

## Haunting Echoes: Tragedy in Quiara Alegría Hudes's *Elliot Trilogy*

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Musical variations, the pursuit of belonging, and a persistent specter: These constitutive elements of the three experimental plays by Quiara Alegría Hudes known as the *Elliot Trilogy* speak of tragedy. They are imbued with the trauma of war, nostalgia, and alienation—a theme that George Steiner identifies as crucial for the dramatic form in his article “‘Tragedy,’ Reconsidered.” For Steiner, “the necessary and sufficient premise, the axiomatic constant in tragedy is that of ontological homelessness . . . of alienation or ostracism from the safeguard of licensed being. There is no welcome to the self. This is what tragedy is about.”<sup>[1]</sup> Hudes’s central protagonist Elliot seeks to recover a sense of home in a society removed from the realities of war he experienced as a soldier in Iraq. Over the timespan covered by the three plays *Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue* (2012), *Water by the Spoonful* (2012), and *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (2014), the playwright redefines tragedy when she sends her hero on a quest for redemption after a fatal error in judgment. But even when he seems on the cusp of overcoming it, the haunting echoes of his past as well as a family curse catch up with him and threaten to shatter his world.

The tragic is at the center of the *Elliot Trilogy*’s plot, but formally the primary dramatic impulses are theatrical experimentation with form and the inclusion of musical variety as each play focuses either on the classical fugue, free jazz, or classical Puerto Rican music. The plays differ in their structural composition and their aesthetic concerns, an instance that reflects the formation process of the trilogy. In an interview with Anne García-Romero, Hudes explains that she “did not set out to write a trilogy, but a few years after . . . *Elliot*, . . . [she] felt there was still more story to tell, and more structural and stylistic experimentation . . . to do in regards to music and playwriting.”<sup>[2]</sup> The plays reflect this evolution of the creative process, since they work effectively as standalone productions as much as they present a conceptual and topical arc that unites them into a three-movement oeuvre. Both a composer and a playwright by training, Hudes combines her vocations in the 2007 Pulitzer Prize finalist *Elliot, A Soldier’s Fugue* by developing a musical structure for a theatrical staging that poetically reflects on loss and suffering. The second play, *Water by the Spoonful*, won the Pulitzer Prize in 2012 because of its “imaginative . . . search for meaning” that emerges from an experimentation with virtual, actual, and theatrical space and an exploration of family and community in the twenty-first century.<sup>[3]</sup> The tragic dimension in *Water by the Spoonful* is realized as there is no escape from past fatal mistakes—neither in real life nor online.

While in the first two plays Elliot is haunted by the first person he killed as a soldier in Iraq and struggles with the untimely and avoidable death of his little sister as a child, *The Happiest Song Plays Last* marks a departure from tragedy that still retains the tragic, but merely as one among other more prominent themes. As Hudes explains in a video interview for the 2014 Oregon Shakespeare Festival, Elliot is “poised to

overcome” his past troubles in the last part of the trilogy and the play explores this orientation toward the future from a personal and social perspective.[4] This becomes particularly apparent in the renewed formal engagement with music as an auditory medium that, for Hudes, is capable of uniting people in celebration while simultaneously addressing grave social conditions with critical lyrics to promote political change.[5] Indeed, the drama does not lose the nostalgic undertones and dissonances established in the previous plays. However, a bittersweet hopefulness—uncommon for classical tragedy—takes over with the Puerto Rican troubadour tradition that Hudes introduces into performances of *The Happiest Song Plays Last* through the sound of the cuatro which is the national instrument of Puerto Rico.

This article will explore how the *Elliot Trilogy* reconceptualizes traditional elements of tragedy—such as the psychological isolation of the tragic protagonist or the intersections between the worldly affairs and the realm of the dead—for twenty-first century concerns with formal experiments that link the classical genre to the contemporary stage. The *Elliot Trilogy* repositions the isolated, tragic subject in a network of human connections by highlighting the intersubjective threads that run into danger of being unacknowledged or hidden from view and by exposing the dynamics of alienation in the process. When the tragic intersects with theatrical experiment in the *Elliot Trilogy*, apparently incompatible spheres converge, harmonize, and sometimes clash, challenging what Jacques Rancière calls the “distribution of the sensible,” of “what is visible or not in a common space.”[6] This productive friction in Hudes’s plays turns the stage into a space for the negotiation of contemporary communal concerns and thus invites us to think about tragedy’s sociocultural significance today. Therefore, I will discuss how the dramatic usage of music echoes the characters’ alienation, how the supernatural and other virtual dimensions resonate with an actual world of suffering and fate, and how formal experimentation in the *Elliot Trilogy* exposes the *hamartia* of the characters and conveys their struggle to find a new sense of normalcy after their loss of innocence.

