I still can’t really see.

Did you know pepper spray is from hot peppers? Like the ones they put in Mexican food? (Thompson, 2016, p. 23)

Glory cannot adjust to prison rules. In a report by Human Rights Watch, it is observed that prison torments mentally-ill inmates: “Prison is challenging for everyone, but prisoners with mental disabilities may struggle more than others” to “respond promptly to staff orders” (Fellner, 2023). Pepper spraying is just another form of Glory’s prolonged maltreatment. Indeed, the inmate may be exposed to “all forms of physical and psychic torture” (Onega, 2020, p. 96). Glory unfolds her trauma of torture: “Ever been pepper sprayed? One time they pepper sprayed me nine times in one day” (Thompson, 2016, p. 23). In fact, “the more the contextual stimuli resemble the conditions prevailing at the time of the original storage, the

more retrieval is likely” (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1989, p. 1535). Psychologist Craig Haney, confirms the later devastating effects after the inmates’ initial struggle in their segregation (2020, p. 148). At the beginning, Glory is depicted as a strong person. But her psyche and mental health deteriorate by the current re-victimisation and traumatic experiences.

When Glory succeeds to mitigate internal suffering, she tries to banish external one. She threatens the prison staff, saying:

And you can’t have me you fu**in’ crazy ugly faced perverts you can’t fu**in’ touch me without my consent. I’m reporting you I’m reporting you to God and my crocodile and I’m telling you she is gonna open her big big mouth and her teeth is gonna stab through your head and she is gonna chew you up into tiny little pieces and feed you to her OTHER babies hey wanna wrestle? I could wrestle ya come on in here and . . .

Sound of guards entering.

No, Gail, come on, I was only foolin’ around, I didn’t mean it. Come on, you know I was only . . . No. No . . .

GLORY moves as if she has been spun around to face the wall.

Stop fu**ing squeezing my neck. Stop fu**in’ squeezing my neck—you’re hurting me!! You’re hurtin’ my . . . I can’t fu**in’ breathe (Thompson, 2016, pp. 11-12)

Glory appears “*in a straitjacket and head restraint, sometimes called ‘the wrap.’ She cannot move*”(12). Hence, she manages to escape the dehumanised situation, at least mentally:

Think of something nice, that nice nurse Cindy in Saskatoon said think of something nice when they put you in this fu**in’ wrap and this . . . helmet so your head can’t even move, when they do this to ya, just daydream, your dreams’ll keep ya goin’, your dreams my dreams my dreams . . . my . . . oh yah, yah (Thompson, 2016, p. 12)

Glory wants to decrease the psychological and mental detriments of torture by remembering happy stories:

The bus goin’ to the war museum in Ottawa and it was winter and so much snow but it had melted and then frozen up so it was like a fairyland outside the windows, and so the whole grade nine and ten is goin’ and we are all packed in the bus but no one it sittin’ beside me, but I like my own company and I’m imagining about the story of the Snow Queen, and how I could be her, like, waving a giant icicle and ah

freezing everyone I don't like—turn 'em into statues. Ice statues that wouldn't never melt unless I said . . .

. . . and then HE gets on the bus later, eh, 'cause he lives in the country and he looks around and he stands there for a second and then . . . sits beside me. (Thomson, 2016, p. 12)

The constant and repeated employment “of dissociation as a way of coping with stress interferes with the capability to fully attend to life's challenges” (van der Kolk, 1996, p. 252). The traumatised tackles the new distresses via dissociative tactics. Glory's dreams of childhood memories and her friend Ravi who “did listen to” her “music” (Thompson, 2016, p. 13) are meant to mitigate the damage. She struggles to weaken both the effects of past traumas and the present re-traumatisation.

