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“Well-Staged Syllables”:
From Classical to Early Modern English Metres
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Edited by Silvia Bigliazzi

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https://skenejournal.skeneproject.it
info@skeneproject.it

Dir. Resp. (aut. Trib. di Verona): Guido Avezzù
P.O. Box 149 c/o Mail Boxes Etc. (MBE150) – Viale Col. Galliano, 51, 37138, Verona (I)

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Eleonora Fois and Daniela Francesca Virdis*

Normal Non-Fluency and Verbatim Theatre: a Linguistic and Performative Analysis[1]

Abstract

The main inspiration for developing a creative verbatim theatre performance is the recording of members of a community, highlighting the claim that the interviewees' exact words are entirely preserved so that the audience knows it is an authentic word-for-word account. While the common non-fluency features that characterise everyday speech abound in the language of verbatim theatre, the conventions of a theatrical script are strictly connected to their embodiment in performance, so some dramatic transformations are inevitable. The role of playwrights and actors in a genre which seemingly binds and limits them will be investigated through a linguistic and performative analysis of normal non-fluency features in *The Laramie Project* (2000), a verbatim play by Moisés Kaufman, in which such features are expected to feature prominently, and in *Fleabag* (2013), a non-verbatim play by Phoebe Waller-Bridge, in which their occurrence would presumably be more limited. The two plays provide a similar background to the investigation of normal non-fluency. The spartan set and the simplicity of costumes and props manage to create an informal and intimate theatrical experience in both *The Laramie Project* and *Fleabag*. The two plays are built around the revelation of people's deepest desires and the confessions of their private thoughts; moreover, they both employ the technique of directly addressing the audience in the performance in order to develop an emotional connection with them. Our analysis of normal non-fluency will be grounded in plays belonging to different genres but with a common purpose and a common dialogical structure. By contrasting the scripts of the two texts and the transcriptions of their performances, the analysis aims to bring to light the complexity of the notion and interpretation of 'verbatim'. It does so by examining the occurrences of normal non-fluency and exploring the performative function of omissions or additions.

Keywords: verbatim theatre; normal non-fluency; *The Laramie Project*; *Fleabag*; linguistic analysis; performative analysis

1. Introduction

The desire to provide a stage for unknown voices and discarded stories is an

[1] While both authors are responsible for the article's design and have co-revised the article, Daniela Francesca Virdis is responsible for Section 3, and Eleonora Fois for Sections 1, 2, 4 and 5. Section 3 draws from Buckledee and Virdis 2016.

* University of Cagliari - eleonora.fois@unica.it - dfvirdis@unica.it.

identifiable common thread linking verbatim theatre, documentary theatre, ethnodrama, theatre of testimony and other forms of interview-based theatre (Summerskill 2020). Verbatim theatre (Paget 1987) involves taping and transcribing interviews with members of a community to exploit them as the primary stimulus for the creative development of the performance; verbatim theatre sources its dialogue in much the same way as journalists source their stories.

Verbatim theatre was acknowledged as a genre in its own right at the turn of the millennium, but the form was pioneered in the early 1980s by Anna Deavere Smith whose "one person documentaries" preserved the exact words heard during the interviews she had carried out for her plays (Hammond and Steward 2008, version.p.). Unlike documentary theatre, verbatim theatre emphasises the fact that the audience is getting a word-for-word account or "straight from the mouth of those involved" (Bottom 2006, 59). The language of verbatim theatre is said to be "often fragmentary, stumbling and repetitious" (Young 2009, 81), and incorporates the normal non-fluency features that characterise everyday speech. These features can be better explained by examining research in the field of linguistics. Mistakes or breaks in speech are commonplace in oral conversation, and are therefore the normal form of communication. Given that they do not constitute a continuous or linear flow of speech, they are non-fluent. Normal non-fluency also depends on the type of communication. In the case of verbatim theatre, communication is drawn from spoken interviews. On the one hand, the interview form generally creates an asymmetry of roles since the interviewee is aware of being in a position of inferiority and has little control over the questions asked. On the other hand, the spoken channel progressively reduces the distance between interviewer and interviewee, favouring a more relaxed conversational style. As the interviews for verbatim plays often pivot on controversial events, often asking the interviewee(s) to disclose private matters or opinions, the amount of disfluency features occurring in the recorded – and transcribed – interviews might be significantly high.

The goal of verbatim theatre is to provide an unmediated experience which puts emphasis on realism (Stuart Fisher 2011, 112), but, as British actor and director Mark Wing Davey has said, "however naturalistic the staging is, the actor is not the actual interviewee"; despite all attempts to copy every detail of pronunciation and rhythm of speech, "the text goes through another, final stage in the process that gives it a life of its own" (Hammond and Steward 2008, n.p.).

"The medium of drama is people moving about on a stage using words. That is, the words are only part of the medium" (Pound 1934, 46), which shows that the conventions of a theatrical script are strictly connected to their embodiment in performance (Peters 2017, 118). Thus, questions arise

as to the role of playwrights and actors in a genre which, apparently, binds and limits them. This issue will be investigated through a linguistic and performative analysis of the occurrence and purpose of normal non-fluency features in *The Laramie Project* (Kaufman 2000), a verbatim play, in which they are therefore expected to feature prominently, and in *Fleabag* (Waller Bridge 2013), a non-verbatim play in which their occurrence is expected to be more limited.

Despite belonging to different theatrical genres, the two plays rely heavily on direct address as a way to involve the audience in the performance itself and to establish an emotional connection. Moreover, since the two plays explore intimate and deeply personal topics, they provide a similar background to the investigation of normal non-fluency. Two of the three levels of performance analysis (Balme 2008, 137) will be considered in order to make the analysis as detailed as possible.

The script will be provided together with transcription of a recorded performance of the plays. Methodologically speaking, therefore, it is essential to specify that the following product-oriented analysis cannot verify the consistency of the findings due to the unfeasibility of examining multiple performances.

Section 2 will discuss the verbatim technique and the playwright's role in the process of converting interviews into a play. Section 3 will introduce the linguistic features of normal non-fluency in interviews and theatrical scripts. Section 4 will present comparative examples of non-fluency in the two plays. Moving from the contrast between script and performance, the goal of the analysis is to bring to light the complexity of the notion and interpretation of "verbatim" through the occurrence of normal non-fluency and its dramatic performative function. The analysis will investigate what aspects may be integrated with normal non-fluency to shape the performance; whether a verbatim correspondence of normal non-fluency features can be detected between script and performance and whether similarities can be found in the type of disfluency occurring in the two plays, thus highlighting the common goals of theatrical writing, regardless of the genre.

2. The Genre

Soans describes the "quintessence of verbatim theatre" as "a group of actors sitting on chairs, or cardboard boxes or a sofa, talking to the audience, simply telling stories" (Hammond and Steward 2008, 21). Similarly, in its "purest" sense, "verbatim theatre is performed with actors in a line before the audience" (Luckhurst 2008, 214), who becomes a proper character and the focus of the actors' attention (Hammond and Steward 2008, n.p.).

