

# **Dedoxification of White Mythology: A Deleuzo-Baroquean Reading of Suzan-Lori Parks' *The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom***

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## **Abstract**

This article attempts to investigate the first major dramatic work of Suzan-Lori Parks from a new angle in suggesting the writer, like the Persian Shahrzad story-teller with interwoven stories/plays, narrates, through a Parksian labyrinthine folding structure, the lost history of African subordinated and discarded by History. Having a Deleuzo-baroquean perspective, this study explores the imperceptible or less-known aspects of her drama that have been muted throughout the White mythological historicism. She portrays, on her neo-baroquean canvas, an amalgamation of myth, music, and performance, while her figures, disfigured by the dominant discourse, become the schizophrenic bodies that subvert the ruling system in a rhizomatic manner. Moreover, her polyphonic lines of flight in the form of Jazz syncopation, contrapuntally, recite the saga of African-American oppressions. In the end, it is concluded that Parks, as a female African-American playwright, has distinguished her dramatic works from her contemporaries by designating the Deleuzo-baroquean plateau in her first play, a tool for subverting and undermining the dominant discourse, in the trajectory of Shahrzad's flight to save her dramatic life.

**Key Words:** Becoming, Deleuzo-Baroquean, Dedoxification, Neo-baroque, Suzan-Lori

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ماهیت‌زدایی اسطوره‌های سفیدپوستان: خوانش دلوزی-باروکی از نمایش‌نامه

بی‌ثباتی‌های ناهیودا در تِرِد کینگ دام اثر سوزان-لوری پارکز

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### چکیده

این پژوهش اولین شاهکار نمایشی سوزان-لوری پارکز، بی‌ثباتی‌های ناهیودا در تِرِد کینگ دام، را از دیدگاهی جدید بررسی می‌کند. سبک تو در توی نمایش‌نامه‌نویسی وی -در حالی که داستان‌های در هم تنیده، یادآور سبک قصه‌گویی شهرزاد ایرانی است- به ترسیم گذشته پامال‌شده سیاهپوستان از سوی قدرت مسلط تاریخ‌نویسی سفیدپوستان تمرکز دارد. این مقاله با دیدگاه دلوزی-باروکی زوایای کمتر دیده شده یا نادید شده سبک دراماتورژی وی را می‌کاود. پارکز در این نمایش‌نامه، بر بومی به سبک نئوباروکی، تلفیقی از معماری، موسیقی، اسطوره و هنرهای اجرایی اجرا می‌کند. فیگورهای نمایش‌نامه وی که توسط گفتمان مسلط، در ابتدا به «بدن‌های بدون اندام» تبدیل شده‌اند، در حال «شدن» به «بدن‌های اسکیزوفرنی» در طی «مسیر گریز» موسیقایی جازی هستند؛ در حالی که حماسه ستم‌های رفته بر سیاهپوستان را سر می‌دهند. در پایان این نتیجه حاصل می‌شود که نویسنده

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به عنوان نمایش‌نامه‌نویس زن آفریقایی-آمریکایی، سبک دراماتورژی خویش را، در اولین شاهکار نمایشی‌اش با الهام از ساختاری دلوزی-باروکی، از سایر نویسندگان زن سیاه‌پوست متمایز کرده و به عنوان ابزاری برای مبارزه و مقاومت در مقابل نظام سلطه‌گر به کارگرفته‌است. پارکز همان شهرزاد قصه‌گو است که نه تنها از جان خویش گذشته (ازجان‌گذاشته‌ای گم‌شده) بلکه سبک نمایش‌نامه‌نویسی سیاه‌پوستان را نیز بهبود و در نهایت نجات بخشیده‌است.

**کلمات کلیدی:** شدن، دلوزی-باروکی، نئو-باروک، ماهیت‌زدایی، سوزان-لوری پارکز

## 1. Introduction

*The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (1986-1989), Suzan-Lori Parks' (1963-) first major play which garnered critical attention and received an Obie award in 1991, though seems "abstract in form and language" lends itself toward various interpretations and commentaries, which investigate its main concern as "the African-American experience under the weight of a hostile world" (Solomon, 2008: 73). Parks as an African-American experimental playwright, evading the conventional Greek form sequenced plot, offers a non-linear but thematically interwoven scenes addressing different issues regarding black people's lives and history. Within its premier performance, *Imperceptible Mutabilities* heralded the originality of its playwright, who, as Garret marks, is "politically minded and granted with the power of words and mastering of language" (2007: 44). During the 1980s, excepting Adrienne Kennedy, an African-American playwright known for her *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (premiered in 1964), the "experimental American theater [...] was dominated by white playwrights" and the arrival of a new African American female dramatist has been so exciting (ibid).

*The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* contains five short plays, *Snails*, *Third Kingdom*, *Open House*, *Third Kingdom* (reprised later), and *Greeks*. At a glance, *Snails*, *Open House*, and *Greeks*, in a triptych structure enfolds the story of black people, man, and woman, under the "regimentation of three institutions; school, religion, and government" (Bennet, 2017: 94) that has led in the creation of docile, dis-organ-ized bodies who thrives to redefine their selves in a dynamic process of becoming which stresses on differentiations rather than oneness and being. In between, the *Third Kingdom* pieces, the hinges of the triptych pictures, unfold a choral group of five characters of each scenic *peinture* to be passengers of a metaphorical glass-bottomed boat wandering somewhere between two cliffs or worlds in a vast varied oceanic water horrified by "nothin in front of [them], but water" (Parks, 1995c: 38). The Parksian characterization is always in a labyrinthine struggle to question the condition imposed upon them, meanwhile, their identity is redefined under a process of becoming rather than asserting a Kantian being.