The happy memories and dreams are the only peaceful images Glory possesses in her mind. Therefore, she says that the guards “can't ever take that away—” by torture (Thompson, 2016, p. 13). Her stories are meant as coping mechanisms, as strategies to decrease pain. She threatens the staff again:

You can put me in chains and this crazy wrap and this fu**in' hockey helmet you can take my pillow you can take my blanket so I'm fu**ing freezing all the time you can take my paper and crayons and my Harry Potter and you can even take my mind but you can't take my memories. You can't take my memories. (p. 13)

She shows some resistance not to past traumas, but to her hallucinations: “I still am . . . for Ravi, and for my mom. 'Cause guess what? Fu** you, mother crocodile . . . WHOOO! I'm goin' home” (p. 29). It is her last hope to think of getting out of the institution to go home. Again, without hope or talking, she would lose her sense of being.

Gail reveals the frivolous rules of the dehumanising institutionalism:

But when she was choking herself before, we hadda be so careful when we went in, right?

Right? Like if I go in and stop her from hurting herself, like, I grab her hand, I might well be charged with assault myself—others have been. I'm telling you, with these rules of theirs? They got us tied up tight and fu**in' gasping for breath. (Thompson, 2016, p. 16)

Institutional violence includes practices of “humiliation, degradation, neglect, and abuse inflicted upon institutional residents, regardless of intention or circumstances” (Rossiter & Rinaldi, 2009, p. 3). The system dehumanises guards and inmates alike.

Moreover, the institutional attitude in different prisons is “antithetical to—indeed hostile to—accommodating the needs of prisoners with mental disabilities” (Fellner, 2023).

In a solitary confinement, there is no direct contact. Glory talks to her friend, Renee, through the walls: “She’s my best friend in the whole world,” and she “won’t ever get out” (Thompson, 2016, p. 19). But Renee never appears throughout the play. Glory speaks about her confidently:

She never hurt nobody.

Alls she did is

1. Be Indian.

2. Try to escape, can you blame her?

And 3. Take hostages.

Okay, that sounds serious but I KNOW Renee, and she would never have hurt nobody.

She just wanted them to see how desperate she was.

She wanted them to LISTEN. (PP. 19-20)

There are two interpretations of Glory’s speech; one is overt and explicit, the other is covert and implicit. Overtly, Thompson offers additional depiction of victimisation through Renee’s character due to a racist system. Thus, Renee’s victimisation enhances Thompson’s direct criticism of institutional violence. Covertly, as a traumatised person, Glory avoids speaking directly about her traumatic experience. Van der Kolk and McFarlane’s studies assure Glory’s ability to organise her world and activities avoiding emotions related to her trauma. At the beginning, she employs more powerful avoidance by literary and artistic activities. Yet, she still remembers her traumatic past. A traumatised person responds with repugnance to the triggered trauma (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 447). Glory’s repugnance compels her to employ various tactics to avoid trauma.

Glory is driven to the reenactment of traumatic past. While the previous reference to trauma is implicated indirectly by talking to Renee’s victimisation, the direct reenactment of trauma makes it clear how the change in Glory’s psyche occurs:

I wonder if bein’ tasered jumbles up your brains. Ravi won’t like me if I’ve gone stupid. When they were transferring me from Joliet to the private airplane they got for me they tasered the shit outta me. I was like “please don’t taser me—I’m not gonna DO anything, come on! I’m scared!”

her, and that's another sixty days. And half of me thinks all those charges might be why she started that crazy choking of herself before. Thank Christ she hasn't done it in a while. (PP. 15-16)

Van der Kolk (1997) believes that self-destruction and self-mutilation are responses to fear and isolation that help suicidal attempts to increase. He says that "Episodes of self-mutilation often follow feelings of disappointment or abandonment" (p. 189). Glory has hope and happy memories. Losing one of them—hope or memories—means desperation.

The traumatised person keeps performing disengagement activities to avert despair. Based on van der Kolk and McFarlane's assumption, Glory has a hope of a new life. Thinking about future positively helps to fight the detriments of confinement. Addressing Gail, Glory shows her constant pursuit for art and acting:

Hey, Gail, how are you today? You are looking pretty no I mean it, well pretty for an old lady only kiddin', will ya loan me your glasses? Just for a minute? I'm goin' home so I'm practising to be an actress, 'cause I'm goin' on TV for real. Come on, you don't need 'em, I'll give 'em back, I just need to practise for a minute. Nobody won't give me nothing. I promise I won't hurt them. Please. (*to GLORY's surprise, GAIL passes her glasses through the meal slot*) WHOAAA!!! Thank you.