It is the pursuit of the "reality effect" which legitimises the production of verbatim works (Martin 2013, 5). Such an effect can be achieved by reporting spoken words verbatim and by breaking the fourth wall with direct address (Duggan 2013, 152; Jeffers 2006, 3; Paget 2008, 137; Stuart Fisher 2011, 116; Summerskill 2020, n.p.) which might develop through the use of monologues (Watt 2009, 194), narration and flashbacks (Chou and Bleiker 2010, 565). This authenticity is essential for deeply political plays such as Richard Norton-Taylor's 'tribunal plays', which dramatised transcripts of legal inquiries (Luckhurst 2008), and David Hare's *The Permanent Way* (2003) and *Stuff Happens* (2004). In particular, verbal authenticity is at the core of headphone verbatim theatre, or "recorded delivery" (Wake 2013), whose two pioneering practitioners were British Alecky Blythe and Australian Roslyn Oades. Headphone verbatim theatre further explores and pushes forward the boundaries of the genre. In headphone theatre, the audience wears headphones throughout the performance (Klich 2017), whereas in headphone verbatim theatre the headphones are worn by the actor(s) rather than the audience: the script is directly fed into the ears of the actors, who perform the edited interviews whilst listening to them at the same time.

It should be remembered that the verbatim respect of the spoken word is not the only means through which to achieve the reality effect. In Horin's *Through the Wire* (2004), for instance, one of the refugees around whom the story revolves is also acting as himself in the play (with the ethical repercussions of asking victims of such complicated stories to relive their traumas performance after performance. Stuart Fisher 2011). In Blank and Jensen's *The Exonerated* (2006), the actors sit behind lecterns that hold the script, to highlight their function as "intermediaries" (Stuart Fisher 2011, 113). In *Cruising,* Blythe, reminiscent of the Brechtian lesson on alienation, chose actors who were 30-40 years younger than the people whose words were being reported.

Theatre requires tension, crisis, the ticking of the dramatic clock (Anderson 2007, 80): the methodological challenge of verbatim theatre lies in reconciling the needs of theatrical storytelling and respect for the verbatim accounts of the story's original protagonists. The source material of the verbatim script is authentic and even mirrors the multiple viewpoints regarding a certain fact, but it is selected and overseen by the playwright; the reception of the play is the only aspect which cannot be fully controlled (Martin 2013, 13).

> Theatre is a process of selection. What happens in the research phase is you become very attached to your characters but we all know in the artistic process you have to let it go. The tension comes when someone in the process says, 'we must let them say exactly what they said, we have to create all this to give them more credibility' and the theatre artist is saying, 'no, we only

> need them to lift their finger once which tells us everything'. The tension is, does the writer have the confidence to allow that process to take place? (Anderson 2007, 86)

Thus, interviews and recordings are to be considered as dramaturgically flexible stimuli. Authenticity is ensured by the sources of the lines, but selection implies that interviews necessarily undergo some form of manipulation, with all the related ethical issues arising from appropriating the narrators' words and depriving them of their agency (Summerskill 2020). Various terms are used to explain the process of adapting verbatim material into performance: "compression" and "shaping" (Luckhurst 2008, 207), "editing" and "juxtaposing" (Bottoms 2006, 59), "manipulating, cutting and splicing" (Hammond and Steward 2008, n.p.), and "framing" (Jeffers 2006, 14); the verbatim words are described as being "distilled" (Anderson and Wilkinson 2007, 154).

This practice of collaging together, editing, and juxtaposing individual interviews presupposes the touch of a unifying hand and a constructed and purposeful authorial perspective. In Hare's *Stuff Happens*, for instance, verbatim quotes mingle with scenes happening behind closed doors for which the author admitted to having used his imagination. More importantly, no signal is given to unequivocally highlight this change of strategy: verbatim and fictional lines are not distinguishable (Bottom 2006, 60), thus gaining equal dramatic force and authority. As Hare says, "theatre is not journalism, and its incorporating real-life material does not necessarily imply that it can be judged by the real-life criteria" (Luckhurst 2008). As rhetoric manipulation is embedded in the creation of a play, regardless of the pretences of truth, "unmediated access to the 'real' is not something theatre can ever honestly provide" (Bottom 2006, 57).

In verbatim theatre, "diegetic realism" co-exists with "mimetic realism", where re-enacted moments are designed to mimetically represent the actual experience (Wake 2013, 106). Moisés Kaufman, director of *The Laramie Project*, said that "When we read transcriptions of the interviews we had gathered on that trip . . . we were captivated by what we heard. The material was powerful, but entirely disorganized" (Moore 2020b). The dramatic transformation of the script also extends to the way the natural flow of the interviewees' utterances and the dramatic action are intercut to build the narrative.

Verbatim theatre requires more flexible expectations from actors. As mentioned above, many verbatim plays, *Laramie* included, largely exploit direct address techniques as a way to further engage with the audience and act on their reactions, provided that they cannot be determined with precision. In *Laramie*, this is the natural consequence of having structured the interviews mostly as single soliloquies rather than dialogues (with some

exceptions which will emerge from the analysis). The main effect is losing the illusion of "peering through a keyhole" (Pritner and Walters 2017, 57), thus raising awareness of the audience's condition as an acknowledged witness. This aligns with Brecht's challenge to illusion, in the attempt to actively engage the audience. Moreover, in *Laramie* as in other verbatim plays, the number of characters require actors to play more than one part, which involves a rapid transformation of time, place and character "of the kind unknown and unnecessary to naturalistic theatre" (Paget 2008, 137); this does not favour the kind of audience's participation that stems from associating one actor with a single character and usually enhanced by the persistence of the fourth wall.

Verbatim performances are based on appropriating every character's cadence or pattern of speech, but there are no analytical terms to describe the process of playing real characters, as the additional challenges of playing a real person using their own words are different from the challenges of playing fictional characters. As actor Bella Merlin noticed, neither the Stanislavskian lesson nor the Brechtian lesson was of help (Cantrell 2011, 168). Nicolas Kent, recalling the staging process of *Justifying War*, remarks that:

> We did the first one in 1994 and acting styles have become even more naturalistic since then . . . we said the lines naturalistically, but we said the lines. Now we include 'ers' and 'uhms' and stutters (Hammond and Steward 2008, version.p.).

For Alechy Blythe,

> it is these [every "uhm", "er", stutter and non-sequitur lovingly preserved] that reveal the persons' thought processes: there is always a specific reason why a person stutters on a certain word, and it is this detail that gives the character such startling verisimilitude. (Hammond and Steward 2008, n.p.).

Normal non-fluency is then interpreted as a performative tool at the actors' disposal. Before looking at the practical exploitation of this concept, the stylistic, psycholinguistic and discursive features of normal non-fluency will be investigated.

3. Normal Non-Fluency: Definition and Theoretical Background

3.1. Normal Non-Fluency and Naturally-Occurring Interaction

In a book section entitled "How Dramatic Dialogue Is *Not* Like Conversation" (emphasis in original), Mick Short (1996, 174-5) provides a very helpful

definition and examination of the phenomenon of normal non-fluency from the disciplinary perspective of stylistics. In the paragraph, the linguistic features of a sequence of tape-recorded interaction (naturally-occurring and extempore) are contrasted with those of an excerpt from a dramatic exchange (fictional and scripted): although dramatic exchange may create an impression of lively and interactive dialogue, it does not result in a precise representation of spoken conversation. Naturally-occurring exchange and fictional exchange are, in fact, markedly different (Hughes 1996), since the former is an example of typical speech, and the latter of typical writing (Leech et al. 1982, 139-40).