In this regard, *The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, en-fold or im-ply a process through which the black identity is once dis-figured by the dominant power and, then, refigured by the African-American differences and variety. The nonlinearity and multicentered structure of the play (each act evolves around a different story and new act in the life of African Americans); the amalgamation of different literary genres (music, architecture, drama, painting, and Western mythology) agitated with hostile torturing scenes and memories; the shadowed images projected by trompe-l'oeil technique (three-dimensional illusionism to break up the fourth wall) and polyphonic melodic

lines (the dialogues are augmented with Jazz musicality) are utilized for increasing the theatricality of the play. As the fourth wall is removed, the viewer is immersed in the course of events and perceives deeply the hostilities forced upon the African people throughout the white colonizer's History.

Meanwhile, in *the Third Kingdom* sections, the self-referentiality of the choral group in remarking on the unbearable conditions during the known Middle Passage, from Africa to America, and their consequent inbetween-unhomely mental state, makes a game with the rules of conventional Greek chorus and increases the self-awareness and metatheatricality of the play. The play within the play, the self-referential remarks remind the viewer of a new discourse in the dramaturgical style of the playwright. The two contrary feelings toward the nature of the play, "immersion and metatheatricality" (Vanhaesebrouck, 2016: 49), and a self-referential theater that prompts its own existing rules, represent a Parksian-(neo)baroquean style. Ndalianis, in *Neo-baroque Aesthetics and Contemporary Entertainment* (2004), writes that "to be baroque is (supposedly) to give voice to artistic freedom and flight from the norm or in the excess of the norm" (8), "a line of flight" proposed by Gilles Deleuze, the postmodern philosopher, as the main element of "minor literature".

Deleuze borrowed the term from Leibniz, a seventeenth-century mathematician, starts his discussion about 'baroque' from a new angle, as an aesthetic term rather a historical period: "[t]he Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds. [...] Folds over folds. One upon another. [...] A labyrinth." (Deleuze, 1993: 1) In this regard, Baroque, and its nowadays usage '(neo)baroque', characterizes an artistic style, endorsing a folding of various forces from the outside to the inside, stresses upon movement and dynamism and advocates questioning of the rules and regimented borderlines to destabilize the norms and standards. Baroque reemergence in the last decades of the twentieth century commences an investigation of "the history of instrumentality, parody, and excess." It permits "a liberation from periodization and linear time, as well as from historicism." (Hills, 2015: 43) Harbison suggests in *Reflections on Baroque* (2003) that modernist architectural play between spaces and texts might be read as part of a baroque heritage, and Calloway argues in *Baroque Baroque* (1994) that the attraction to novelty, artifice and the bizarre in art nouveau, and surrealism must be read as a return of a certain seventeenth-century sensibility.

Meanwhile, since Parks stresses that her plays are more than "race drama" which constitutes issues rather than "race issues", one can investigate the folding of the concerns of an African American woman regarding the black situation, no matter whether man or woman, in a hegemonized white society that is amalgamated with the craftsmanship of her dramaturgy in a form of (neo)baroquean style. Although it seems to be problematic to use baroque as a critical framework, the main reason for ascribing the term to African-American



anticolonialist writings can be traceable like baroque, as a self-conscious artistic form, which evades any clear-cut definition and borderline in favor of questioning the norms and rules. It is in the trajectory of what she pursues as a postmodern playwright, to write a form of "a good theater to defend the dramatic literature" against the prevalent "Theater of Schmaltz" (Parks, 1995b: 7).

Moreover, what she pursues in her dramatical world, puts in questioning "the natural and neutral" (Mudasir, 2014: 16) regarding the past conditions of African Americans. In this regard, as a creative musician-playwright, one can investigate in her polyphonic musical world of plays, a combination of polyphonic voices and melodic lines, counterpointed while complementing each other, that enfolds the (hi)story of each scene and sheds light on the process of becoming of its figures. Her drama is imbued with figures who are searching for a "baroquean becoming" rather than a "Renaissance being" (Garland, 2007: 7), a way of "dedoxification" or "denaturalize[ation] of our assumptions" (Mudasir, 2014: 16) vis-à-vis the lost history of black people. Consequently, there are no more characters, only figures who are disfigured by the hegemonic power and then are going to be refigured throughout events in her dramatic world.

Following the aforesaid, as the aim of the present study is to illuminate the less investigated aspects of Suzan-Lori Parks drama, in this case, *The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, through an aesthetical-dramaturgical perspective, (neo)baroquean critical tool is applied to open up new discussions regarding the African American dramatists' literary works. Parks as a crafted musician has played out a (neo)baroquean style of playwriting in both structure and content to play with the rules and then destabilize the white canonized and standardized forms in Western dramatic literature. Since she has declared her style of playwriting different from the contemporary, even black playwrights, the present study attempts to investigate and decipher her literary world from a new perspectival tool, (neo)baroquean strategy which is indebted in large to Deleuzian postmodern notions.