GLORY grabs the glasses, plays with them. (Thompson, 2016, p. 32)

Glory dreams of a better future because "the inability to imagine a future for oneself kills the capacity to look for new solutions" (Davidson and van der Kolk, 1996, P. 515).

Gail asks Glory to give her back the glasses. But Glory unintentionally breaks them: "I'm sorry, Gail. I really did not mean to break them. I was just . . . playing" (Thompson, 2016, p. 33). She begs Gail not to report her: "Don't report me. Please? Please. Because if you report me—" (P. 33). She understands how extra charges do harm her damaged psyche.

Glory is charged with other sixty days. She is no longer able to digest confinement, or to be evasive of the inner torment. Resisting trauma and hallucinatory states vanish by the charge. Due to severe torture and abuse, the mind "begins to play tricks on" the inmate (Peltier, 1999, p. 155) who develops "psychotic states, including hallucinations, paranoid delusions, and the loss of reality" (Schwab, 2010, p. 152).

Glory's suffering is exemplified by psychological deterioration and mental disorders.

Throughout the play, she has recurrent visual hallucinations like seeing the crocodile: "*GLORY is in her cell, looking at the crocodile she sees coming up through the cell floor. There is a camera in the corner of room*" (Thompson, 2016, p. 11). The visual hallucinations are accompanied by sensations, she can "feel" and "smell" the crocodile (P. 11). Fighting spirit and hope vanish as Glory surrenders to despair, and addresses the crocodile: "It's my crocodile mother. Can you hear her? I can hear her call me" (P. 37). On the surface, the crocodile refers to the enormity of hallucinatory states that attack Glory in her solitary confinement. Metaphorically, the crocodiles represent death that always seduces Glory.

As long as the psychological state is settled, Glory is able to placate her psychotic states. When her trauma is controlled, there is a mental balance as she declares to the crocodile: "And I feel her . . . waiting and I say to her no. No I am not yours to have I am mine and I am not I am not going to be sucked under the mud by your crocodile eyes so stop lookin' at me" (Thompson, 2016, p. 11). The crocodiles are illusionary. They are hallucinatory forms of psychosis, but they are more severe after the prolonged re-traumatisation. The traumatised reveals his/her inner conflicts in order not to lose the sense of identity. As she gets extra charges, she becomes closer to the crocodile and begins imitating the crawling crocodile: "*(GLORY drops to the ground and begins to slither on her stomach)*" (P. 37).

Glory's engagement with art and poetry is not enough. She needs social communication from which she is deprived. According to Paola Brambilla, a professor of psychiatry, "hallucinations can be dramatic and may have severe impact in affected individuals, and it might be associated with suicidality" (2018, p. V). On the other hand, Glory experiences hallucinations more severely than the normal one. She calls and addresses the crocodile before committing suicide: "Can you hear her? I can hear her call me. Like . . . a siren, as loud as a siren and I am feelin' her eyes just arrowing into me and her tail inside me again and her skin in my skin and her mouth . . . on my head on my neck pullin' pullin' me back down" (Thompson, 2016, p. 37). Now, the sound of the crocodile is louder than ever. It pulls Glory down, into the womb of all human beings. She "*takes a strip of cloth from her pocket and tears it to make a ligature, then ties it and puts it around her neck. She walks in circles, her breathing laboured, and then faints*" (Thompson, 2016, p. 37). Her behaviour is dramatic both in imitating the crawling of the crocodile, and in attempting to commit suicide. Nevertheless, she does not die as the guards rescue her.

Even if the inmate resists loneliness, his/her fortitude is ephemeral due to the truism of segregation as egregious experience. When the person's "hopes are illusory," he/she turns to be "a victim of self deception" (Diyaiy, 2020, p. 193). Glory's hopes of going home become a mirage as she develops enough awareness of the endless cycle of agony. Consequently, she prefers death to life:

They do not know the loneliness here.