Fluency is one of the characteristics constituing an essential part of typical writing. This concept was introduced into the field of psychology toward the end of the nineteenth century, and has since been defined as "the facility with which ideas can be called from the 'antechamber of consciousness' — roughly equivalent to the subconscious in later terminology — into full consciousness" (Rogers 1953, 368). Contrariwise, one of the traits characterising typical speech is normal non-fluency. This phenomenon consists of the semantic, morphosyntactic and paralinguistic mistakes and breaks in the speech-flow commonly typifying oral performance and extempore interaction as uttered by almost all speakers (Fromkin 1973). As Leech and Short (2007, 130) note, these mistakes and breaks "are non-fluent in the sense that they fall short of an 'ideal' delivery, and yet they are normal in the sense that they occur habitually in speech; it is difficult to say anything at all interesting without such lapses occurring". The mistakes and breaks under examination are the following:

1. Small silent hesitations and pauses;
2. Voiced and unvoiced fillers (*ah*, *er*, *ummm*, *em*);
3. Discourse markers, like initiating signals (*Oh*, *Well*), tag questions (*isn't it*) and tag constructions (*you know*);
4. Mispronunciations: lack of clear articulation or enunciation of word sounds, e.g., lisp;
5. False starts (1): unnecessary repetitions of whole words or parts of them;
6. False starts (2): syntactic structures which are abandoned, or reformulations of what has been said resulting in ungrammatical sequences of words;
7. Stammering: difficulty in controlling the rhythm and timing of speech;
8. Cluttering: abnormally fast rate of speech, with syllables running into each other;
9. Lack of voice projection, e.g., mumbling;
10. Attempts at taking conversational turns which are abandoned, or speakers overlapping and interrupting one another;
11. The competition among the speakers to take the conversation off onto a topic of their choosing.

(Adapted from Short 1996, 176; Leech and Short 2007, 130-131; Hargie 2011, 224; see also Crystal and Davy 1969, 104)

As psycholinguists Broen and Siegel (1972, 219) state, "Rate of disfluency is highly variable both within and among speakers . . . Within an individual, disfluency varies as a function of the degree of linguistic processing required by the speech task . . . as well as the speaker's emotional state" and several content, situational and interpersonal factors. In their psycholinguistic research on non-fluency, carried out by interviewing respondents, Blass and Siegman (1975) analyse two such factors: 1. The various communicative methods adopted to get answers from respondents – in these scholars' studies, speaking, dictation and writing; 2. The degree of intimacy of the matter under discussion during the speech event of the interview. Interviews and dialogue are also the methods elected to collect the lines and data constituting the scripts in verbatim theatre.[2] Furthermore, intimate topics, such as personal matters, choices and problems, are also treated in verbatim theatre (see the essays on and interviews with six leading verbatim playwrights in Hammond and Steward 2008). For these reasons, Blass and Siegman's (1975) psycholinguistic scrutiny will be presented here.

As outlined by these scholars, in their research "Eighteen subjects responded to questions in an interview-like situation in which response modes (speaking, dictation, and writing) and question topics (personal *v.* impersonal) were systematically varied" (Blass and Siegman 1975, 20); ten dependent variables were assessed, consisting of content, syntactic and extralinguistic indices of fluency and oral behaviour. The main aim of the analysis was to try and measure the deviation of the respondents' linguistic performance during the interviews from their linguistic competence; in other words, to assess the variables triggering their fluctuations between fluency and normal non-fluency.

As demonstrated by this examination, the communicative method employed in the interview and its distinctive encoding conditions influence the relations between interviewer and interviewee in the speech event. For instance, the speaking method occasions a higher level of visual contact

[2] In both psycholinguistic research and verbatim theatre, embracing the method of the interview as a conversational mode offers diverse advantages. In Blass and Siegman's (1975, 22) words, "the interview is a relatively well-structured form of communication in our society with each of the interactants usually having an implicit awareness of the behaviours appropriate to that setting. Among other things, the participants in an interview are aware that one participant (the interviewer) is to initiate dialogue, to ask most of the questions, and in general to have greater control over the situation, while the other participant (the interviewee) is to do most of the responding and in general have less control of the situation".

between the two interactants than dictation or writing; this yields the following results:

1. The interviewee feels less control of the speech event and more psychological pressure than in the other two methods;
2. There occurs an intensification of the role asymmetry inherent in the relation between the two interactants;
3. The two interactants get more involved with each other and their social distance diminishes, two factors determining a linguistic shift toward a more familiar conversational style.

This investigation also proves that, during an exchange with an interviewer they are unacquainted with, the interviewee is more willing to reveal their ideas and thoughts about public information and activities, rather than exposing their private concerns. This inclination is conveyed by shorter utterances and a reduced output when covering personal subjects, and by a more reticent and debased — namely, non-fluent — use of language in their answers to intimate questions as compared to their replies to non-intimate ones.

Interviews discussing private matters also underlie verbatim theatre, as shown in Section 2 (see also Hammond and Steward 2008). The findings of Blass and Siegman's psycholinguistic analysis may therefore contribute to further exploring verbatim theatre and its stylistic and discursive aspects. Result no. 1 above (the lack of control over the speech event and the psychological pressure felt by the interviewee) and result no. 2 (the role asymmetry between the two interactants) directly originate from the great amount of visual contact characterising the speaking method relied on in the interview and favoured over dictation and writing. These circumstances might be eased but, by the very nature of the speaking itself, they cannot be altered radically. Consequently, it can be safely hypothesised that they are also primary qualities of the interviews verbatim theatre is founded on. A calming and mitigating influence can be ascribed to result no. 3 above: the two interactants' involvement with each other and their diminished social distance, which leads to and is simultaneously relayed by their more colloquial conversational attitude. As inferable from verbatim plays, such a quasi-familiar manner is also one of the linguistic properties of verbatim theatre interviews.

It seems that one conclusion drawn by Blass and Siegman does not fully apply to verbatim theatre; namely, the interviewee's unwillingness to disclose the mental and emotional condition they are experiencing to an interviewer with whom they are not well acquainted. In both Blass and Siegman's research and verbatim theatre interviews, the interviewee and the subjects to be treated in the speech event are chosen by the interviewer.

Nevertheless, it is in verbatim theatre interviews only that the interviewee approves heartily of being asked questions about intimate matters and, having given this approval, they are more than willing to give the direct, honest and detailed answers underpinning verbatim theatre.

3.2. Normal Non-Fluency in Fictional Interaction and in Verbatim Theatre

As argued in the studies referenced in Section 3.1, extempore dialogue is distinctly typified by normal non-fluency, so much so that, when normal non-fluency features are produced by the speaker, they are usually apt to go unnoticed or unaccounted for by the hearer,[3] since they are unrelated to the propositional content and interpretation of naturally-occurring conversation. Accordingly, moving from non-fictional interaction to fictional interaction, and considering the dissimilarities between the two, a playwright can fail to include these features in manufactured discourse, and still be able to create a dialogic text closely resembling spontaneous discourse (see Clark 2014 for these two varieties of discourse). According to Short,

> Normal non-fluency does not occur in drama dialogue, precisely because that dialogue is written (even though it is written to be spoken). Moreover, if features normally associated with normal non-fluency do occur, they are perceived by readers and audience as having a *meaningful* function precisely because we know that the dramatist must have included them *on purpose*. (Short 1996, 177; emphasis in original)

Moreover, creative-writing handbooks commonly advise that plays and scripted discourse should comprise planned normal non-fluency elements, so that the impression of extempore exchange is given (see, among others, Morkane 2004, 33). When these elements are investigated from a stylistic viewpoint, all of them should be carefully taken into account and interpreted; that is to say, they should not be ignored or scrutinised as the similar unplanned items in spontaneous interaction might be. In fictional dialogue, these features play a central role in the process of meaning-making and do not hinder it, because they merely 'disguise' themselves as performance mistakes. Hence, according to Short (1996, 178), "In well-constructed dramatic dialogue, everything is meant by the playwright, even when it is apparently unintended by the character".