### Tragedy and the Staging of the Sensible

Defining tragedy as the drama of alienation means to implicitly link its characters to the absolute absence of companionship. The tragic fate is cast as unique. It is the lonely path of a singular individual caught, according to Steiner, in “the logic of estrangement from life, of man’s ontological fall from grace.”[7] In this vein, a hero’s isolation is the minimum requirement for the unfolding of tragedy. In Aristotelian terms, the hero’s alienation resides in a fatal action, the *hamartia*, and as soon as it is performed “fallen man is made an unwelcome guest of life or, at best, a threatened stranger on this hostile or indifferent earth (Sophocles’ damning word, dwelt on by Heidegger, is *apolis*).”[8] The estrangement thus sets the acting subject apart.

Even if it remains unsaid in Steiner’s definition of the term, tragedy therefore implies a world populated by human beings, a *polis* or a community that differs from and eventually interacts with the tragic hero. To conceive of the hero’s homelessness means to relate the uniqueness of tragic fate to discursive practices about citizenship, community, and belonging. To be alienated means that there are processes at play that shatter the hopes for meaningful, intersubjective interactions. Hence, the tragic hero stands in relation to a community (on stage as well as off stage during the performance in front of an audience) and from the dialectical engagement with these relations emerges the political potential of tragedy.

Tragedy is a dramatic threshold that renders the blind spots of a community visible by negotiating social practices from the perspective of the tragic lone hero at its margins. If, as Rancière writes in *The Politics*

of *Aesthetics*, “artistic practices are ‘ways of doing and making’ that intervene in the general distribution of ways of doing and making as well as in the relationships they maintain to modes of being and forms of visibility,” the theatrical experimentation with tragedy’s tropes and characteristics engages simultaneously with the politics of alienation and belonging.<sup>[9]</sup> When Rancière writes about the politics of the arts, he locates the political in the everyday communal dynamics that influence human perception and in the different possibilities of participation that the division of labor, common space, and time entail. He argues that “the distribution of the sensible reveals who can have a share in what is common to the community based on what they do and on the time and space in which this activity is performed.”<sup>[10]</sup> Such a division has influence on what is palpable, whose voices and actions can be heard, who can be seen and recognized as a member of the community, and who is granted (political) agency. Rancière calls

the distribution of the sensible the system of self-evident facts of sense perception that simultaneously discloses the existence of something in common and the delimitations that define the respective parts and positions within it. A distribution of the sensible therefore establishes at one and the same time something common that is shared and exclusive parts.<sup>[11]</sup>

In other words, the system of in/visibility that governs a community functions through delineations of inclusion and exclusion.

Theater is particularly apt to make the distribution of common ground and difference palpable because the theatrical performance simultaneously represents and embodies fictional characters and events. The shared space with living bodies on stage allows the spectators to tap into the various registers of sensory perception available to them and to connect them to a communal experience. When Plato and Aristotle seek to deal with “the split reality of the theatre” by either ascribing to it the function of enacting or practicing the ideal form of community as Plato does or through *catharsis* representing the world with the purpose to purge the social body from unwanted emotions as in Aristotle’s view, they set the conditions for theater to serve contradictory political purposes.<sup>[12]</sup> In his discussion of these differing artistic regimes, Rancière observes that the tragic stage

simultaneously carries with it, according to Plato, the syndrome of democracy and the power of illusion. By isolating mimesis in its own proper space and by enclosing tragedy within a logic of genres, Aristotle . . . redefined its politics. Furthermore, in the classical system of representation, the tragic stage would become the stage of visibility for an orderly world governed by a hierarchy of subject matter and the adaptation of situations and manners of speaking to this hierarchy. The democratic paradigm would become a monarchical paradigm.<sup>[13]</sup>