## 2. Literature Review

Subsequently, the present study is aimed to have a new conceptual tool, Deleuzo-baroquean, in reading a postmodern African American female playwright, the researcher could not find any academic research related to the subject of study. Since Deleuzian philosophy encompasses a good variety of philosophical notions, a considerable bulk of the literature has been done reading Deleuze and his philosophy. To give just a few remarkable instances, Colebrook in *Understanding Deleuze* (2002) provides a notable introduction to this great thinker and his philosophy. In *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition: A Critical Introduction and Guide* (2003) Williams, using the

concept of 'syntheses', brings into attention a new 'structure of reality' that Deleuze provides as his dominant principle of philosophy. Stivale's *Gilles Deleuze: Key Concepts* (2005) presents a complicated web of connections among Deleuzian conceptual framework through the fifteen selected essays in three parts. May centers *Gilles Deleuze: An Introduction* (2005) on the question, 'How might one live?' believing that it makes the essence of Deleuze's philosophy. *Deleuze Reframe* (2008) by Sutton and Jones primarily argues the need for a book to comprehensively and cohesively cover Deleuze's life, works, and philosophy comprehensively and cohesively. Patton in *Deleuzian Concepts* (2010) deals with efforts to delineate and develop some of the lines of force within Deleuzian political philosophy. In *Iris Murdoch and the Meaning of Life: A Deleuzian Reading of Her Early Fiction* (2016), Ghaffari compares elaborately the notion of 'love' from Iris Murdoch, Plato, and Deleuze respectively to enhance the crude ideas regarding this great philosopher novelist, Iris Murdoch, about the idea of love.

On the other hand, the critical studies dedicated to reading Parks' dramatic works are mainly focused on the subject of black woman identity formation in white masculinized society, the African American lost history, and postcolonial matters while the present research is mainly motivated by exploring the less investigated aspects of her dramatical works. In this way, *Memory-Theater and Postmodern Drama* (1999) by Malkin focuses on the postmodern mindsets, preoccupation with questions of memory, and the threat of erasure of African American history in studying three selected plays of Parks. *Recovering the Black Female Body* (2000), edited by Bennett and Dickerson, focuses on the depictions of African American women's bodies in several literary works since the nineteenth century, and in the sixth chapter, the writer discusses Parks's play from the standpoint of black feminism. In *Black Feminism in Contemporary Drama* (2008) by Anderson, the writer highlights the dramatic and political premises of black feminist drama and investigates the intersection of race, class, and gender in twenty-first-century drama and challenges the images and stereotypes of African American men and women in Park's two selected plays. Ghasemi, in his Ph.D. thesis, *Quest/ion of Identities in African American Postmodern Drama: A Study of Selected Plays by Suzan Lori Parks* (2016), explores a number of the metanarratives and dominant ideologies in denigrating racially and sexually African Americans in this case the African American women.

In this regard, having a neo-baroque perspective, concerning the philosophical notions of Gilles Deleuze, this study has attempted to enlighten the new ways in reading an African-American female playwright that can help introduce new outlooks in reading Afro-American literature. Moreover, the present study attempts to open up new discussions regarding (neo)baroque studies while the previous studies only focused on investigating the historical aspects of the term and traces its trajectory in the literary world while stressing

its historical definition. In this regard, the present research aims to highlight (neo)baroque as an inclusive critical term, embracing various schools of thought and knowledge, emphasizing dynamism and performance, not only as an artistic style. Through this process the present research challenges to divulge Parksian dramaturgical style which has made her distinct from her contemporaries. Therefore, this study tries to answer the following questions:

1. Is it possible to investigate Baroque and (neo)baroque as a tendency or movement toward resisting the dominant power and rules?
2. Is there any possibility of reading An Afro-American female drama from the baroquean perspective? How and why?

### 3. Theoretical Framework: A Deleuzo-Baroquean Perspective

Although its definition is elusive, the neo-baroque is widely supposed "to extend, develop, reflect, recycle, or revise the most salient traits and themes of Baroque art" (Snyder, 2010: 17). Ndalianis writes that a decline of harmoniousness and classicism and lack of respect to the rules and borders that usually have heralded the Renaissance time caused the term 'baroque' to be perceived as unusual, vulgar, exuberant, and beyond the norm. Since the essence of the term implies chaos, dynamism, and abstract forms, one can trace the reemergence of baroque style in modernist art and movements as well, especially in "surrealism, impressionism, and neo-gongorism" (5). Nevertheless, as a transhistorical term, she believes that the baroque form has continued to "have a life one that recurred throughout history but existed beyond the limits of a canon". Concerning the cinema, she concedes that the implication of the poetics of neo-baroqueism in the contemporary film world signifies "an auteurist flair" for a director's film (ibid). To be baroque, Ndalianis states is supposedly to "give voice to artistic freedom and flight from the norm or in the excess of the norm" (9), a Deleuzean "line of flight" in a multiplicitous "rhizomatic" manner.