They do not know the feeling of having no one to look at, to talk to, no one to touch.

The feeling of being the only person in the whole world.

If I could get a pair of socks . . .

A nice pair of clean socks . . . I could shove them down my throat.

I hope it's raining when I die. I like that idea, of me being on the floor, my face purple, my body eaten by crocodiles, my bones—cold as the floor . . . and the rain just pouring down. (Thompson, 2016, pp. 38-39)

Glory focuses on the need of contact with others because the traumatised needs "some form of involvement with others" in order to pass "passivity and helplessness" (van der kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p. 18). In fact, such involvement/contact is not secured in many prisons over the world (Lobel & Smith, 2020, p. 4). Therefore, Glory decides to commit suicide. Schwab asserts that "death wish can be turned inward and against the self or outward against others" (2020, p. 166). To wish the prison staff dead does not rescue Glory from her agony.

Before ending her life by self-strangulation, Glory occupies her last moments by writing poetry: "*GLORY writes with her finger on the wall, her own secret message, the same poem as before,*" then "*With the ligature, GLORY hangs herself. Over the sound of the death rattle, the guards recorded voices are heard*" (Thompson, 2016, p. 39). The guards enter her cell, but Glory is out of breath. She dies, as Gail asserts, "At approximately 8:10 a.m. in her TQ cell on October 26, 2007, at Grand Valley Institution for Women" (p. 41). It is all due to the psychiatrists who order the guards not to enter Glory's cell "until she has ceased breathing," Gail says (42). For that reason, Thompson focuses on presenting Glory's death as a homicide rather than a suicide. Ordering the guards not to go inside the cell till she is out of breath is indeed a proof of Glory's death as a homicide. Her mother emphasises this idea by declaring that Glory "did NOT want to die," she "wanted to live" (Thompson, 2016, p. 43).

Though the content of Glory's poem is undisclosed, she may want to engrave her suffering. Describing the poem as a secret message, Thompson encrypts Glory's agony through poetry. Judith Butler states that "even when what happens to a body

is not survivable, the words survive to say as much” (2029, p. 59). It is a message to the audience/readers that what happens to Glory should not be averted. When she is asked whether her fact-based plays are a “kind of activism,” Thompson answers that “it’s the only kind of activism that I am effective in. Maybe I’d be naïve to think they could change anything, but I hope that they plant a seed in viewers’ hearts and minds” (Farfan, 2017, p. 87). Thomson dramatises Glory’s victimisation to employ theatre for its goal. She wants to confront Canadians with the painful reality concerning the violent institutions like Grand Valley.

Gail’s Integrated Memories

The realms of art and literature have a profound preoccupation with human responses to the tragedies encountered in life (van der kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p. 3). Thompson’s characterisation of Gail is based on creating a woman confronting life ravages. Gail speaks retrospectively by narrating the life and death of her brother, James, and his wife, Nancy. James was a prison guard who “went into corrections as soon as he graduated the college corrections course” (Thompson, 2016, p. 5). He “did his job real well, highly regarded, on track for promotions,” but he began “bringin’ in . . . contraband” and “got in so deep he could not crawl out” (6). James and Nancy were in a picnic in their farm where they killed each other:

One Sunday they make themselves a picnic—chicken salad sandwiches, roast turkey, potato salad, chocolate cake, two bottles of the best wine, and they ride their horses as far out on their property as they can. They let the horses go. They spread out their red checkered picnic blanket. They eat their picnic lunch. They drink all the wine. They put their arms around each other.

And they shoot each other in the back of the head. (Thompson, 2016, p. 7)

Gail is not a traumatised person. She is not overwhelmed by narrating her brother’s tragic end. The person, with integrated memories, “does not suffer anymore from the reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, behavioral re-enactments, etc” (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 447). Unlike Glory, Gail narrates the traumatic past without being emotionally or physically aroused. She does not reenact it in the present time.

Gail shows some sense of shame because of her brother’s work as a trafficker: “I wonder, you know? If what happened to my brother Jamie—might have something to do with why I could not do . . . what I knew . . . was the . . . right . . . the only right . . .” (Thompson, 2016, p. 7). She judges herself as having the distinction between right and wrong. This is the difference between Gail and her brother, James.