This malleable political potential of the stage can be understood as the precondition both for the states of community that it makes palpable and for the subversions of the boundaries that the distribution of the sensible establishes. Hudes challenges the distribution of the sensible in national discourses of collective drama as well as in the private institution of the family through the lens of tragedy. In the *Elliot Trilogy*, the protagonist’s function as a soldier in wars fought overseas by the US emplaces his actions in a space and time that the civilian community that he rejoins after each tour does not share with him. As such, the very function that determines the protagonist as a national subject instead of a ruler—as someone who serves his country—irrevocably alienates him from the everyday lives of the society he lives in.

Consequently, Hudes's plays are a departure from the monarchical paradigm of the Aristotelian tragedy. They complicate the subject matter of the nation and the interpellation of the individual as national subject with the personal experience of alienation and the precarious state of belonging. Her reconceptualization of tragedy acknowledges the complexity of social and political dynamics in the twenty-first century that is exceedingly high because the global directly ties in with the local. Globalized interconnections expose that there are no simple truths and that the individual needs to navigate their actions as a human being, citizen, and inhabitant of the world simultaneously.

### **Musical Echoes: Tragedy, Dissonance, and Alienation**

Music is the major acoustic experimental dimension that connects Hudes's work to tragedy. In his early treatise *The Birth of Tragedy*, Friedrich Nietzsche emphatically posits that music engenders tragedy in classical Greek drama. He writes "that tragedy arose from the tragic chorus, and was originally only chorus and nothing else" and he thus elevates it to "the true primal drama."<sup>[14]</sup> Consequently, he locates the chorus as the site where tragedy takes place while rejecting A. W. Schlegel's understanding of the chorus as the "ideal spectator," or as Nietzsche describes it, "the epitome and concentration of the mass of spectators."<sup>[15]</sup> For Nietzsche, this idealized definition of the chorus does not take into account the diegetic function of the chorus: "the true spectator, whoever he might be, must always remain aware that he is watching a work of art and not an empirical reality, while the tragic chorus of the Greeks is required to grant the figures on the stage a physical existence."<sup>[16]</sup> However, the chorus also does not merely react to the dramatic actions on stage,<sup>[17]</sup> but serves as a threshold between both "a living wall that tragedy pulls around itself to close itself off entirely from the world and maintain its ideal ground and its poetic freedom."<sup>[18]</sup> Along these lines, the embodied music of the chorus connects the actuality of the performance with the fictional action. It is the invisible fabric that separates the tragic hero from the world and simultaneously has an effect on the audience because it translates her or his actions and, hence, promotes processes of understanding and making sense that allow the spectators to relate the drama on stage to their own lives. Poised at the interstices of human alienation and intersubjective connection, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* lends itself to entering into a dialogue with Nietzsche's position on the classics from a contemporary perspective – thinking its musical and formal experimentation as the resonant location from which tragedy materializes.

The structure of *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* mirrors the structure of the musical genre by the same name. It is divided into preludes and fugue scenes in which four characters take turns in speaking lyrical dialogue sentences. One voice sets the melody and the others join in to create the counterpoints and interweaving parts of the musical whole. The voices of Elliot, his father, adopted mother, and grandfather join forces to relate the experience of three generations of a Puerto Rican family as members of the US military. When the chorus introduces a scene with the grandfather as a soldier in 1950 Korea, they complement each other to provide a description of the fictional space that remains invisible due to the minimalistic stage design:

GINNY: A tent.  
No windows, no door.  
Walls made of canvas.  
A floor made of dirt.  
The soil of Inchon, Korea is frozen.

GRANDPOP: Sixteen cots they built by hand.  
Underwear, towels, unmade beds.  
Dirty photos.

GINNY: That is, snapshots of moms and daughters and wives. . . .

GRANDPOP: A boy enters. [\[19\]](#)

Only when these last words are spoken, the enactment of the scene begins while the oratory mode continues with two more voices eventually joining in. Hence, the chorus of four voices initiates the action. Without them, the drama could not play out as it does. They introduce each of the three male family members and, together, they bring them to life with their speech. At the same time, their communal effort counterpoints the isolation experienced by the soldiers in the field and the silence regarding their war experiences that they keep to themselves when they come back home.