Among postmodern philosophers, Gilles Deleuze (1925 - 1995) has explored the 'baroque' term in its broadest sense in his book on Leibniz, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (1988). The term originated from his previous writings regarding 'subjectivity' in the last chapter of the book *Foucault* (1986). As Deleuze examines Foucault's notions, he describes "the idea of doubling, a productive force reflected in the metaphor of the fold" (Smiešková, 2010: 11). Since in the fold, there two sides, the inside or the past and the outside of the present are inseparable and interact upon each other and constitute one, therefore, Deleuze claims that the "knowledge is known only where it is folded" (1993: 56). Although, Deleuze tries to give a clarified definition of 'fold' and 'baroquean' structure, the concepts hint to a large scale from mental status to the contemporary social conditions. What makes it close to postmodern art and literature, can be found in the term's openness and dynamics with an emphasis

on expression and happening, 'becoming', rather than searching for an ideal form and order which is certainly related to many aspects of contemporary life (Smiešková, 2010: 14).

In this regard, as a transhistorical term, baroque-study reemergence in the last decades of the twentieth century is indebted chiefly to Deleuzian philosophical and critical notions, who as a postmodern philosopher that has brought philosophy into daily life subjects and created the practical form of philosophy which has been neglected by the previous philosophers, from Kant to the present time. Foucault, in a preface to Deleuze's *Anti-Oedipus* (1972), truly asserts that Deleuzian philosophy must not be considered as "the flashy" philosophy of Hegel but an "*art*" which has raised "the old banners [of previous philosophers,] but the combat has shifted and spread into new zones [:] *ars erotica, ars theoretica, ars politico*" (italics by Foucault, 1983: xli). Therefore, as an important postmodern figure in philosophy, cultural, political, and ethical studies, Deleuzian philosophical notions have changed our ways of thinking in the present age. Colebrook, in *Understanding Deleuze* (2002), writes that:

At the heart of Deleuze's thought is his insistence that our relation to the world is dynamic, not just because our ideas about the world change, nor because the world is a thing that goes through change. Life itself is constant change and creation. (51)

As a brilliant philosopher, Deleuze belongs to a tradition of philosophy that is remarkably different from his contemporary philosophers, in way that he believes "new philosophy and ideas would culminate in new possibilities for practice and action." (Colebrook, 2002: xviii) Philosophy for Deleuze was not about creating correct pictures or theories of life but transforming life, "by thinking differently we can create ourselves anew, no longer accepting already created and accepted values and assumption" (ibid). In this regard, since one of the requirements of the present postmodern life is a philosophy of flux that can be provided by a philosopher insisting on the changing nature of life in the present era, for subjects such as hybrid identity, African Americanism, or even feminism.

As the aim of the present article is a reflection on the less investigated aspects in the dramatic works of Suzan-Lori Parks, it applies the philosophical notions of Gilles Deleuze by having a Deleuzo-baroquean outlook regarding the process of 'becoming' to trace the melodic lines of players in direction of Deleuzian "lines of flight". The musicality of voices suggests a pathway toward a new destination, a 'third kingdom' or an 'in-between' situation where searching for a lost history and neo-baroque aesthetic converge in a polyphonic, polyrhythmic and multacentral dramatic world to privilege the anti-mimetic and anamorphic structure of meaning.

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Gilles Deleuze, in *The Fold*, has borrowed the term, baroque, from the mathematical thinker, Leibniz, and opens up his discussion regarding 'baroque' terminology from a new angle, as an aesthetic term rather a historical period, stressing that "[t]he Baroque refers not to an essence but rather to an operative function, to a trait. It endlessly produces folds. [...] Folds over folds. One upon another. [...] A labyrinth." (1) Deleuze expands his notion in embedding the concept of "subjectivity" in 'folding', whereas 'fold' allows Deleuze to think creatively about the "production of subjectivity" and a "critique of typical accounts" of it in the postmodern age, and ultimately about the "possibilities for, and production of 'non-human' forms of 'subjectivity'" (O'Sullivan, 2010: 103).

'Fold' for Deleuze contains a movement that is "elusive and multiple, a 'trait' where the subject/object distinction collapses, and cannot, therefore, be attributed unambiguously to an external agency" (Dimakopoulou, 2006: 4). The folding of baroque structure which "proliferates in unpredictable directions" (ibid), results in evading clear definitions and distinctions while embracing heterogeneous schools of thought and knowledge. The movement of thought and energy in a "rhizomatic" manner, which is horizontally unbound and directionless, is the pivotal element in a baroquean structure. Just as "nomads never belong to a certain spot, [...] the nomadic thought does not limit itself to the centers" (Moradi, 2020-2021: 56), the philosophy of Deleuze is baroquean-nomadic, in a way that it breaks the established norms and "deterritorialized" the borders and rules in form of "line of flight".

Hence, Deleuze proposes a thousand philosophical plateaus or strata, folding in a baroquean manner, for the reader to choose the best and proper one for his/her lifestyle, in this way, vindicates him/her from adhering to fixities. This nomadic way of thinking instigates the process of "becoming", it celebrates "the heterogeneity of its constituents [and] hails the differences", it is "an assemblage" of various "forces" that interact ceaselessly upon each other (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987: 4). Roland Barthes has called this process of nomadic thinking, which "enables us to see the oft-concealed ideologies" of the dominant power as "dedoxification". The term "doxa" implies something that society has undertaken as natural and dedoxification is the "recognition of this supposed 'natural' as ideology" (Mudasir, 2020-2021: 16). Parksian dramatization dedoxifies the naturalness of historicization of white hegemony in casting aside the past and history of the African American.