This playwright-character dichotomy was developed by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 84-5; 145-6; 219) in their book on Early Modern English fictional

[3] But see Wilson 2000, 24: "But such features can be more characteristic of some speakers than others. They can even become recognized as part of someone's idiolect or individual manner of using language and, as such, subject to overt comment, parody or exaggeration".

and non-fictional written dialogues and on the methodologies to explore the speech-like items they contain. These two researchers analyse several written text-types featuring speech, comprising trial proceedings, witness depositions, plays, fiction and didactic works. Among other models, they elaborate on Short's (1996, 169-72) prototypical discourse structure of drama and its two discourse levels: the topmost level of playwright-audience (or, in their broader application, author-reader) and the lower level of character-character (or speaker-hearer), with the topmost level embracing the lower. This model has a number of implications for the pragmatic and stylistic function of normal non-fluency items and for communicating the author's and the speaker's pragmatic stances. As Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 85) argue,

> At the topmost discourse levels, all speech-like features are *authorial* pragmatic devices. Items such as normal non-fluency features cannot be dismissed as unconscious non-strategic items, since they have been put there on purpose by the author, to appeal to or manipulate the reader, to assist in characterisation, and so on. At the lower embedded discourse levels, speech-like features may also count as *speaker* pragmatic devices. This author-speaker distinction is clearest in the case of constructed (i.e. presented) dialogue, but one cannot dismiss it for recorded (i.e. re-presented) dialogue.

At the topmost level of author-reader, all speech-like elements (for instance, hesitators and extempore examples of pragmatic noise expressing laughter or suffering) are authorial pragmatic markers and influence the audience. Therefore, they realise Gricean flouts, signalling to the reader how the speaker behaves and reacts, what their conversational purposes are and how to read the interaction they are engaged in.[4] On the contrary, at the lower level of speaker-hearer, several speech-like items may be plain cases of normal non-fluency, thereby realising Gricean infringements. Several other speech-like items may also be speaker pragmatic markers, indicating the character's state of mind and physical and mental sensations. To sum up, at the speaker-hearer level normal non-fluency elements sometimes constitute Gricean infringements, whereas at the author-reader level they always constitute Gricean flouts necessitating investigation and explanation.

Leech and Short (2007, 129) maintain that, in fiction and fictional drama, "in rendering conversation, a fiction writer is in a very different situation from that of the detective or legal reporter giving an actual transcript of words spoken by real people; there is no specific real speech event against which the report may be measured as a more or less accurate record". In line with this claim, authors of fiction, such as playwrights or novelists, and authors

[4] See also Burton 1980, 113: "'performance errors', say, stuttering, hesitations, false starts, etc., are interpreted wherever possible by the audience to mean something like 'that character is nervous' rather than 'that actor is nervous'".

of non-fiction, such as detectives or legal reporters, should be regarded as directly opposite both in character and in terms of the activities they engage in. The fiction writer presents, namely invents or fashions manufactured conversational discourse, while the non-fiction writer re-presents, namely notes or gives an account of naturally-occurring conversation.

When the character and activities of a fiction author and of a non-fiction author are compared with those of a verbatim theatre author, the heterogeneous nature of the verbatim playwright emerges.[5] A verbatim playwright actually benefits from the prerogatives of both a fiction writer and a non-fiction writer, or reporter. On the one hand, like reporters, verbatim playwrights record the real sentences uttered by real speakers during real interviews while, on the other hand, like writers, they cut, choose and arrange the recorded data into a text matching the audience's expectations in terms of length and plot unfolding. The following are additional remarkable privileges of verbatim playwrights:

1. Like writers, verbatim playwrights select their characters and subject matters, i.e. whom to record and what to speak about;[6]
2. When verbatim playwrights write out spontaneous interviews, the

[5] The nature and role of a verbatim theatre actor are also heterogeneous; here, they will be dealt with shortly for space reasons only, but would deserve further research. As shown in Section 2, verbatim actors listen to the edited versions of the recorded interviews underlying verbatim plays, which are transmitted via earphones in rehearsals; verbatim actors are required to utter the interviewees' very sentences and imitate their ways of speaking. In the practice of such verbatim playwrights as British Alecky Blythe (2011), the recordings are also transmitted during the actual performances, and it is essential for verbatim actors not to commit the recorded sentences to memory, with a view to assuring an authentic and accurate delivery of them. As a result, verbatim actors can be reckoned to act as mediators, and verbatim plays can be thought of and scrutinised as extensive instances of free direct speech (Semino and Short 2004). This mediation, however, may be biased, deliberately or accidentally. In the first place, verbatim actors rigorously maintain the linguistic and paralinguistic characteristics of the recorded sentences; they have, though, to put the final and completing touches to them by adding non-verbal aspects, like gestures and facial expressions, to make their rendition more realistic. Given that these aspects are not incorporated into the recordings, they can only be contrived by verbatim actors working with their playwrights or directors: gestures and facial expressions hence help to suggest their personal reading of the interviewees' sentences. In addition, verbatim actors listen to the recordings again and again during rehearsals, as they would read from scripted plays in fictional drama, and most of them memorise the recorded texts. Accordingly, intentionally or not, verbatim actors have the leisure to interpret those texts and, when performing them, could convey their own reading to the spectators.

[6] See Blass and Siegman 1975, outlined in Section 3.1, for the psychological effects of the communicative method of the spoken interview on both the interviewer and the interviewee, particularly on the latter.

resulting transcriptions are graphologically laid out as fictional drama and manufactured discourse; they do not appear chaotic, as some transcriptions of extempore discourse may be;

3. Conversely, like reporters, verbatim playwrights acquire single sentences and whole texts characterised by what Leech and Short (2007, 129) define as "ear for conversation". That is to say, these sentences and texts reveal the qualities of naturally-occurring exchange utilised in the original interviews, including morphosyntactic and lexical patterns and paralinguistic properties, such as overlaps and interruptions, all of which contribute to meaning-making and characterisation.[7]

In this research on verbatim theatre due to their specific, almost unique and heterogeneous nature, verbatim playwrights are so called only for ease of reference.

Owing to the fact that they display a number of characteristics of fiction writers, can verbatim playwrights really be said to be verbatim? Clark and Gerrig (1990, 795-6) supply a linguistic definition of verbatim discourse: in its strictest sense, they note that this term indicates that the original or earlier speech event has been exactly transcribed, along with its normal non-fluency items. In verbatim theatre, the original interviews as a whole are modified by verbatim playwrights, but the single sentences they encompass are not. Therefore, verbatim playwrights are not verbatim at the macro-linguistic level of the edited interview, but are verbatim at the micro-linguistic level of the unedited sentence.

This is most pertinent to the questions discussed by Culpeper and Kytö (2010, 85; 219) considered above. In non-fictional re-presented dialogue, edited recordings and transcripts are the results of the unchallenged decisions and readings of editors, reporters and, in verbatim theatre, playwrights. At the micro-linguistic and micro-discursive level, they purposefully re-present normal non-fluency elements and pragmatic devices in certain contexts, thus alluding to or even constructing certain, maybe partial, interpretations of a sentence or a whole text. As a result, maintaining these elements and devices in a modified text contributes to relaying the editors' and playwrights' agenda and to achieving their cultural and political aims.

Moreover, in verbatim theatre possible prejudice can also be found at the macro-linguistic and macro-discursive level. According to Leech and

[7] This feature of verbatim theatre and of the interview method leading to it has also been found fault with: "'verbatim theatre' — the term currently favoured in the UK over the more general term 'documentary theatre'. The distinction matters because, where the latter might be said to imply the foregrounding of documents, of texts, the term 'verbatim theatre' tends to fetishize the notion that we are getting things 'word for word', straight from the mouths of those 'involved'" (Bottoms 2006, 59).