The tragedy, one could argue, happens between these voices – in their musical entanglement as well as in the temporal asynchronicity that keeps them from coming together in perfect harmony. In one of the preludes, Elliot's grandfather, who owns a flute on which he plays Bach for his comrades during the war, explains the tensions that govern the fugue:

Of everything Bach wrote, it is the fugues. The fugue is like an argument. It starts in one voice. The voice is the melody, the single solitary melodic line. The statement. Another voice creeps up on the first one. Voice two responds to voice one. They tangle together. They argue, they become messy. They create dissonance. Two, three, four lines clashing. You think, Good god, they'll never untie themselves. How did this mess get started in the first place? Major keys, minor keys, all at once on top of each other. (*Leans in*) It's about untying the knot (35).

The dissonance of the voices pitches the harmonic unity of a shared experience against the isolation of the individual in a situation where lives are lost and nobody wins. When Elliot is injured in Tikrit, the multiplicity of voices recounting the incident clashes with his isolated and solitary position:

POP: Seventy-four barbs chew into his bone.

GRANDPOP: It is not a sensation of rawness.

GINNY: It is not excruciating pain.

POP: It is a penetrating weakness.

GRANDPOP: Energy pours out of his leg.

GINNY: Like water from a garden hose.

ELLIOT: Sarge!

POP: The boy knows he is trapped (41).

Throughout the trilogy, Elliot's injured leg will serve as a reminder that he has left his physical—and also psychological—integrity behind in an event that cannot be genuinely shared with family or civil society. In the passage above, the fugue resonates with the distance and the sense of alienation that separates and simultaneously unites the four characters. Overall, the temporal layering of the respective wars in which the family members served emphasizes that the war experience remains invariably the same in the 1950s, 1960s, and in 2003. García-Romero argues that by “utilizing the fugue structure, Hudes sets up the expectation of a multi-vocal landscape which surrounds one main theme or idea” underlining “that the impact of the subject of military service is all pervasive and that regardless of generation or military conflict, the devastation of war is universal”.[\[20\]](#)

In *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue*, the grandfather's commentary that the fugue is all “about untying the knot” can also be considered as a self-reflexive commentary on the joint experimentation with musical and theatrical aesthetics. The tragic tone is supported by the minor key of the grandfather's flute when he plays a Bach tune several times throughout the entire play: “Minor key, it's melancholy,” says the grandfather when he assumes the function of the narrator for a moment (36). However, scenes serving as preludes fragment the fugue and thus disrupt the process of melancholic resolution, reflecting that all members of the family choir have their individual stories that they do not necessarily share. The sense of alienation that results from any war experience inhibits the potential for perfect harmony.

### **Supernatural Frictions and Musical Improvisation**

In *Water by the Spoonful*, the potential for dissonance to resolve into harmony vanishes even further as tragedy takes over the everyday. Early in the play, Elliot's cousin Yazmin, a music professor, introduces free jazz as the governing aesthetic principle:

Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, 1964. Dissonance is still a gateway to resolution. . . Diminished chords, tritones, still didn't have the right to be their own independent thought. In 1965 something changed. The ugliness bore no promise of a happy ending. . . . Coltrane democratized the notes. He said, they're all equal. Freedom. It was called Free Jazz but freedom is a hard thing to express musically without spinning into noise. This is from *Ascension*, 1965.[\[21\]](#)

The play's experimentation with jazz aesthetics echoes its concern with the impossibility of both personal and collective traumata to be reconciled into a single and simple narrative of good versus evil that promises but ultimately is incapable of providing solace. The repercussions of violence and death permeate all actual and virtual spaces that the characters inhabit and force them to navigate the complex and intricate affective networks caused by tragic flaws.

