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Research article

*Fable* (plot, composition) and *mimesis* (imitation, mimetic illusion): the theoretical-factual crisis of both terms on the European (post-)dramatic context. Validation of a model and refounding of drama the late-20<sup>th</sup>/early-21<sup>st</sup> centuries

*Fábula* (trama, composición) y *mímesis* (imitación, ilusión mimética): la crisis teórico-fáctica de ambos términos sobre el contexto (pos-)dramático europeo. Validación de un modelo y refundación del drama a finales del XX y durante el siglo XXI

Miguel A. Orosa<sup>1</sup>: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador Ibarra, Ecuador. <u>maorosa1@pucesi.edu.ec</u> Viviana Noemí Galarza-Ligña: Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador Ibarra, Ecuador. <u>vngalarza@pucesi.edu.ec</u>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> **Corresponding author:** Miguel A. Orosa. Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador Ibarra (Ecuador).





#### Abstract:

**Introduction:** This article explores the crisis or adaptation, as the case may be, of some dramatic terms and concepts through 21st century stage and dramaturgy in the culture of postmodernity. Among them are *fable*, which denotes plot and compositional organization, and *mimesis*, also called mimetic illusion. **Methodology:** the analytical-synthetic method is applied: to begin with, a decomposition of the plays into their constituent parts is carried out, and then the common features are synthesized in order to draw relevant conclusions. **Results and Conclusions:** The results and conclusions validate the non-formal performative model, proposed in the theoretical framework, in their comparison and analysis with the theatrical plays of the most representative authors of the European continent. **Discussion:** Within the *event*, the crisis of *fable* and *mimesis* induces dissonances due to a new logic of meaning. It is a question of seeing to what extent the reality of these plays meets the proposed model made up as a result of personal philosophical and dramatic research or of one's own and others' experience in the field of dramaturgical management and other signs of the stage.

**Keywords:** Fable (and crisis); mimesis (and crisis); contemporary European dramaturgy; postdramatic dramaturgy; postmodern dramaturgy; contemporary stage writing; contemporary European scenes; postmodern theater.

#### **Resumen:**

**Introducción**: Este artículo examina la crisis o adaptación, en su caso, de algunos términos y conceptos dramáticos a través de la escena y la dramaturgia del siglo XXI en la cultura de la posmodernidad. Entre ellos se cuenta la *fábula*, que denota la trama y la organización compositiva, y la *mímesis*, también llamada ilusión mimética. **Metodología**: El método analítico-sintético es objeto de aplicación: para empezar, se lleva a cabo una descomposición de las obras en sus partes constitutivas y, a continuación, se sintetizan las características comunes en orden a extraer conclusiones relevantes. **Resultados y Conclusiones:** Los resultados y conclusiones validan el modelo performativos no formal, propuesto en el marco teórico, en su comparación y análisis con las obras teatrales de los autores más representativos del continente europeo. **Discusión**: Dentro del *acontecimiento*, la crisis de la *fábula* y la *mímesis* induce disonancias a causa de una nueva lógica del sentido. Se trata de ver en qué medida la realidad de estas obras responde al modelo propuesto fruto de la investigación filosófica y dramática personal o de la experiencia ajena y propia en el ámbito de la gestión de la dramaturgia y otros signos de la escena.

**Palabras clave:** Fábula (y crisis); mímesis (y crisis); dramaturgia europea contemporánea; dramaturgia posdramática; dramaturgia posmoderna; escritura escénica contemporánea; escenas contemporáneas europeas; teatro posmoderno.

### **1. Introduction**

The context of this research refers to the process of change and refoundation of what is theater, that we try to show through the analysis of two key terms in Aristotle's Poetics (1974), fable and mimesis, and other concepts that accompany this process and serve as a frame of reference.

We will delve deeply into the crisis and adaptation within the realm of (post-)drama, focusing primarily on two of its fundamental elements: the fable, also known as mythos or plot, and mimesis, which has been referred to by various terms throughout history, such as imitation, mimetic illusion, True Nature, or Beautiful Nature.



However, we will not fail to propose an approach to the basic and referential level of these two patterns, fable and mimesis, by addressing other characteristics of post-drama that we understand will be found mainly in the so-called canonical plays of the 21st century.

The foundational element underpinning the entire process of decline around these terms, in its connection with the *current state of knowledge*, relates to the period of epicisation that drama underwent during the first transformative phase at the close of the nineteenth and the dawn of the twentieth century (Viviescas, 2013) culminating in a second theatrical reform that will take place from the second half of the 20th century. This process of epicisation is intricately linked to the emergence of an epic subject or a rhapsodic author, who assumed the role of a mediator or spokesperson, embodying the author's voice within the narrative (Barbolosi and Plana, 2013, p. 84). In essence, this transformation signifies the shift of "classical" mimesis into *discourse*, into a speech act, finding its presence within a text endowed with a specific narrative component.

One might say that the world in which we live displays before our eyes two possible theatrical settings in which to place ourselves, the dramatic and the post-dramatic. The first, the *dramatic*, is the one that Szondi (1987) describes in his *Theory of Modern Drama*.

The second possible landscape is the *post-dramatic* one (Lehmann, 2006), to some of whose characteristics we shall refer to in the theoretical framework. This post-dramatic theater differs from naturalistic theater (which seeks empathy) and epic theater (which gives rise to a critical positioning) in that the former (post-dramatic) creates reality, not on fiction (reality representation), and on various *planes of immanence* (perspectives) (Deleuze, 1990; Lehmann, 2006; López-Antuñano, 2023; Orosa & Galarza, 2022).