Thompson says that the system “destroys these people, because it makes them compromise their ethics as human beings” (Farfan, 2017, p. 89). As if Gail is “giving a speech to a conference of guards about what happened” (p. 90). She intends to humanise the guards because torture “violates the very boundaries of the human in both victim and torturer” (Schwab, 2010, p. 154). Her narration is of purpose: “Merely uncovering memories is not enough; they need to be modified and transformed,” to be meaningful (van der Kolk & McFarlane, 1996, p. 19). Therefore, her unfolding the past is not in vain.

Gail absorbs the traumatic memories into a coherent, narrative story which has beginning, middle, and end. As flexibility is introduced, the potency of traumatic memory diminishes in influencing present experiences (van der Kolk & van der Hart, 1991, p. 450). The past does not affect Gail’s psyche. She shifts to the current situation and speaks about a visit by a “*group of VIP*” who came to Grand Valley “around last week” (Thompson, 2016, p. 14). As they are asked “to have a look at the girls in segregation” (p. 14), Gail fluctuates between duty and sympathy,

though the loyal-employee part of me thought no way it’s none of their business they don’t understand what they’re lookin’ at, the other part of me, the real part of me thought yeah. Go in. See what conditions . . . see what that kid Glory has to . . . and we . . . we are forced to be part of what is happening to her. So that part of me, the deep-down part, was very disappointed when they all declined.

I wanted them to see . . . what we have to cope with. (Thompson, 2016, p. 14)

Though she witnesses torture and violence, Gail is not re-traumatised. Human beings structure their world in accordance with a personal view of reality due to the cognitive schema that helps them to mitigate the harsh experiences (van der Kolk et al., 1996, p. 304). Gail’s past agonies of her brother’s suicide equipped her with a buffer in the face of the current traumatising.

After Glory’s death, Gail “steps into Glory’s cell” and describes her face:

They call that hypoxic.

’Cause it means there is no oxygen getting to the face.

The veins are . . . blocked by the ligature.

Her face . . . was like that moment.

When dusk . . .

Turns to dark.

Pitch black. No life. (Thompson, 2016, pp. 42-43)

It is clear that Gail is sad, but not traumatised. Again, she is strong enough to absorb new traumatic experiences. There are pauses in her sentences, indeed, but she does not show any sign of emotional arousal, or behavioural and sensory states.

At the end, Rosellen speaks about her daughter's hope and what she really wants in this life:

My daughter did NOT want to die.
She wanted to live.
She tied ligatures around her neck . . .
Because . . . she . . . had faith.
She had faith that they cared enough about her.
That her country cared enough about one of its daughters.
That those guards would have to save her.
So she needed her life saved many times a day.
So she would know that it was worth living.
She wanted to live. (Thompson, 2016, pp. 43-44)

Rosellen's words parallel Glory's other part that loves life, as a joyful girl who wanted to go home and be Ravi's beloved. Thompson ends the play in an innovative way. To view/read the last two scenes depicting Gail then Rosellen is to get different perspectives. Gail says that the guards do not rescue Glory, justifying that they have their orders. Still, Rosellen attributes her daughter's death to the system including the guards. Thompson leaves the audience with two different points of views. But Rosellen's opinion is not only personal because many people may agree with her.

CONCLUSION

Thompson depicts victimisation and traumatising in *Watching Glory Die*. The play is a criticism of institutionalism that increases characters' suffering. Both past and present traumas are not mitigated by Glory's internal capacities. She finds no chance to placate her traumatic experiences. All of her avoidance mechanisms fail when her internal and external resources diminish in the face of abuse and unjust charges. Glory's desperate part is invigorated. Death, as a result, becomes Glory's resort. On the other hand, Gail's trauma is well controlled. She does not suffer from any traumatic symptoms. She is strong enough to confront the past and present experiences. Her memory schema absorbs her brother's traumatic death successfully. She copes with James' death. Therefore, she is equipped with psychological capacities against life distresses and potential traumas.

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