Moreover, Deleuzian philosophy and the trajectory of his nomadic thinking stress dynamism and movement resulting in advocating multiplying and multiplicity, thousand plateaus folding in a baroque-rhizomatic form. In clarifying the term 'baroque', one can find an amalgamation of a broad scale of literary and artistic genres and philosophical notions with an emphasis on rejecting and destabilizing the norms and playing with the rules. Therefore

"diversity is an essential characteristic" (Vanhaesebrouck, 2016: 56) of baroquean building which portrays and values 'differences' rather than sameness and one being. It contains different and even contrary experiences which helps in using the term as a conceptual tool for analyzing literary works.

Vanhaesebrouck notes that baroque's most prominent aspect can be traceable in its subverting power, because of its polyphonic and self-referential nature which makes the term neo-baroque distinct from being a "reminiscence [or] a simple reiteration of a particular episode taken from art and theatre history". Vanhaesebrouck aligns his notions with Egginton in defending the theatricality and self-referentiality of the term, writing that "creating a 'borderline' [a liminal] experience during which the spectator, or visitor, is immersed in a visual and sensory universe different from his own," is the main characteristic of the early modern baroque theater of 16th century which has been shared by neo-baroque style in its postmodern concern as well. Rejecting the "semiotic characteristics of neo-baroque cultural practices", as a good body of cultural critics has done, Vanhaesebrouck believes that, neo-baroque as a critical terminology, is foremost a "liminal experience, a performative in-between-state" (Egginton, 2010: 66-70) by which one can explore the recent developments in 'postdramatic theater'.

In this regard, as the aim of the present study is to explore the less investigated aspects of Parks' dramaturgy, it has used the (neo)baroquean critical tool, indebted largely to Deleuzean philosophical notions while stressing the diversifying and contradictory characteristics of contemporary literary works. Consequently, this article concludes that the Parksian world of her plays is designed in a (neo)baroque structure in the form of labyrinthine plateaus meanwhile questioning the norms and dedoxifying the white hegemonic mythology and historification. In this way, her labyrinthine dramatic world not only contends the prevalently defined styles of dramaturgy in Western tradition but also, in this way, she defines and redefines her style as an African-American female playwright.

#### **4. Discussion: Dedoxification of White Mythology**

The play, *The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom* (abbreviated *IMT*), is divided into four main parts (*Snails*, *Third Kingdome*, *Open House*, *Greeks (or the Slugs)*) and later another part added in between *Open House* and *Greeks* named *Third Kingdome (Reprised)*. The opening of the play, in *Snails*, stunned the audience with the very terse stage direction: "Slide show: Images of Molly and Charlene. Molly and Charlene speak as the stage remains semi-dark and slides continue to flash overhead" (26). The semi-dark stage with projected images and no stage property but two players busy talking

exemplifies a *trompe l'oeil* painting for increasing the illusion of reality in the spectator.

With an emphasis on the literal meaning of "deceiving eyes", the *trompe l'oeil* technique is utilized to "subvert the realistic representation by calling attention to its artifice, to its perspectival manipulation" (Zamora, 2018: 46). This technique has been regarded as an artistic device of spatial illusion and mainly wrought by baroque artists of the 17th century and after on. The figures in Parks' play are portrayed on a vast three-dimensional baroque canvas, a self-reflexive baroque dramatic painting with no fixed-point perspective or predetermined center. In this way, Parks' dramatic world, not only questions the center of reality but also creates a perplexing illusive reality that is relocated in the viewer's experience toward the depicted events.

Moreover, in the allegorical world of the play, the story of each part is interrelated to another one drawing an image of African-American life (hi)story cast aside under the metaphorical shadow of "the projected images" (Parks, 1995c: 26) or schools of thought and the institutions of white hegemonic society. Even though, each part narrates a different story, the five parts are counterpointed harmoniously. While each part is being played out by a group of five distinct characters that will not reappear in the subsequent their words and "lines often do" (ibid) as if the bodies got lost throughout the 'whole of History' but their words and voices have been resonated forever. The three main parts; *Snails*, *Open House*, and *Greeks (Slugs)*, as their titles suggest, entail a recurring motif throughout her dramatic oeuvre: home, loss of home, and unhomeliness.

The *Snails* opens up the story of three women; Molly, Charlene, and Veronica who are treated with cruelty by society, the educational system, and the hegemonic power, and Dr. Lutzky, a naturalist, is the representative of all. A repeated theme that will be foreshadowed later in *Venus* (1996) as well, where the question of losing the home of an African girl, Saartjie Baartman, is intensified with the cruel treatments of the colonizer in seducing and depriving her of the motherly home in favor of showing England "where the streets are paved with gold" (Parks, 1997: 15). On the other hand, the question of losing home and returning home is more highlighted in *Open House* and *Greeks (Slugs)*. Although the figures of these two parts have been disfigured under the regimentation of the language and culture of the dominant power, Deleuzian dis-organ-ized bodies, their quest for returning home, and their sense of unhomeliness are the evidential concern of these parts. Thematization of this concern will be acme in Parks' later plays especially *Father Comes Home from the Wars (Parts 1,2 and 3)* (2014) parodied from the Odyssean returning home mythology.