As far as the *objective* of this research is concerned, it has to do with the formulation and subsequent verification of a theoretical model that would encompass some of the most important concepts of the current (post-)drama. The drawing up of the theoretical model comes from various sources: theatrical experiences, the exchange of information and impressions with professionals in this field, the reading of some works/papers of contemporary theatrology, just to cite a few examples.

The *validation* of this theoretical model is based on the analysis and subsequent synthesis of those multiplicities and assemblages in the field of *event* and *aion* time (simultaneity) present in the pragmatics of post-drama today.

Undoubtedly in the current *relevant literature*, Lehmann (2006), Pavis (2014), Sarrazac (2013), Cornago (2006), López-Antuñano (2023) (the two latter in Spain), we can find very interesting studies in the scope of the theatrology, in the field of the theoretical, of theatre theory, let's put it this way. However, and this would be *a gap in the research* on the subject at hand, it is not so easy to find research of both importance and significance that starts from or is intimately related to the pragmatics of (post-)drama, closely bound to its facticity, and that, in addition, is connected to the mentality and philosophy of the time.



This would be one of the lacks, if we carry out a *critical review*, that could be made, respectfully understood, to the scientific theatrical literature of our days. The oblivion or absence of connection between theoretical-philosophical studies, which are supposed to be prestigious, and theatrical pragmatics, which would be something left to the artists and their imagination. Of course, and as we have already mentioned before, this hierarchical strategy (the important factor is the theory, and then, the factuality) does not match the culture of our time, and even less so the indifference towards transdisciplinarity, which is another of the important contributions of postmodern culture to current research and education.

For this reason, precisely, we are going to approach this research from this double *theoretical-pragmatic* perspective, on the one hand, and a *transdisciplinary* strategy, on the other. In the latter sense, we mean to say that we are going to address this paper from a somewhat postmodern viewpoint (in its cultural sense), which is where we will find many of the internal reasons, that is to say, the whys and wherefores for the prescriptive descriptions that poetics of all times tend to make. How often it is forgotten that the theatrical performances of an age relate to a way of seeing the world, of conceiving life and existence.

What has been said up to this point, therefore, would *justify the need and relevance* of this research, which will be developed further on below.

What *this research intends to show* is the relatedness and correlation of the conceptual model (which we will find in the theoretical framework) with the pragmatics of theater; the validation, therefore, of this model through the canonical plays of the 21st century. And we have already remarked that from a *rhizomatic* way of thinking this theoretical-pragmatic strategy, added to a *transdisciplinary* methodology, are the best remedies to carry out an investigation of (post-)drama from a post-modern point of view.

# 2. Objectives

The objective of the current research revolves, in the first place, around the drafting of a scientific model that gathers and encompasses some of the most up-to-date significant concepts and patterns of dramaturgy/stage, the central goal of the undertakings of the present paper in its relation to contemporary European scene. It is important to note that the post-dramatic text that is included with the scenes is not an autarchic element in the whole event (that would be like hierarchizing, privileging one sign over others, a return to the metaphysical "form"), but one more and simultaneous to others (*aion* time) in the framework of the multiplicities that this monistic and limitless ontology entails.

The conceptual framework and scientific model that we have evolved comes from various sources: theatrical experiences, exchange of information and impressions with professionals in this field, different essays on contemporary theatrology, the in-depth study of the most renowned philosophical authors in the post-structuralism arena, to cite just a few examples.

The *validation* of this theoretical model, the second and most significant objective of this research, is based on the analysis and subsequent synthesis of those multiplicities and assemblages in the field of the so-called *event* and *aion* time (simultaneity, event motion) present in the factuality of current post-drama. This work has not been carried out from the causal logical reasoning proper to abstract metaphysics but from the dynamic ontology inherent to postmodern society.



## 3. Theoretical Framework

In this section we will now take a brief survey at some of the most significant patterns of contemporary European (post-)drama in accordance with the criteria we have already mentioned. The selection of these patterns or research variables for a conceptual framework reflects the information gathered from various sources: professional conversations, exchange of experiences in the field of this specialty, theoretical-dramatic or philosophical research, among others. Later, this model of analysis proposed below will have to be validated by current European post-theatrical pragmatics.

#### 3.1. Fable (and crisis)

The term "fable" (mythos) holds a significant meaning closely associated with that of a *plot*. It is crucial to note that a fable should not be perceived merely as a straightforward story or as a simple message with its content. Instead, its actual concept is intricately bound up with a context of confrontation and the idea of *agon*, signifying competition, struggle, and conflict (referred to as a "plot").

The Western understanding of the plot as an antagonistic force stem from an affinity with the origin and teleological philosophy underlying Greek tragedy. In this framework, a character desires to achieve a specific goal (the dramatic objective), engages in a struggle to attain it (confrontation), and ultimately either succeeds or fails.

The fable and its *agonic* dimension, along with the systematic *selection of facts* and the concept of *turning point*, are inseparably intertwined. This interconnectedness establishes and shapes the distinction between *mythos*, which encompasses fable organization, and its contrast to a mere chronicle or common narrative (Aristóteles, 1974; Brecht, 2000; Richardson, 2006; Hegel, 2007; Diderot, 2009; Lessing, 2014; Pavis, 2014; Orosa, 2023b).