Short (2007, 131), "real conversation is unlikely to be promising material for literary employment, and . . . it must strike an observer who has an eye on the aesthetic capabilities of language as sloppy, banal and ill-organised". Consequently, in verbatim theatre the editing process is necessary and inevitable, so that the resulting written text, when likened to fictional conversation and drama, does not look too dissimilar, uncomfortable or challenging to read. Nevertheless, members of the audience inclined to critical analysis may ask themselves at least two questions: 1. Why specific sentences have been consciously edited in and some other sentences have been consciously edited out by the verbatim playwright; 2. Whether this has been done in line with the playwright's "eye for beauty" or, in Leech and Short's (2007, 129) term, their "ear for conversation", or rather in line with their political and cultural ideology. Hence, although this type of theatre is typified by extempore traits, any verbatim play, just like manufactured dramatic discourse, may also possibly communicate a 'manufactured' mindset and pay tribute to an agenda preserving the status quo.[8]

4. The Analysis

As seen in the previous sections, verbatim theatre pivots on the idea of individual speech events being staged exactly as uttered, which sparks interesting theoretical reflections on the role of verbatim practitioners. The analysis will involve a verbatim play, *The Laramie Project*, and a non-verbatim play, *Fleabag*. The bare stage (a few tables and chairs in *Laramie*, and a single stool in *Fleabag*) and the simplicity of the costumes and props

[8] As observed by a number of scholars publishing mostly in the United States, the worldview of the verbatim playwrights working in Britain is comparatively mainstream and non-political. For the politics of verbatim theatre, see Waters 2011 and Sierz 2005, 59: "Political [verbatim] plays such as David Hare's *The Permanent Way* (2003) and *Stuff Happens* (2004) or Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo's *Guantanamo: 'Honor Bound To Defend Freedom'* (2004) come across as powerful public forums, but they can't be said to stretch drama's aesthetic boundaries, or even suggest ways of changing the world. Like Reality TV, they simply tell us what we already know". See also Martin 2006: 14: "'Verbatim' can also be an unfortunately accurate description of documentary theatre as it infers great authority to moments of utterance unmitigated by an ex post facto mode of maturing memory. Its duplicitous nature is akin to the double-dealing of television docudramas." See Bottoms 2006, 59 for R. Soans's *Talking to Terrorists* (2005) in particular and for verbatim theatre in general: "this emphasis on the verbatim tends to further obscure the world-shaping role of the writer in editing and juxtaposing the gathered materials: on examination, Soans's 'theology' turns out to be the standard white mythology of 'us' as normal and decent and 'them' as the dark and dysfunctional, yet most critics seem to have treated him as merely a conduit for the viewpoints of others".

shape an informal, nearly intimate, theatrical experience for both *Laramie* and *Fleabag*. The two plays are based on sharing private moments with the audience and relying heavily on direct address. This allows for the analysis of normal non-fluency to be grounded on plays belonging to different genres but with a common purpose and a common dialogical structure.

By comparing the presence of normal non-fluency elements in both the script and the performance, the interpretation of the verbatim technique and the performative functions of normal non-fluency will come to light. The underlined elements in the transcription of the performed lines indicate either normal non-fluency in both script and performance or normal non-fluency only in performance. The use of Italics indicates shifts in the lines performed. Moreover, '/' and '//' indicate pauses in performance; '..' indicate shorter pauses. The analysis will refer to the list of normal non-fluency features provided in Section 3.1; they will be indicated in brackets as NNF plus the corresponding number.

4.1. *The Laramie Project*

Gender identity and politics were the focus of most American documentary trial plays created and produced during the 1990s, as well as a major source of dramatic interrogation for two famous plays by the New York-based Tectonic Theater Project. *Gross Indecency* and *The Laramie Project* explored the dangers, past and present, of being homosexual. The brutal beating and death of Matthew Shepard, a gay student who lived in the town of Laramie, Wyoming, was the focus of *Laramie*, which premiered in 2000 and became the most widely produced new play of the century's first decade (O'Connor 2013, 156). The analysis is based on the twentieth-anniversary performance, recorded at the Provincetown Theatre on 28 October 2018, and on the script published by Dramatist Play Service Inc. in 2001.

The actors conducted the interviews with the people of Laramie (Kaufman 2001, 483), recording more than two hundred interviews – and four hundred hours of tape over a period of two years (Lacko 2018, 30; Magagna 2016, 200). The narrator at the beginning of the play immediately discloses the fact that 'the play . . . is *edited* from those interviews' (Kaufman 2001, 21; emphasis added). The actors also actively participated in the creative process with director/playwright Moisés Kaufman:

> the *actor* [sic]*/dramaturgs* in the company began creating theatrical presentations ("moments") with the material in the texts. . . . And the writers [sic] group was there to continue to help me make changes and *additions* based on what the actors were bringing to rehearsal. (Moore 2020b, emphasis added)

The relative objectivity of this theatre form (O'Connor 2013, 158) is thus questioned by the company's involvement as writers who shape and edit the script *and* as actors who play all the parts. However, this was the key to creating the authenticity the company sought,[9] as it is clear from the words of Head Writer and Assistant Director Leigh Fondakowski:

> we also knew that we were expanding upon it in a way by having the actor who interviewed the person in real life play the characters they had personally met. So that the audience was just one degree of separation from the actual person, and the connective tissue was the empathy of the actor. (Moore 2020a)[10]

Laramie opens with an actor[11] who, after introducing his first interviewee, Sgt. Hing, morphs on stage, wearing a hat and 'becoming' Sgt. Hing, whose utterances, interlaced with those of other characters, introduce the audience to Laramie and its people.

> 1
> (script)
> SGT HING. I was born and raised here. My family is, uh, third generation. My grandparents moved here in the early 1900s. We've had basically three, well, my daughter makes it fourth generation. (21)
> *
> (performance)
> SGT HING. I was born and raised here, uh.. My family is third generation / My grandparents moved here in the early 1900s and—uhm .. We've had basically three uh.. you know, well, my daughter makes it fourth generation.
>
> 2
> (script)
> SGT HING. it's a good place to live. Good people, lots of space. Now, when the incident happened, with that boy, a lot of press people came here. And *one time some of them* followed me out to the crime scene. And uh, well, it was a beautiful day, absolutely gorgeous day, real clear and crisp and the sky was that blue that, uh… you know, you'll never be able to paint, it's just sky blue – *it's just gorgeous.* And the mountains *in the background and a little snow on 'em,* and this one reporter, uh… lady… person, that, *was out there*, she said… (21)

[9] On a strictly social and political level, the company's work also allowed to undeniably classify Shepard's murder as a hate crime. During the interviews for *The Laramie Project: Ten Years Later*, actor and company member Greg Pierotti reported Aaron McKinney, one of the murderers, saying: "The night I did it, I did have hatred for homosexuals" and "Matt Shepard needed killing" (Moore 2020a).

[10] However, such connection only exists if the play is performed by the original cast.

[11] It was not the original cast who performed this production. In the script, the actor speaking – hence, the one who actually interviewed Sgt. Hing – is Greg Pierotti.