The inauguration of *IMT* heralds a question that Charlene asks: "[h]ow dja get through it?" and Molly answers: "Mm not through it." (25), as if the battle has just started and Parks/Molly has not yet through it, it is just a commencement and beginning. This phrase, on the other hand, remarks that as an African American playwright, Parks has written a play not only to be seen and heard but to be read and discovered of what has happened to the African people throughout history. In *IMT*, there is no stage direction, it is hidden in the figures' dialogues as if the whole history and the past of black people are buried under the hegemonic metanarration of History and should be dug up and discovered (Parks, 1995b: 159). The semi-dark stage gradually will be replaced by a fly-infested kitchen of a petit apartment built implicitly through the dialogue lines of figures: "Flies are casin yer food Mona" (1995c: 27). Play, in part one, start *in media's res* where two women, maybe sisters or roommates, Charlene/Chona and Molly/Mona, are talking about Molly's "expelling" from school for failing in her English grammar exams, the "basic skills", and consequently, losing her job and "the only thing worse n workin sslooking for work" since she could not "speak correctly" (1995b: 26).

Since the action is hidden in the lines of dialogue, it seems that Molly, feeling distressed, wants to jump out of the window from their "twelve-floor" apartment and Charlene tries to relieve and sympathize with her by making a meal and asking for her favorites. But Molly insisted that:

Molly: Hhh. What should I do Chona should I jump should I jump or what?

Charlene: you want some eggs?

Molly: Would I splat!

Charlene: Uhuhuhnnnn...

Molly: Twelve floors up. Whaduhaya think?

Charlene: Uh-uh-uhn. Like scrambled?

Molly: Shit.

Charlene: with cheese? Say "with" cause ssgoing in.

Parks' Baroquean dramatic world displays an array of theoretical and analytical frameworks to be deciphered and challenged throughout the play, it seems that both sides of the conversation, Charlene and Molly while talking with each other, perform a different illocutionary act with their own intended meaning. But there is a lack of understanding toward each other's illocutionary acts, meaning, which creates a feeling of confusion and rupture in the viewer.



Molly feels dissatisfied and despaired from the situation imposed by the educational system in expelling her from school since she could not "speak correctly" (26). Meanwhile, Charlene tries out to suggest some amendments to convince her to learn the language to speak, if not, she would not have a name (27).

Though Parks has given them names, Molly and Charlene, but they call each other Mona and Chona as if the figures of her story can have the right to be an independent existence rather than subjects incarnated by the pen tip of the author. From one perspective, Molly represents a good example of Deleuzian Body without Organs (BwO), not only a dis-organized body within a system but against the "organizing principles" of the system that "structure, define and speak on behalf of the collective assemblage" (Message, 2010: 33). On the other hand, throughout events, the figures of this part, Molly/Mona and Charlen/Chona move toward 'becoming' "schizophrenic" persons. They are not the manipulation of the power but Deleuzian "schizophrenic bodies" who behaved against the civilized social norms to subvert the dominant system, since they "[have broken the] cake of civilization" (Parks, 1995c: 32) and became "the emblematic of violent outside" and consequently, "swiftly discarded" (Braidotti, 2010: 124) by the dominant power.

Molly/Mona, who is dissatisfied with the imposed condition, is "all decided" and wants to take revenge by committing suicide. Chona tries to sympathize with Mona but the situation is too entangled for Mona to bear on. Chona states: "[...] You can study at home. I'll help." But Mona replies: "Uh-uhnn! I'm all decided. Ain't gonna work." (27) Parks' portrayal of a dis-figured nomos/body, Mona, is in opposition to the Western logos/ Word, as if the first one represents an "anarchic distribution" (Roffe, 2010:185) of movement and life but the latter one is a symbol of ordered, well-organized system of thought. In this way, she undermines the rightfulness of the colonialist language and power and replaces it with a nomadic way of perception and thinking.

Chona and Mona's discussion is interrupted by the intrusion of Dr. Lutzky, a naturalist, in the second scene, who seems that come to "take thuh roaches" (28) that bit Mona all over her body. But he is a white, "bleached bone" (55) man "who [wears] white cause white was what thuh job required." (26) Ironically, he is monitoring and studying the girls' behavior as "subjects" by a spy "cockroach" modeled from a "fly on the wall" insect (27). He is the representative of the imperial gaze to surveil the colonized to set power relationship between those being scrutinized and those who watch, he wants to "hose[...] us down" (ibid).

Meanwhile, the word game, and use of "pronouncedly visual theatrical language" (Vanhaesebrouck, 2016: 56) intermingled with players' performance has created a Barthesian *effet du reel* atmosphere, a sense of theatricality

throughout the play. Though there is a lack of stage direction, this play is rich in language and since the center of signifying and signified is dis-located and then re-located in the viewer/ the actors and director, the fluidity of dramaturgy is imperceptible in the melodic lines of dialogue which represent the "lines of flight" or lines of "deterritorialising" (Deleuze, 1987: 503-4). As *Thousands Plateau* is deliberately designed to "foster lines of flight in thinking" to produce "new ways of thinking rather than territorializing into the recognizable grooves of what 'passes' for philosophical thought" (Lorrain,2010: 145), Parksian dramatic world, in a rhizomatic manner portrays a baroquean plateau which prompts the spectator/reader to think and to sense a new.