The concept of the fable comprises more than just notions of causal connections and chronological sequences; it also covers the ideas of a living, orderly, and intelligible totality, emphasizing beauty as the unity of its parts. Additionally, it implies ideas of dramatic completeness in terms of organization and meaning (purpose, logos), representing an invention or device of style and organicist tendency.

Beneath the foundational notion of "ars imitatur naturam" (art as imitation of nature), the concept not only conceals the idea of mimetic illusion but also that of composition, reflecting the order of the world and the embodiment of life in its logical and universal dimensions.

The elements mentioned up to this point, in conjunction with the underlying pillars of *dramatic tensión*, *narrative intrusions within the dramatic space*, from its inception, or techniques of *formal* expression found the patterns or constituent elements of the term "composition." This term, when understood in its broader sense, beyond the mere plot, alludes to the *fable*.

In contemporary European theater, one of the many harvests of postmodern culture, the crisis of the fable unfolds one of the keys to understanding this culture and which has its birth in the field of post-structuralism. These latter notions encompass diverse forms of thought and devices: the hybridization of cultures, non-authoritarian, non-hierarchical, non-identitarian principles that embrace or prefer polyphony, very diverse perspectives, studies that explore reasoning devoid of meanings (outside metaphysical logics and that would now unfold at a "molecular" level) and references to statements impossible to classify (atopias) (Deleuze, 1990).



Canonical *fable* undergoes a transformation, dissolving into sensations and subjective visions attempting to project the internal world (self-reference is not the private or internal life of the author, it refers, on the one hand, to multiplicity, perspectivism and, on the other hand, to the inner life of *event*: time *agon* -simultaneity-, repetition and difference, the relational life of a logic of meaning proper to postmodernity [Deleuze, 1990] in a language devoid of an inherent, identitarian logic, proper to the hierarchizing principles of metaphysics).

The Western canonical idea of dramatic progression, which lends meaning to actions, is dismantled. Instead, techniques like associative mechanisms and collage, or the fusion of real and dreamlike layers, are employed. Here, the audience is tasked with reconstructing an entire world of impressions based on their personal perspective (plane of immanence).

Speech act theory has severed the connection between utterance and "truth", the latter being defined as the correlation between language and the world. The crisis of *drama* is attributable to the fact that "fiction" is not already hinged on content, but on language ("the text") and its referral to the *outside*, that *absence* that is no longer present in the sign but in *difference* (Derrida, 1997).

Therefore, the crisis of the *fable* stems from a new theatrical and cultural vision based on the setting up of an experience different from that copy of "reality" that is inherent to mimesis. This is a fresh experience that now neither imitates nor re-presents the world, but rather generates it, although it is sometimes approached through some bodily or spiritual *experimentation* bound up with the myriadness of the event.

On the one hand, those who are the attendees cast their presence and visions beyond the socalled fourth wall and the "author", on the other hand, projects his own self, the drama that unfolds in his mental space, onto the spectators' imaginary realm, seated ostensibly in the "seating area" of a public scrutiny. This *interaction* is reinforced by exemplifying a consortium that becomes more and more intense, either at the moment of reading or at the time of the staging, which in the 21st century, with all its consequences, is an exercise in performativity. (Aristóteles, 1974; Brecht, 2000; Richardson, 2006; Hegel, 2007; Diderot, 2009; Pavis, 2014; Lessing, 2014; Orosa, 2023a)

#### 3.2. Mimesis (and crisis)

The discussion on the issue about *mimesis* (imitatio, Naturaleza Bella, mimetic illusion) is closely connected to the canonical concept/context at hand and to its recycling, development, and reconsideration (due to changes in worldview) since the late 19th and early 20th centuries. This concept refers to the re-presentation of reality in theatrical plays, the imitation of nature or life, and, importantly, of the human being (Artaud, 1986; Brecht, 2000; López-Antuñano, 2023; Orosa, 2023b).

From an ideological standpoint, proves challenging to comprehend the history of the term "mimesis" without taking into account the decline of the concept of reality in the field of postmodernity. Furthermore, it becomes intricate to reassemble some sort of world and address the solitude experienced by individuals (the subjectivities) when "they" find themselves isolated or oblivious to any type of surroundings. This is apart from the debate on identity in postmodern culture, which, if such an identity were to exist, would only have a mere guild character; but precisely because postmodernity rejects the principles and structure of a metaphysical reality such a circumstance (the existence of an identity) is not possible.



From a political perspective, the intrusion of the current and post-classicist narratives and its contemporary discourse provides an opportunity for the narrators, now prominently visible and intense, to guide the new citizen in understanding the postmodern city (referred to as the new polis). The deictic level and the diegetic discourse play crucial roles in this neo-didactic function.

Lastly, from an aesthetic viewpoint, the speech act and utterance have emerged, intertwining their techniques and strategies with purely dramatic ones. This integration is implemented through a variety of different tools, such as artificial and extreme voices that arise from contemporary narratology to which we should most certainly add organizations and new logics of an "architectural" different nature. All this unfolds under the shelter of a multiplicity of meanings depending on the levels of insertion in which all these elements are embedded: extradiegetic, intradiegetic and metadiegetic.

The ongoing debate around the term mimesis/imitation focuses on its possible extinction due to the crisis of the concept on grounds of its bond with metaphysics, with the Aristotelian apophantic, and what it implies in terms of connection between language and the world (representation), with things (which of course disrupts a contemporary logic based on *difference* and the *event*).