*

(performance)
SGT HING. it's a good place to live uh… Good people, loooots of space / Now / when that incident happened with that boy / a loooot of press people came up here uh / *One day a couple of 'em* followed me out to the crime scene, and uh it was a beautiful day, absolutely gorgeous day ya know / real clear and crisp // and the sky… *the sky* was that uh ..sky blue that, you know, you'll never be able to paint it, it's just sky blue // And the mountains, and a little snow, and here's uh one reporter, uh .. lady .. person, uh that, *came up to me and* she said…

These performed utterances prove to be richer in voiced fillers (NNF 2) and hesitations (NNF 1) than the script. This might result from improvisation, in which case the actor managed to reproduce the most frequent features of the real person interviewed. The tag construction 'you know' (NNF 3), which establishes shared information (Schiffrin 1987, 274), thus connecting the actor and the audience, is preserved as well. Alternatively, the actor might be faithfully reproducing the original interview or even referring to the recorded performance from the original cast: unfortunately, the original interviews are not available, so it was not possible to retrace the staging process of this specific performance to support these hypotheses[12].

Laramie is rich in emotionally-charged "Moments" (as Kaufman [2000, 19] defines the single episodes structuring the performance), which provide practical examples for the psycholinguistic studies seen in Section 3.1. In "Moment: Seeing Matthew":

3
(script)
REGGIE FLUTY. So finally I said, 'Oh, for God's sakes, lighten up, Francis!' / they say I'm stubborn and I don't believe them, *but I just think*, you know, okay I've heard your opinion and now here's mine, I'm thirty-nine years old, *you know*, what are they gonna do, spank me?
MARGE MURRAY. I just hope she doesn't go before me. I just couldn't handle that. (57)
*
(performance)
REGGIE FLUTY. And finally I just *had to say*, 'Oh, for God's sakes, lighten up, Francis!' / they *tell me* I'm stubborn and I don't believe them, you know, *it's just* , okay : I've heard your opinion and now here's mine, I'm thirty-nine years old, what are they gonna do, spank me?
MARGE MURRAY. Well / I just hope she doesn't go before me/ I mean // I couldn't handle that.

Two separately conducted interviews were linked and shaped into a

[12] Further research would be required to understand the preparation of subsequent productions of a verbatim play, when, as in this case, the original connection between actors and script is lost.

conversation-like Moment. Both actresses are on stage at the same time and even though they do not address each other directly and exclusively, for they are still looking at the audience, their utterances integrate perfectly giving more weight to the Moment. The tag construction 'you know' (NNF 3) is more frequent in Reggie's scripted utterances. Performatively speaking, whether deliberate or unintentional, this deletion gives more impact and power to her outburst, which leads to wondering whether the actress is actually reproducing Reggie's reaction during the interview(s). As the original material is unavailable, it is not possible to verify whether Reggie's original utterance was as emotionally charged as seen in performance and, consequently, whether the actress preserved that intention or provided her own interpretation.

Marge, Reggie's mother, is concerned about her daughter, who was exposed to HIV while performing first aid to Matthew. The initiating signal 'Well' (NNF 3) is here working not only as a turn-taking device (the character is indicating that she is ready to speak [Fischer 1998]) and a reception marker (thus showing her reaction to previous information [Jucker and Smith 1998, 174]), but also, and more importantly, as an orientation shift, signalling the passage from the description to the evaluation of events (Schiffrin 1987: 125). It paves the way for the emotional impact of the first part of Marge's line, and so does the tag 'I mean' at the end, followed by a long dramatic pause.

Therefore, the additional tag constructions and discourse markers combine with strategic paralinguistic pauses to shape the meaning-making process. This is evident also in "Moment: Live and Let Live":

4
(script)
JEDADIAH SCHULTS. And the reverend will tell you flat out that he doesn't agree with homosexuality – and I don't know – I think right now I'm going through changes. I'm still learning about myself and – you know, I don't feel like I know enough about certain things to make a decision that says 'homosexuality is right'. When you've been raised you all life that it's wrong – and right now, I would say that I don't agree with it – yeah, that I don't agree with it, but – maybe that's just because I couldn't do it – and speaking in religious terms – I don't think that's how God intended it to happen. But I don't hate homosexuals and I mean – I'm not going to persecute them or anything like that. At all. I mean, that's not gonna be getting in the way between me and the other person at all. (59)
*
(performance)
JEDADIAH SCHULTS. The reverend will tell you flat out he doesn't agree with homosexuality / and I don't know, I- I think right now I-I'm going through some changes and / I'm / still... learning about myself and / I don't feel like I know enough about... certain things *that I can* make a decision that

> says 'homosexuality is right'// When you've been *told* your all life that it's wrong… and I mean, right now, I'd just say I don't agree with it / yeah, I don't agree with it/ but-but maybe that's just 'cause I couldn't do it – and speaking in religious terms – I don't think that's how God intended it to happen. But I mean- I-/ I don't hate homosexuals, I-I mean – I'm not going to persecute them or anything like that… I mean, at all. That's not gonna be getting in the way between me and the other person, at all.

Jedadiah's struggle and turmoil, further emphasised by the actor's choice of hugging himself as a self-protective move, is made more credible by additional normal non-fluency elements. The additional stutters and the tag construction 'I mean' (NNF 3) – the latter also added in Jedadiah's utterances in "Moment: Epilogue" – convey the character's process of self-understanding. The paralinguistic signs help to structure the performance: slower and faster speech rates stress pivotal aspects of the utterance (Jedadiah's stance on homosexuality: 'right now, I'd just say I don't agree with it / yeah, I don't agree with it'; his profession of respect for homosexuals: 'I'm not going to persecute them or anything like that … I mean, at all'), which is far from being disconnected, too slow or dispersive (as it might be perceived in reading).

So far, the analysis of script and performance of *Laramie* has revealed changes and additions. Nevertheless, some performed utterances mirror the script almost to the letter, as in the "Epilogue":

> 5
> (script)
> ROMAINE PATTERSON. Well, a year ago, I wanted to be a rock star. That was my goal. And now um, well, it's obviously changed in the fact that um, throughout the last year I -I've really realized my role in, um, in taking my part. And, um, so now instead of going to school to be in music, I'm gonna go to school for communication and political science. Um, because I have a career in political activism. Actually, I just recently found out I was gonna be honored in Washington DC from the Anti-Defamation League. And whenever I think about the angels or any of the speaking that I've done, you know… Matthew gave me – Matthew's like guiding this little path with his light for me to walk down. And he just – every time we get to like a door, he opens it. And he just says, 'okay, next step'. (86)
> *
> (performance)
> ROMAINE PATTERSON. Well… a year ago / I wanted to be a rock star / That was my goal / And now… um, well, now it's obviously changed in the fact that um, throughout the last year I -I've really realized my role in, um, in taking my part. So.. now instead of going to school to be in music I'm gonna go to school for communication… and political science. Um, because I have a career in political activism. Actually, I just recently found out that I was gonna be honored in Washington DC from the Anti-Defamation League /

> And… whenever I think about the angels or… any of the speaking that I've done, you know / Matthew gave me / Matthew's like… guiding this little… path with his light for me to walk down, and he just / every time we get to like a door, he opens it, and he just says, 'okay, next step'.