In this regard, her drama summons a language game, it puns. The title of the play suggests both the mutability or dynamism of meaning and its homophone, muteability, or state of being muted by the dominant power. Playing on words not only deepens the intended meaning but suggests the instability and multicentrality that destabilizes or recalls Barthian dedoxification of the norms and the predefined standards of Western ideology. for instance, the second part of the play, *Open House*, literally refers to an open day of a house, while at the same time reflecting an absurd image of black woman slavery. Mrs. Aretha Saxon, in search of a lost past, has no evidence to prove her identity, her name isn't inscribed in the white man's book, the Lord's Book of Amendment. Since she is enquiring about having a "place" in their "kingdom", "a home in [their] great house" (44), Miss. Faith, a nun played out by a black man extracted Aretha's teeth, the last evidence of her identity. Aretha Saxon is a reflection of double victimization in masculinized society by both black and white power.

The *Open House* climaxes the sense of feeling the reality in the spectator as s/he is immersed in the course of actions and torturing events, as if the fourth wall has been removed, reflecting the Brechtian *alienation effect*. But Parks here steps further by having the presence of the spectator on the stage as well, by engaging her/him in the course of actions and events since the center of truth is relocated in the spectator's perspective, demonstrating a neo-baroquean style. As an interactive-baroquean theater, her dramatic work is meant to be heard and understood, where the presence of the audience is more emphasized and her/his understanding regarding the portrayed events is crucial in the development of the play.

Therefore, following the aforesaid, thematically, the story and the figures are the present representations of a past event, in a chained repeated action that reflects a past that has affected their present moment. In *Third Kingdom*, a saga is being recited by the five 'seers' which parodies the classical forms in theme and musical structure. The reciters are "seers", who are, as Deleuze writes in *Cinema 2: the time-image* (1989), no longer driven by ideology and are devoid of agency, these "characters are no longer actors but 'seers', who cannot or will

not react, so great is the need to 'see' properly what there is in the situation." (128) Parksian 'seers' saw the past, lamenting the present and foresee the future. They are the creators or African magicians of their legendary story and the theme of their saga is a repeated slavery motif regarding the events during the Middle Passage and hostilities that happened during that period.

While the main concern in the three parts is a quiring to return or have home, "a lovely home" (58), *Third Kingdom*, the hinge of this triptych story, implies an 'unhomely' or 'in-between' condition, where "There are 2 cliffs. 2 cliffs where the Word has cleaved. Half the Word has fallen away making 2 Words and a space between. Those two Words inscribe the Third Kingdome." (56) here, she depicts a sense of wandering and in-between that the subject experiences while feels no belonging, a theme that has resonated through her repeated melodic lines. As if Parksian drama climaxes here, in *Third Kingdome*, among the repeated words and polyphonic voices of her Seers: "the 'climax' could be the accumulated weight of repetition- a residue that, like a city dust, stays with us." (Parks, 1995a: 10) The wandering status of her nomads/ disfigured bodies is beautifully played out by her Jazz band in a multivoiced manner against a well-organized orchestrated command.

The choral group of five "Seers"- Kin-Seer, Us-Seer, Shark-Seer, Soul-Seer, Over-Seer- parodies the classical form of chorus and its traditional usage as well. Here the chorus is no longer a group of players commenting on the events of the play. Parksian chorus members are the tortured members of a wrecked ship in nowhere, wandering on the vast oceanic water, lamenting their unbearable condition. They are "seers" or ghosts that came from "somewhere, [Past Land], [...] take up a residence in a corner" of her mind. Parks writes: "They are not characters. To call them so could be an injustice. They are *figures, figments, ghosts, roles, lovers* maybe, *speakers* maybe, *shadows, slips, players* maybe, maybe someone else's pulse". (12, italics are hers)

They are not only members of a commenting choral group but the tortured figures of her story gathered in nowhere, in-between spaces, to recite their saga. This group of five members are wounded men or women of the play. They are Molly (Mona)/Aretha Saxon / Mrs.Smith/Kin-Seer or Charlene (Chona)/Charles/Sergent Smith /Us-Seer and the list continues. Parksian chorus not only imitates the classical form but while commenting on and narrating the imposed situation on the black people, mocks and destabilizes the traditional role of the chorus as a powerful commentary tool during the play. The role of the traditional chorus has changed here. Over-Seer's remarks that "the 2nd part comes apart in 2 parts." (37), create a self-referentiality which implies that the second part of the play is divided into two parts and a Third Kingdome reprised, added. Additionally, the polyphonic melodic lines while being repeated are revised simultaneously, intensifying a form of Jazz syncopation that reminds the viewer of Parks' virtuosity as a musician and playwright. Hence, not only the form and the content of the classical Greek form of choral

song is parodied but its intention for commenting on the course of events is reversed as well.

Repetition and revision, abbreviated by Parks "Rep. & Rev.", as a strategically powerful tool, has been used throughout her dramatic oeuvre that appears to be used for augmenting the musicality of her plays. As an accomplished musician, she is well familiar with the Rep. & Rev. technique, and defines it, as "a concept integral to the Jazz Music" and "the African and African American literary and oral tradition" (Parks, 1995b: 8-9) by which the composer or the performer will write or play the lines once and repeat it again and in each repetition of the lines there is a slight revision. There is a dynamism and movement in this process. Repetition has a positive and 'productive effect', it creates differences and stresses upon this, it refigures the dis-figured bodies, it dissolves the fixed stereotypes and identities, and gives way to something new, something that both Deleuze and Parks call for it, a becoming rather than being.