In this innovative space, art is no longer mere deception, farce or copy, but a fragment of "the real" (reality creation), at least in a mental sense. This shift allows us to contemplate the notion of *play* making life a presentation (in a possible Deleuzian sense) encompassing dimensions of *event*, *difference* and *margin*.

However, it seems that there could be a potential convergence between performativity and mimesis, as performative actions include and create elements of reality in which fiction and form intersect with everyday experiences of becoming, although this does not mean a restoration of a system or ideas from earlier traditional visions (Pirandello, 1968; Artaud, 1986; Brecht, 2000; Nietzsche, 2012; Orosa, 2023b; Pavis, 2014)

#### 3.3. European (post-)dramatic context: some notions and patterns

In this section we will refer to the (post-)dramatic context, and to some of its patterns (especially dramaturgical), upon which the crisis of the fable and mimesis develops and integrates (according to postmodern culture). This section, together with the two previous ones of the theoretical framework, shows the different characteristics that we have selected, in an informal way (also by consulting different professionals), in order to compose, or rather create, the legal framework of this research on European contemporary theater. For the aforementioned selection, we have also taken into account those formal scientific writings and studies that deal with the object of the research.

According to the first of the characteristics we have selected (*writing as a dynamic labyrinth*), drama has become post-drama, a tendency or a way of conceiving that embraces all kinds of genres, techniques or arts often becoming a total work of art. The new dramaturgies alternate and merge realist and post-dramatic elements in a truly intelligent way and without necessarily entering into conflict with each other.

We are faced with the contradiction between the act of writing and fixing a text and the unique and ephemeral nature of a stage presentation, which serves as a driving force for both dramaturgy and the stage. What may initially appear as nonsensical gradually reveals subtle hints and unexpected connections at pivotal moments. The theatrical realm is unfolded as a



dynamic labyrinth, constantly in motion and susceptible to unforeseen alterations (as it matches the economy of the *sign* in Jacques Derrida [1997]).

In terms of text rewriting, a technique known as *development of drama*, stage work and rehearsals often dispense with the original text and return to it again and again to overwrite it. In many cases, the text is produced during rehearsals and tends to be ready in the days leading up to the premiere.

It is important to note that the text only serves as one of the theatrical signs, without outlining the stage design or construction process. Moreover, contemporary language encompasses a wide array of artistic, visual, and literary styles. This diversity of languages often interacts through opposition, contrast, and complementarity, resulting in a fragmentation that challenges conventional notions of unity, totality, hierarchy, and coherence (metaphysics versus contemporary event. *Non-representational relationship between text and stage. Aesthetics of the suppression of meaning*).

*Palimpsest* is a technique that uses previous artistic works and erect over these stories singular buildings that leave on paper, on the glazes of former writings, artworks rethought via *deconstruction* that lead through the *absence* of the sign to new events and perspectives. These palimpsest techniques are sometimes joined with the so-called *assemblages*, with montage ones, which consist on discontinuity practices combining with *multiplicities*, with *intensities*, with *strengths*: in other words, with *heterogeneous series*.

*Dramatic organization and text*. The dramaturgy centers on fragmented, poetic or repetitive texts (*repetition of difference*) that deviate from traditional structures, eschewing a one-size-fits-all approach either through word/identity or by classical reasoning. These texts often lack dialogues or conversations, (defined) characters, or a dramatic action. Instead, they exhibit these multiple simultaneous multiplicities, devoid of hierarchy, each carrying equal thematic significance. Moreover, these postmodern texts deliberately discard the metaphysical syntactic logic of classical literary forms.

*Everyday life and micro-discourses.* It avoids relying on grand narratives or structured, meaningful meta-narratives. Instead, it embraces the portrayal of ordinary, daily experiences and routines that attempt to depict something or someone in a vague or ambiguous manner, often in isolation. Continuous references are made to the present now and today, to the realities and problems of the contemporary world. However, this issue is transformed into a pretext that conveys a dramatic proposal, with no purpose of denunciation.

The "characters" (we would say better, the *subjectivities*) show fragmentation, fluctuation and instability, and lack a defined purpose, task or function. They are often merely voices or echoes performing various guises or *multiplicities* of an *event* made up of *difference*. Obviously, the traditional psychological consistency (of the characters) gives way to this changing nature. Likewise, sequences are fragmented into concise sketches that establish rhizomatic connections or assemblages, making synthesis impossible and eliciting a transient and elusive impression.

*New ways of dialogue and conversation.* The audience listens passively to a number of speakers who do not interact with each other, which resembles a monologue, a narration or a long speech. This monologue is dissected and rephrased by one or more speakers, creating a fragmented narrative that is performed by several voices. Often, the monologue meanders off-topic. *Diegesis* (narration, emulation) prevails over *mimesis*, conveyed on stage by means of long explanations.



Lengthy unanswered discussions ensue, sometimes phrased as an appeal to the audience, which goes unanswered. Playwright annotations and stage directions explicitly convey their thoughts. Marginal discourse intermingles with lyrical language.

In contemporary theatrical practice, the "characters" displace those roles of representation and incarnation to become authentic actors, they themselves are reality and reality marked by *multiplicities* and *difference*. The development of the stage blurs the boundaries of what we call the real, creating a perfect blend in which it is difficult to distinguish between reality and fiction. The contemporary stage boldly confronts reality, not by replicating or reproducing it, but by presenting it outside of imitation, as a vibrant and palpable becoming.

There are no plots, but interactions between different types of discourse and subjectivities. There is no recognizable space-time (rather, *aion* time), but possible worlds and contexts (planes of immanence). Subjectivity shows itself in a polyhedral guise, employs various languages and communicates through equivocal expressions, misunderstandings and reiterations, rather than conveying absolute truths.