Stutters and hesitations (NNF 3) convey the self-understanding process of the character, confirmed by one of the rare occurrences of false starts ('Matthew gave me… Matthew's like guiding'. NNF 6). The approximation revealed by 'like' serves here to highlight the importance of searching for the right words (Jucker and Smith 1998, 187), in a pivotal utterance. A similar correspondence between script and performance is detectable in "Moment: A scarf":

> 6
> (script)
> ZUBAIDA ULA. I've lived in Laramie since I was four. Yeah. My parents are from Bangladesh. Two years ago, because I'm Muslim, I decided to start wearing a scarf. That's really changed my life in Laramie. Yeah. Like people say things to me like 'why do you have to wear that thing on your head?' Like, when I go to the grocery store, I'm not looking to give people Islam 101, you know what I mean? So I'll be like, well, it's part of my religion and they'll be – this is the worst part cuz they'll be like, 'I know it's part of your religion, but why?' And it's – how I am supposed to go into the whole doctrine of physical modesty and my own spiritual relationship with the Lord, standing there with my pop and chips? You know what I mean?… You know, it's so unreal to me that, yeah, that a group from New York would be writing a play about Laramie. And then I was picturing like you're gonna be in a play about my town. (36-37)
>
> *
>
> (performance)
> ZUBAIDA ULA. I've lived in Laramie since I was uh… four / Yeah… my parents are from Bangladesh / Two years ago, because I'm Muslim, I decided to start wearing a scarf / That's really changed my life in Laramie… Yeah… Like people say things to me like / 'why do you have to wear that… thing on your head?' and it's like, when I go to the grocery store, I'm not looking to give people Islam 101 / *you know*? So I'll be like, well, it's part of my religion / and they'll be / this is the worst part cuz they'll be like, 'I know it's part of your religion, but… why?' /And it's *like* / how I am supposed to go *through* the whole doctrine of physical modesty and… my own spiritual relationship with the Lord.. standing there with my pop and chips? You know what I mean?… You know, it's so unreal to me that, yeah, that… a group from New York would be… writing a play about Laramie. And then I was picturing like you're gonna be *writing* a play about my town.

It is interesting to notice that the use of 'you know' is essential in conveying the character's fear of being misinterpreted and the desire to communicate

in the clearest way possible; it expresses doubts on the shared nature of the information and on the common ground being established (Jucker and Smith 1998, 192). 'Like' works here prevalently as an indicator of direct speech (Jucker and Smith 1998, 186), hence with no key performative function. The fact that it has been preserved attests to the will to keep the conversational style of the interviewees.

The utterances of the last two excerpts from *Laramie* are rich in discourse markers, especially 'like' and 'you know' (NNF 3). What these Moments have in common is the younger age of the interviewees. Sociolinguistics studies suggest that younger people do use 'like' more often than older people (Dailey-O'Cain 2000, 77). Considering that the line where Reggie mentioning her age (Example 3) is the exception, the audience is guided towards understanding the age of the characters (and the people) involved not only by the context but also by the abundance of specific discourse markers.

4.2 *Fleabag*

Written and performed by Phoebe Waller-Bridge and directed by Vicky Jones, *Fleabag* debuted in 2013 during the Edinburgh Festival Fringe. Waller-Bridge shares with her audience the trials and tribulations of a young woman, known only as Fleabag, in present-day London. Waller Bridge wanted to write about "a young, sex-obsessed, angry, dry-witted woman" (Waller Bridge 2019, 14). The analysis is based on the performance at Wyndham's theatre, recorded by National Theatre Live in 2019, and on the script published by Nick Hern Books in the same year.

While the story is entirely the product of the playwright's creativity, there are striking similarities to verbatim performances in the way the playwright/actress intimately offers her unmediated experience to the audience: once more, direct address is favoured. The stream-of-consciousness monologues are preserved by reducing the presence of other interlocutors to the minimum, with Waller-Bridge impersonating most of the other characters with whom she exchanges lines: her father, her sister, her clients, her boyfriends. The props are limited to a stool on which Waller-Bridge sits throughout the performance.

Section 4.1 showed that *Laramie* exploited additional normal non-fluency elements to increase the emotional impact of some utterances. The opposite strategy is found in *Fleabag*. In key dramatic moments, when the emotion needs to be tangible, there is no difference between the script and the performance:

1
(script)
FLEABAG. I opened the café with my friend Boo. She's dead now. She accidentally killed herself. It wasn't her intention, but it wasn't a total accident. She didn't think she'd actually die, she just found out that her boyfriend slept with someone else and wanted to punish him by ending up in hospital and not letting him visit her for a bit. She decided to walk into a busy cycle lane, wanting to get tangled in a bike. Break a finger, maybe. But it turns out bikes can go fast and flip you into the road. Three people died. She was such a dick. I didn't tell her parents the truth. I told her boyfriend. He cried. A lot. (51)
*
(performance)
FLEABAG. I opened the café with my friend Boo / She's dead now / She accidentally killed herself / It wasn't her intention but it wasn't a total accident / She didn't think she'd actually die, she just found out that her boyfriend *fucked* someone else and wanted to punish him by ending up in hospital and not letting him visit her for a bit / She decided to walk into a busy cycle lane, wanting to get tangled in a bike, break a finger, maybe .. but it turns out bikes can go fast and flip you into the road, three people died, she was such a dick / never told her parents the truth / I told her boyfriend / He cried / A lot.

In this case, no occurrences of normal non-fluency are found in either script or performance. Every word is carefully selected: even changing the verb 'fucked' contributes to enhancing the dramatic impact of the action. As in *Laramie*, however, tempo plays a role: the fast speech rate builds to the abrupt stop at the clause 'she was such a dick', and strategic pauses mark the utterances about the mourning of Boo's parents and boyfriend. In this case, conveying the emotion lies entirely on the actor's performance, and no space is granted to interruptions.

In *Fleabag*, direct address is predominant, with few conversational moments. The peculiarity lies in the fact that Waller-Bridge still interrupts the flow of the dialogue and addresses the audience to describe her interlocutors' actions (or reactions). Moreover, with very few exceptions, she plays both Fleabag and her interlocutors – her sister, her friend, her lover and clients from the café. In these cases, normal non-fluency is more frequently found.

2
(script)
FLEABAG. Tea, Joe?
JOE. Yeah lovely, lovely. Thank you darlin'. I'm just gonna… be out the back.
. . .
FLEABAG. not sure what to do… I ask him for a rollie. I don't smoke. Well I do, but – shut up. (54)

*
(performance)
FLEABAG. Tea, Joe?
JOE. Yeah darling yeah that'd be lovely thank you. I'll just… I'll just be out the back.

. . .

FLEABAG. I'm not sure what to um… I ask him for a rollie, I don't smoke. Well I do, but – oh shut up.

The repetitions in Joe's reply do not follow the script: they are surely improvised by Waller-Bridge to make the utterance more natural and expressive: Joe sounds distracted, distant, worried, as is confirmed later on.

3
(script)
JOE. I love these chairs, y'know.
FLEABAG. What's… wrong, Joe?
JOE. Ah my girl, I just… I love people. I love people. But… they get me down.
FLEABAG. Yeah. People are… shit.
He turns and I can see into every deep line on his face.
JOE. Oh no, darlin'. People are amazing, but… when will people realise… that people is all we got?
FLEABAG. He smiles but I feel a bit ambushed. I pretend I have to wash the cappuccino machine, go inside and wipe the nozzle a bit. (55)
*
(performance)
JOE. I love these chairs y'know.
FLEABAG. What's wrong, Joe?
JOE. Ah my girl/ my girl / I love people / I love people / But they get me down.
FLEABAG. Yeah /Yeah people are shit.
He turns *to me* / I can see into every deep line on his face.
JOE. Oh no, darlin', no / People are amazing / but when will people realise / that people are all we got?
FLEABAG. He smiles at me but I feel a bit ambushed / so I pretend I have to wash the cappuccino machine, go inside and wipe the nozzle a bit.

Joe is trying to initiate the conversation by bringing up unimportant topics and by checking the shared information via the tag 'y' know' (NNF 3). The additional repetitions in Joe's next line are emphasised by Waller-Bridge's delivery, which is purposely slow, conveying Joe's sense of desolation. The doubling of the reception marker 'Yeah' (Jucker and Smith 1998, 179) emphasises Fleabag's agreement.

The next example confirms that normal non-fluency can be improvised to make the interaction more realistic.