Meanwhile, the musicality of her play, the multilayer-counterpointed lines playing multivoiced but harmonical music, paints a dynamic, nomadic, and noe-baroquean labyrinthine picturesque regarding the condition of black people who have their history and language but "fallen on hard times" (Parks, 1995b: 21). Deleuze, in *Thousand Plateau*, proposes that the refraining lines during a musical performance, creating polyphony, imply as a deterritorializing tool to 'deterritorialize' or uproot the territory of the organized and hegemonic system of the norm. The repeated and revised polyphonic lines disturb the linearity of standardized storytelling dramas which Parks regards as schmaltzy.

Parks, in "An Equation for Black People Onstage", argues that the main concern in the dramatic world of her play is not solely limited to the reflection of the black condition, as the oppressed people, in a dualistic relation to the white oppressor. She believes this will result in the reduction of "[b]lackness to merely a state of 'Non-Whiteness'" and this form of dramaturgy is only a false form, a "bullshit" (20). She differentiates her dramatic work by ascribing them as new "territories" that have to be explored, new realms out of which "new dramatic conflict" for describing the situations of African Americans should be found. She stresses that the traditional forms of dramaturgy "never could accommodate the figures which take residence in" her mind (8). As an African-American female playwright, she explores her form and style of dramaturgy which is far from the prevalent dramatic structure and hints at her thematization.

Parks in *IMT* draws a baroquean picturesque in which the folding of outside and inside forces and their interaction is amalgamated with the Western historicity of literature and myth. She portrays the process of black 'becoming' intermingled with and subordinated by White mythology. In this regard, two Greek myths, Odyssey and Icarus, are figured tacitly and then parodied in the last part of the play, *Greeks (or the Slugs)*. Mr. Sergeant Smith, a war sergeant, is in charge of "keep[ing] watch over [a] rock" since his Commander "likes a clean rock", he does cleaning in favor of gaining a "distinction" (62-63). The

family is waiting for his return from war. The sound of airplanes arose. Mrs. Smith remarks: "There was a light in thuh sky last night. [...] I stopped. I looked. I heard. Un man was fallin fallin aflame. Fallin at midnight. There wasn't uh sun. he was coming from another world." (68). Her remarking is affirmed as Mr. Sergeant Smith expresses: "They say he was flying too close to thuh sun. [...] He fell on me. I saved his life." (71) *Odyssey*/ Mr. Sergeant Smith/ Parks has tried out to save a life, whether through an Odyssean return to a lost history and past or saving Icarian-African American dramatic world.

Parksian-Deleuzian dramatic world escapes any imposed limitation and borderline in a way of (noe)baroquean style to question any rigidity and stability of the norms and standards. She has garnered Deleuzian lines of "deterritorializing" or "lines of flight", Parksian melodic lines, while being uttered by the players, dismantle the conventional system of dramaturgy of Western theater and literary canon by evading the classical form of playwrighting and introducing an interactive theater. Repetition in this sense, as Deleuze stresses, is a creative activity that dissolves fixed and stereotyped notions regarding the black identity subordinated by white hegemony and gives rise to a transformative and productive process of becoming.

### 5. Conclusion

As for Deleuze, the Parksian process of becoming involved in the interaction of the outside forces in a repeated and revised manner, a neo-baroquean style. Repetition has a positive and productive effect, it creates differences and stresses this, it dissolves identities and gives way to something new, something that both Deleuze and Parks call for. In this regard, Parksian dramatic worlds, though seem to belong to the postmodern dramaturgical style, take further steps in portraying the black experience to be felt and understood by the audience interactively. As a Deleuzian "minoritarian" form of literature, Parks' drama represents a "line of flight" in the "majoritarian" or capitalist society, which inherently tends to deterritorialize and dis-organ-ize the canonized schools of thought and regimentation that enfold 'being a subject or slave' in their lives.

Deleuzian philosophy attests to this point that a multi-layered baroquean form of identity, in the present era, has been replaced by the postmodern form. One can imagine the enfolding baroque structure where the stress is on the multiplicity of possibilities, diversity and repetition and the amalgamation of interactive forces in the process of becoming. Following the aforesaid, since the main objective of the present study has been to enlighten the less-investigated angles of Suzan-Lori Parks' first major play *The Imperceptible Mutabilities in the Third Kingdom*, it has tried out to make 'perceptible' and detect the 'mutabilities' she has impliedly portrayed to make the 'muteabilities' of African American voices to be heard. Meanwhile, in this way, 'the bones' of a lost history are to be dug up to reflect the suppression and agonies of black people throughout the tyrannies of white hegemonic society.

Therefore, as Parks, in "Elements of Style", stresses, she has to write "a good theater" to enhance and creates a change from "the theater of Schmaltz" to

a daresaying theater: "As a playwright, I try to do many things: explore the form, ask questions, make a good show, tell a good story, ask more questions, take nothing for granted." (6), she creates a neo-baroquean masterpiece in which both content and form play, aesthetically, hand in hand, to prove her mastership in both dramaturgy and musicology. In this regard, not only, she has enhanced and saved the dramatic world of being canonized by white dramatists, but also, dedoxifies and subverts the dominant discourses as well.

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