As for self-referential writing, according to some it is a set of memories, feelings and sensations experienced by an individual, relating to himself or to the environments frequented, sifted by the self but not necessarily representing objective reality. Dramatic writing does not pretend to offer an objective vision. For others, on the other hand, this self-referentiality alludes to the elements of the *event*, that occurrence from which the object and the subject (which for some has died) have been displaced, in the realm of multiplicities and the simultaneity of time.

*Abstraction and polysemy*. The elements of the becoming (*aion* as an event movement), of the event, once subject and object are displaced, are the ambience, the situations.

In contrast to the organized acts and arrangements common in traditional writing (unitary metaphysical conception), the fragmentary structure often arises through juxtaposition (fragmentariness of the *event*). This includes the superimposition of planes (simultaneity, *aion*), associative processes, worlds of illusion, daydreams or dreamscapes, discursive formulations or extensive ponderings of the playwright. These fragments often lack logical coherence, since they are based on the automatism and verbalization of the unconscious mind, which produces effects of incommunicability (molar and molecular level, [Deleuze,1990]).

There is an absence of canonical conflict, tension or dramatic progression, which are replaced by *destinerrancy* (Derrida, 1997) from the logic of *errancy* (the *difference*). The traditional dialogues or monologues tend to be more discursive than dramatic, lacking tension (canonical tension). The scene is transformed into a sensory experience, which serves as a means of expressing the "abstract" (molecular level in Deleuze [1990]): worryings, personal musings and stream of consciousness that lacks logical formulation (logic has become another in the realm of postmodernity). There is thematic, informative or discursive dispersion, repetition (of the unique multiplicity) and inclusion of texts of varied provenance. This results in discontinuous information and the juxtaposition of materials of diverse provenance (absence of metaphysical unity), including the presence of heterogeneous items from different artistic disciplines. Such an abundance of information often results in ambiguous messages or the diversity of viewpoints or perspectives of the playwright or other subjectivities involved in the formulation of the play. Some new texts celebrate the multiplicity of perspectives. The outcome is determined by different subjectivities and perspectives and, in essence, there is no single, definitive interpretation (a metatext).



The text often digresses into philosophical discussions. These digressions can be transformed into authentic conversations addressed to other subjectivities or to the audience, breaking the fourth wall. This constant questioning is beyond the realm of fiction. The permanent *controversy* arises from the clash of diverse perspectives, replacing the traditional dramatic conflict. What emerges are sporadic and unrelated controversies, confrontations, disputes and micro-conflicts, reflecting the complexity of human interactions.

The metaphysical notion of meaning, "sense of drama," is challenged by the absence of a linear dramatic development. Instead, there is a discontinuous sequence of conflicts, tensions and successive actions. The play pauses at certain points, allowing for contemplation, introspection and even contradictory statements, diverging from initial impressions. The flow of action is frequently interrupted to reflect on specific situations or human configurations, questioning the conventional dramatic structure. There is no longer a clear dramatic form with a definite beginning, climax or resolution. Instead, attention pivots to the elements of the event inspired by multiplicity, marking a departure from traditional narrative orientations (new logics of meaning based on difference, multiplicities, the interruption or cutting of flows to stop the power of previous discourses, opposition to the principle of identity, non-contradiction and excluded third party).

Contemporary playwrights employ the resource of revisiting the past to suspend dramatic progression and tension, ultimately leading to a reversal of the traditional sense of drama. Similarly, anticipation challenges the notion of tense waiting by revealing to the audience what will happen in advance, both in terms of subjectivities and plot.

Events and judgments about them are shown not only as they are, but also considering what they could be or become (in conditional or future terms or uncertain prospects). Engaging in a process that explores various possibilities and alternative scenes, whether parallel or successive, inherently involves repetition. Repetition and multiplicity, as well as repetition and circularity, are two predominant processes in contemporary theater (Lopez-Antuñano, 2023; Sanchis-Sinisterra, 2002; Sarrazac, 2013; Schmidt, 2017, Orosa and Galarza, 2022; Deleuze, 1990; Derrida, 1997; During, 2005).

# 3.4. Panel of European playwrights/stage directors of the 21st century and main canonical plays

Below we provide a table on European playwrights/stage directors of the 21st century and their main canonical plays. The latter will be the object of analysis and subsequent synthesis and, in the same way (as explained above), will serve to assess the validation, or not, of both the theoretical framework and its corresponding model. Such a model and its patterns (characteristic variables), as previously mentioned, comes from conversations with post-drama professionals, personal experiences or those of other experts and previous scientific studies, to mention some of its sources.

#### Tabla 1.

Table of relevant canonical plays of the European stage of the 21st century		
Authors	Plays	
Alvis Hermanis	Works with texts by various authors and stages productions	
	centered on human behavior.	
Amir Reza Koohestani	The Meursault Investigation	
Anatoli Vassiliev	Engages in diverse adaptation projects.	