6
(script)
FLEABAG (*to* DAD, *very drunk*). Alright, Dad!
DAD. What's going on?
FLEABAG. Oh, I'm absolutely fine.
DAD. Okay.
FLEABAG. I just –
DAD. Yes?
FLEABAG. Nothing.
DAD. Okay?
FLEABAG (*drunkenly*). Okay... I don't... yeah... I... uh...uhm... it's a... hm... Ah, fuck it.
I have a horrible feeling I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, deprived, mannish-looking, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist.
He looks at me.
DAD. Well... you get all that from your mother (68)
*
(performance)
FLEABAG (*to* DAD, *very drunk*). Alright, Dad!
DAD. What's going on?
FLEABAG. Oh, no no, I'm absolutely fine.
DAD. Okay.
FLEABAG. I just uh .. /I just .. uh
DAD. *Yeah*?
FLEABAG. Nothing... *I didn't even... uhm ok, uhm sorry... I just...* Ah, fuck it.
I have a horrible feeling I'm a greedy, perverted, selfish, apathetic, cynical, deprived, mannish-looking, morally bankrupt woman who can't even call herself a feminist.
He *just* looks at me.
DAD. Well, uh /you get all that from your mother.

Both Dad's and Fleabag's fourth turns were erased, condensing the scene to go straight to Fleabag's confession. There are numerous additional normal non-fluency features: mostly voiced fillers ('uh'. NNF 2), but also one false start ('I didn't even'. NNF 6), and multiple repetitions, which reinforce the depiction of a drunken character struggling to make an uncomfortable confession. It is interesting to notice that, even when depicting a character whose speech would normally be not only confused but also probably unintelligible, Waller-Bridge carefully delivers her lines without overlapping or cluttering. The additional voiced filler in Dad' last line, combined with a pause, introduces the punchline.

While normal non-fluency so far is detectable in the peculiar conversations in the play, it can be occasionally found in the monologues as well:

> 5
> (script)
> FLEABAG So I watched a pretty good movie, actually, called *17 Again* with Zac Efron who is…fit. I know. But seriously, he's actually a – a really good actor. So – yeah, and the film could have been worse – honestly. Than that finished. So I lay there. Thinking. Café. Numbers. Numbers. Zac. Numbers. Googled Obama to keep up with – y' know. Who, as it turns out, is also – attractive. (48)
> *
> (performance)
> FLEABAG So I watched a pretty good movie actually, called **uhm** .. *17 Again* with Zac Efron who is .. he is .. fit / I know but .. seriously, he's actually a really good actor / yeah .. and the film could have been worse, honestly, *check it out.* Than that finished, I lay there, thinking café, numbers, numbers, Zac, numbers / Googled Obama / to keep up with .. **uhm** y' know / Who, as it turns out, is also / attractive.

In this excerpt, the hesitation (NNF 1) before the title of the movie, the repetition implying the search for words to describe the actor, and the confirmation of the previous evaluation contribute to making the delivery more plausible and natural. Even the addition of the idiomatic expression 'check it out' emphasises the contact with the audience and is coherent with the addition of the tag 'you know' (NNF 3) when she mentions Obama. This certainly confirms the search for a more naturalistic delivery in contemporary theatre. However, in *Fleabag* this is more frequently found in conversations between characters or in moments where the actress explicitly seeks the support of the audience.

The analysis shows that the most frequent non-fluency features detectable in *Laramie* are hesitations (NNF 1), voiced fillers (NNF 2), and discourse markers (NNF 3). The absence of other features present in naturally-occurring interaction, such as mispronunciations (NNF 4), stammering (NNF 7), cluttering (NNF 8), and mumbling (NNF 9) can be explained by the fact that the actors' delivery has to be largely audible and understandable. The most common vocal problems in performance are lack of clarity and insufficient volume: the actors need to speak on stage with "clarity, power and confidence", for "if an audience or another actor-on-stage can neither hear nor understand you, your work is irrelevant" (Rodenburg 2020, 4-5). It can be hypothesised that the features mentioned above were recorded in the interviews but could not be reproduced lest they affected clarity and playability. However, only a deeper investigation with access to the original materials could shed light on the matter. The monologic nature of *Laramie* and *Fleabag* leaves no space for overlapping (NNF 10) or competition among speakers (NNF 11).

Fleabag entirely pivots around witty monologues and accelerated tempo.

However, limited in number, normal non-fluency features are still noticeable in the script and their number increases slightly in performance. Additional disfluency in *Fleabag* is mostly used to give the illusion of spontaneity to the (few) conversations in the play. In a reduced number of monologues, disfluency aims at heightening the connection between the actor and the audience.

In the performance of *Laramie*, additional normal non-fluency features are present. This is peculiar in that it apparently contradicts the verbatim claim of the genre, but it confirms that the performance does not slavishly follow the written script. Additional normal non-fluency features help to frame the characters' speech style, serve as an indicator of the age of the characters, and convey the characters' emotions. These additions might even signal the actors' need either to make the line more speakable or to highlight certain emotive aspects of the utterance, opting for modalities they had already introjected without misrepresenting or falsifying the characters' language.

5. Conclusions

While varying their purpose according to the dramatic level of a situation, normal non-fluency features contributed in both plays to the "emotional punch, one that might have the capacity to employ emotion in the service of judgment" (O'Connor 2013, 158). In fact, normal non-fluency features contribute to the meaning-making process and signal how to interpret the characters' reactions, thus, as discussed in Section 3.2, realising Gricean flouts, not Gricean infringements.

It appears that the notion of 'verbatim' in verbatim theatre cannot be univocally interpreted, nor is it the only means through which to communicate the authenticity and realism of the play and the performance. This is shown by the importance of delivery, strategic pauses and paralinguistic elements. Therefore, the apparent rigidity of the verbatim form can be broken by the tools at the practitioners' disposal. The analysis showed that the actors shape the story and the performance with their bodies and their voices, and that the playwright is not limited by the sources. It is the playwright – supported by the actors in *Laramie* – who shapes the interviews into a coherent and cohesive structure fit for the theatrical medium, with its own message and purpose. The resulting play is more than the sum of its parts (the interviews). That being the case, it may be acknowledged that in verbatim playwrighting the creative aspects survive. In short, to return to the heterogeneous nature of the verbatim playwright explored in Section 3.2, they are definitely more writer-like than reporter-like.

It emerged from the analysis that verbatim and non-verbatim plays differ in the frequency of normal non-fluency features, with the former showing

a higher number of occurrences than the latter. However, similarities were found in the types of disfluency features occurring in both plays, which suggests that, regardless of the specific genre, some rules of the theatrical medium cannot be broken. Despite the overwhelming majority of narrative utterances which characterises the two plays, the reduced presence of false starts and reformulations in *Laramie* and *Fleabag* is attributable to the need for dramatic dialogue to avoid purposeless dispersions and appearing chaotic (while still giving the impression of being spontaneous, as shown in Section 3.2). This might be one of the possible causes of the necessary manipulation and editing of the source in verbatim plays, showing that the interviews are modified as a whole, while preserving non-fluency features in single sentences (as seen in Section 3.2).

Kate Gaul, who has had a thirty-year connection with verbatim theatre and who directed *Laramie* in Australia, said that 'The theatre is a highly crafted space where you say a lot more with a lot less. The writer's job is to take the *essence* of what is said and whittle it down into the moment of art and hopefully if you work with actors you can get them to do that for you' (Anderson 2007, 85, emphasis added). Despite coming from different genres, the two plays share this common perspective in handling words; their presence is never superficial, and they only come to life thanks to the actors' contribution.

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