*Table of relevant canonical plays of the European stage of the 21st century* 



Anja Hilling	liberté oh no no no
Christoph Marthaler	<i>Hotel Angst</i> . Interprets classical texts and collaborates on original works with fellow playwrights.
Claude Régy	Stages texts by various authors and directs operas.
Dea Loher	Gaunerstück
Dusan David Parizek	The Ridiculous Darkness
Falk Richter	Known for crafting his own texts and reimagining classical plays.
Frank Castorf	Dostoevsky Cycle
Gesine Danckwart	Wunderland (Wonderland); Täglich Brot (Daily Bread)
Ingrid Lausund	Trilliarden. Die Angst vor dem Verlorengehn
Jan Klata	Stage management with political upheavals, creating powerful narratives.
Jan Lauwers	Plastic creator, shows, texts, stagings, direction of actors and dancers, images, design of the scenic space.
Joël Pommerat	Creates diverse cinematic productions, various shows, and plays for children.
Katie Mitchell	Renowned for directing dramatic and operatic texts.
Kay Voges	Borderline Procession
Krzystof Warlikowski	Creates original plays inspired by classical works and diverse texts.
Marianna Salzmann	Wir Zöpfe; Ich, ein Anfang
René Pollesch	The City as Booty; Insourcing the Home; Sex Love You, But I Have Chosen Entdramatisierung.
Sibylle Berg	Viel gut Essen
Simon McBurney	Adapts novels and creates original texts for the stage.
Simon Stone	Three Sisters
Sussane Kennedy	Angela (a strange loop)
Theresia Walser	Die Jüngste aus dem Walser-Clan
Thomas Ostermeier	Stage direction



Yael Ronen

Source: López Antuñano (2023); Schmidt (2017); Orosa and Galarza (2022).

# 4. Materials and methods

## 4.1. Methodology, justification and preciseness of objectives

The object of study of this research with a qualitative approach, and with some questionings therefore difficult to measure, is the post-dramatic "organization", the production of a model that is able to apprehend firstly the experience and phenomenon of European post-drama and, secondly, the translation of this experience into the canonical plays that have been selected in table 1 above (section 3.4.).

This is followed by the analysis and subsequent validation of the theoretical paradigm, if applicable. Can the scientific model proposed here be validated by examining these canonical plays that are the central focus of this study? These inquiries pave the way for an *exploration*, a later *description* (collection of information to demonstrate the relations between model and pragmatics and to describe the factuality of the phenomenon as it is), the necessary *explanation* (with reference to this fresh knowledge and new findings) and subsequent comprehensive *validation* (evaluating and assessing the systematics of this research to determine its quality and validity) around the intricate dynamics underlying contemporary dramatic arts in the European context.

In the collection of data and its procedures, not only formal means such as documentation, books, publications and papers have been used, but also informal ones such as conversations with interested people, experiences of professionals, the customs and mentality of the post-modern stage, among others. *Structured observation* is also part of these procedures, following the specific method that arises from each of the patterns of the designed model and its confrontation with the factuality of the selected plays.

*The criteria of selection* of the post-dramatic plays reflects their being representative in the range of post-dramatic production, and, besides, some scholars have mentioned a good number of these plays in various academic studies, as shown in the sources of Table 1, section 3.4.

This exploration focuses on two fundamental stage elements: fable and mimesis (and its crisis), both of which are features of the re-presentation of the metaphysical period. But not only, it also adds other patterns on which the aforementioned (fable and mimesis) are based and that make up the European post-dramatic context in its wide extension.

Employing the analytical-synthetic method, the research meticulously breaks down the texts comprising the European stage productions into their constituent parts. Subsequently, commonalities are synthesized to draw pertinent conclusions.

This scholarly endeavor seeks to address fundamental research questions. Specifically, it attempts to discern the patterns and characteristics of the European post-dramatic phenomenon, evidenced by the crisis of two of the foundational dramatic elements (namely fable and mimesis), of which other factors that shape the context and standards of the current post-dramatic landscape are also part.

According to the justification criteria of a research project, this article is socially relevant because it analyzes a field that is determinant for the cultural industries. It has theoretical



value, since it works with paradigms of the Social Sciences and integrates them into the conception of theater and post-drama. Finally, it is methodologically useful, because it provides a new instrument of data collection, in this case, for the analysis of post-drama and in some case for performance.

The main *objective* within this methodological use is to compose a panel for the analysis of plays from the point of view of post-drama. We also make use of a transdisciplinary strategy by introducing concepts coming from postmodern culture and poststructuralist philosophy. The secondary *objective* is to validate the informal/formal model through the pragmatism/factuality of the plays selected in Table 1 (section 3.4.).

#### 4.2. Content analysis and observation sheet

#### Tabla 2.

	Feature/Concept/ Scenic signs	Explanation
1	Fable	Design from the Western Dramatic Canon that has to do with the plot, made up of agon, and the composition of the play in all its components, in such a way as to imitate universal order.
2	Mimesis	Imitation of life and nature. Metaphysical result of the re- presentation based on the Aristotelian apophantic structure.
3	Writing as a dynamic labyrinth	The theatrical realm appears as a dynamic labyrinth, in constant motion and susceptible to unforeseen alterations.
4	Poetics and stage notes. Text rewriting	Stage work and rehearsals often disregard the original text and return to it again and again to overwrite it. In many cases the text is created during rehearsals and tends to be finalized in the days before the premiere.
5	Aesthetics of the suppression of meaning.	Replacement of metaphysical causal logic by new logics of meaning.
6	The palimpsest	Palimpsest is a technique of rewriting over the ruins of previous texts.
7	Dramatic organization and text	The dramaturgy centers on fragmented, poetic, or repetitive texts that deviate from traditional structures, eschewing a singular focus on the word and classical reasoning.
8	Critical view of the world and everyday life.	It avoids relying on grand narratives or structured, meaningful meta-narratives. Instead, it embraces the portrayal of ordinary, everyday moments and routines (micro-discourses)
9	Characters	The "characters" exhibit fragmentation, fluctuation, and instability, lacking a defined purpose, task, or function. Frequently, they serve as mere voices or echoes.

Dramaturgical patterns (and stage concepts) of European post-dramatic theatre



10	New forms of dialogue	Conversations unfold at a molar and molecular level. New logics of meaning.
11	Openness to the real and creation of reality	In contemporary theatrical practice, subjectivities relinquish the roles of representation to become real actors.
12	Dramatic text and textuality	There are no plots, but rather interactions between different types of discourse and subjectivities.
13	Self-referential writing	Some scholars understand it as a set of memories experienced by an individual, others as repeatedly returning to the elements of the so-called event.
14	Abstraction and polysemy	What is usually called "abstraction" refers to the idea of event and new logics of meaning.
15	Abandonment of traditional structures	Unlike the structured acts and frames commonly found in traditional writing, the fragmentary structure frequently emerges through juxtaposition.
16	Spectator participation	The outcome is shaped by subjectivity and there is no single, definitive interpretation.
17	Loss of dramatic conflict	The ongoing controversy arises from the clash of diverse perspectives, replacing the traditional dramatic conflict.

Source: Orosa and Galarza (2022), López-Antuñano (2023), Sanchis-Sinisterra (2002), Sarrazac (2013), Schmidt (2017).

The technique used will be *content analysis* by the application of the model in Table 2 in relation to the model of the canonical plays in Table 1. Table 2. refers to the patterns of post-dramatic theater, with a special attention to dramaturgy; Table 1. relates to the most recognized canonical plays of the 21st century in Europe (this is the *sample* under study). The production of the panels was carried out through dialogue with peers in the period 2022-24 within the School of Theater of the Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, and in addition through the use made of the appropriate documents, including audiovisual ones, mentioned along this paper (*materials* employed). It aims precisely to validate the post-dramatic theoretical model of Table 2. by analyzing the factuality of the plays contained in Table 1. That is, the objective is to see how and if the theoretical model developed to address post-drama is confirmed by the analysis and subsequent synthesis of the most representative plays of this phenomenon.



The theoretical panel of post-dramatic analysis reflects some variables in the sphere of contemporary theatre (it is an open model), namely: the non-causality of the action, the absence of hierarchies of any kind, the disappearance of autarchical elements or signs in the work of art —such as the text, for example—, the confrontation of disciplines in the stage — absence of harmony, new logics of meaning—, self-referentiality (in the event), micro-discourses to the detriment of meta-narratives, the collage of different multiple and fragmented scenes, and others that can be observed above in the respective Table 2.

As for the *inclusion criteria*, as we have already mentioned, they refer to the canonicity or postdramatic relevance of the plays that have been selected, such criteria defined not only through conversations, professional experiences or other informal means, but also through the scientific works that we have been referring to in this research.

To conclude this section, we have already mentioned that a *descriptive data analysis method* is used (in order to know the *sample* as it is) by dissecting and later synthesizing these data in order to compare them with the theoretical framework developed in Table 2 and, eventually, to determine its validity.

## 5. Research results

From an aesthetic point of view, comparisons and analysis are made among the plays listed in Table 1 in order to observe the presence of features from the theoretical framework (Table 2.); that is to say, the existence of variables from the model (Table 2.) is observed in a structured way within the selected plays as sample and object of analysis (Table 1).

In the first place, and somewhat as a pre-analysis of the features of the model, a variable is highlighted: the existence of written or rewritten texts (*text rewriting*) in these plays within the post-dramatic realm. This does not necessarily mean that there is a textual autarchy; but it does mean that the mere existence of a text places us in a somewhat "conservative" attitude within the post-drama (even though these new texts have different characteristics from those of the previous stage). All the plays in Table 1. include the text as part of the scenic signs.

When we take a close look to the elements of post-drama, listed in Table 2., it will be seen how post-dramatic variables are anchored in these plays in an undoubtedly recurrent manner: rupture of linear times, choices of *aion* time or simultaneity, fragmentation of construction, of processes, of subjectivities, conversations in a new logic of meaning, displacement of the object/subject and a letting the elements of the *event* show themselves (atmospheres), juxtaposition (multiplicity of the event) instead of the unity and identity characteristic of metaphysics, conditional statements (what would happen if what happened had not happened), micro-discourses, daily routines (multiplicity, simulacrum, repetition of difference, micro-discourse instead of meta-narratives), collage, irrationality and the emergence of new logics of meaning. All the elements of the theoretical model are consistently found in the selected sample of the post-dramatic woods. An emblematic case would be that of a nihilistic approach around the characteristics outlined in this paragraph and which matches Castorf's political reflection on the neoliberal Zeitgeist (Schmidt, 2017).

Koohestani's *The Meursault Investigation* (2016) makes special attention to the variable of hybridization of cultures and cross-cultural understanding. *Liberté oh no no no*, by Anja Hilling (2022) pays special attention to the *ambiguity* of the text and to *subjectivities* to the point of dispensing with the *nominative value of names*, just to mention some of the patterns in the list, although many other variables are apparent in this play, which features many of the elements of post-drama.



As far as *fable* and *mimesis* are concerned, they vanish entirely from the selected plays. This is reasonable considering that these metaphysical constructions, coming from the representational or apophantic structure of Aristotle (and which is the inspiration for Hegel's conception of drama), are denied by the ontology of the *event* and its "eternal recurrence". Nevertheless, there are authors who from a post-dramatic standpoint turn to the means of mimetic and psychological realism, as is the case with Thomas Ostermeier, for example, in his productions of Shakespeare (2006-2018).

The aesthetics of re-presentation and the canonical dramatic framework are replaced by other styles of the suppression of meaning and by repetition and difference, as we also observe in the theatrical plays that make up the sample. The *palimpsest* makes its debut in some of the plays (not all). Simon Stone's *Three Sisters* (2016) is a magnificent specimen of overwriting: all of Chekhov's original text has vanished and we can only notice the shadows of the old fable.

The former characters of incarnation are replaced in all cases by subjectivities and these are displaced to the margins, conversations sometimes take place on a molecular plane open to the real and the creation of reality, which is often mixed with fiction (this is the case of Dusan David Parizek in *The Ridiculous Darkness* [2014] and Kay Voges in his *Borderline Procession* [2016]).

Self-referentiality (which has less to do with the director's private life than with the architectures of the *event*), perspectives (of the director, actors, of each of the spectators, who also participate in the construction of the plays, immanent planes of the critics, etc.) and the death of the traditional conflict (which is replaced by the clash and confrontation of perspectives) are variables that are constantly found in the analysis of the plays in Table 1. (To give an example, *Love You, But I Have Chosen Entdramatisierung*, by René Pollesch [2026], where the actors discuss a question by one of the most important contemporary European philosophers, Slavoj Žižek: "What is an event?").

We also find in the selected plays the *unique* repetition of multiplicity, often in circular motion, the suspension of *dramatic tension* through analepsis and prolepsis, and the denial of the metaphysical principles of non-contradiction, identity and excluded third party (as in the case of Sussane Kennedy in *Angela – a strange loop –* [2023]).

The initial premise is corroborated by employing the model along with its pertinent variables. Through this process, the subsequent results are confirmed: the conclusions validate the model of post-dramatic stage contemporaneity. They also prove how the stage texts examined validate the crisis of mimesis and fable in the post-dramatic realm.

## 6. Discussion and Conclusions

Regarding interpretation of the results discussed in the previous section, we observe how the variables that are object of inclusion in the theoretical model correlate with the factuality of the selected plays.

In truth, this latter finding has to do with the formulation of a theoretical model, some keys to understand the reality of what is called post-dramatic. Other previous authors (Lehmann, to give a relevant example) have launched this project with different results, not so much as a scientific project but rather as if it were an essay. Even professionals in this industry need a model, networks that help to capture this reality that is part of their art, of their work, so that they can clearly see all its implications.



What is happening, if we observe it in depth, is that we are witnessing a re-foundation of theater, of dramatic art, given that it saw its birth as a statute of copy, of imitation, of mimicry (according to the philosophy of the time, the structure of Greek ontology in the hands of Plato and Aristotle); this same theater is now transformed into a reality that is no longer a mimetic illusion. Precisely with the emergence of postmodernity and its characteristic mentality (whose keys are addressed by the philosophy of post-structuralism) not only emerges a new worldview, a philosophy, but a reformulation of drama, art, politics, ethics, which shows us the need and importance of a theory such as this that addresses the new dramatic phenomena, but not only from the literary theory, from the theatrology, but from that same mentality and philosophy that are engendering a new world. A philosophy and theory of drama that challenges the whole European tradition, the metaphysical principles that founded it.

It is understood that this is a beginning, maybe like many others, in contemporary theatrical studies, and the one that concerns us does it from a transdisciplinary perspective: dramatic theory and philosophy, let us say, "contemporary". This approach in which we have been working, as it is designed, undoubtedly opens new doors to more novel, more holistic, more integral approaches, to deeper answers on the subject.

It is considered that the most significant finding has to do with the approach to a desired model of theoretical keys that tries to address the re-foundation of theater. This fact shows a singular advance, the transdisciplinary methodology, that leads the pragmatics and the facticity of the theater where it should be taken, towards a mentality/philosophy that engenders all the expressions of a society. It is precisely this point that shows a hopeful horizon for new research on this subject.

Lastly, the use and the utility of the panels developed to draw relevant conclusions are validated, although their use for full validation is left open to future researchers.

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### **AUTHORS:**

Miguel A. Orosa:

Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Ibarra

Ph.D. in Spanish Language and its Literatures (European Postdrama/Performance, Indigenous Latin American Postdramatic Theatre, TV fiction script). MBA-IESE Business School. Law School-Universidad de Valladolid, Spain. First National Research Award "La Ley". Writer, Dramatist, Scriptwriter. Plays published by Ñaque, Europe. Member of the METACOM Research Group.

maorosa1@pucesi.edu.ec

Índice H: 7 Orcid ID: <u>https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8452-3372</u> Scopus ID: 57195417263 Academia.edu: <u>https://independent.academia.edu/MiguelOrosa</u>

**Viviana Noemí Galarza-Ligña** Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador, Ibarra

Master's Degree in Communication and Creative Industries. Degree in Social Communication. Ten years of experience in University Teaching. Researcher in the areas of Cultural Communication, Broadcasting and Communication for Social Change. Member of the METACOM Research Group.

vngalarza@pucesi.edu.ec

Índice H: 4 Orcid ID: <u>https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2770-246X</u> Scopus ID: 57195317264 Google Scholar: <u>https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=OOquZBkAAAAJ&hl=es</u> ResearchGate: <u>https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Viviana-Galarza</u>