*Water by the Spoonful* exposes the uncanny layers of human suffering by tying them to the sonification of noise and freedom in free jazz. The repercussions of Elliot's past actions become a haunting personification that continues to exist in the now of the world on stage, a spectral tear in the split coexistence of Yazmin's lecture hall and the sandwich shop Elliot works at after his return. The ghosts from his past are literally trapped in-between worlds and the musical tunes reconceptualize the tragic

device of the specter as they render the complexity and democratic dissonance of trauma narratives audible. While Yazmin plays Coltrane for the audience, a ghost appears on stage. The man goes to Elliot and addresses him in Arabic, disrupting his everyday activities. The apparition takes on the form of a civilian Elliot killed during the war, and his appearance in the second part of the trilogy can be understood as an element of dramatic escalation or theatrical noise. In Rancière's words, the specter and Elliot are interlinked through their respective "bodily positions and movements" that visualize "the parceling out of the visible and the invisible" on stage.<sup>[22]</sup> The collision of the supernatural with the actual world acts out the distribution of inclusion and exclusion in the communal perception. In the first play, Elliot merely has nightmares about him, but in *Water by the Spoonful*, the remnant echo from the war becomes an anthropomorphic, supernatural manifestation that only Elliot perceives and renders it difficult for him to perform his task.

GHOST: Momken men-fadluck ted-dini gawaz saffari?

ELLIOT: That's three teriyaki onion with chicken. First with hots and onions. Second with everything. Third with extra bacon. Two spicy Italian with American cheese on whole grain. One BMT on flatbread. Good so far?

GHOST: Momken men-fadluck ted-dini gawaz saffari? (18).

Without looking the ghost in the eye, Elliot is perturbed when the specter appears but tries to remain professional as he continues his conversation with a customer while the ghost insists on asking Elliot the same question over and over again. It translates into a concern of legal status: "Can I please have my passport back?" (11). The passport—Elliot always carries it in his pocket—acquires a symbolic value on stage for the freedom that Elliot took from a man, i.e. the freedom to live, but also the freedom to pass borders, and, ultimately, to pass peacefully over the threshold to the afterlife. The clashing of languages and the asymmetrical communication situation with an inaudible third party on the phone emphasize their entanglement in the conflict between two nations that holds them captive. The discrepancy between the food order and the struggle for life and freedom could be read as an instance of dramatic irony that underlines the urgency which pervades the situation.

In *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, we finally learn that the passport represents a constant reminder to Elliot's *hamartia* or, in other words, the fatal misjudgment that he confesses when he acknowledges that he "knew he was a civilian" in front of his family: "At first I thought it was an AK in his hands. Split second before I shoot, I'm like, that's a cricket bat. And then I pulled the trigger and took his face off. How am I supposed to tell anyone that?"<sup>[23]</sup> As long as the passport is not returned to its owner, the suffering continues for all parties involved. Since the passport cannot be returned despite the attempts Elliot makes to send it to the civilian's family, the suffering continues indefinitely without any prospect of forgiveness or absolution. "Man makes ghost, man keeps ghost," says one character near the end of *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (83) and in a pivotal moment when Elliot meets Ali, an ex-Iraqi Armed Forces soldier, the only possibility for resolution is that they can acknowledge each other: "No forgive. I cannot forgive. But you know real who I am. I know real who you are. Witness for each other" (36). The mutual recognition evoked in the scene rejects the possibility of a happy ending while still offering an avenue for reconciliation. It suggests that Elliot's confession can be considered as the impetus for transforming the haunting memories of the past, the noise, into a jarring, yet encompassing narrative that

consists of multiple, dissonant layers told collectively.

As García-Romero observes, Hudes adopts the four principles of “cultural multiplicity, supernatural intervention, Latina identity, and theatrical experimentation” [24] established by the teacher and playwright María Irene Fornés in her dramatic productions. The ghost highlights how closely connected these aspects are in Hudes’s work.[25] On the one hand, the specter is a manifestation of the multiple invisible convergences between hybrid cultural identities and the complex histories emerging from conflict that are potentially silenced. On the other hand, the specter itself is a theatrical experiment. The impossible presence of the dead materializes on stage as a reminder of the potential for fatal misjudgments that haunts every violent confrontation, thus opening up a space for the collective negotiation of the invisible repercussions of war and its silencing effects on the human subject such as trauma or death.

### **Human Connections and Haunting Specters of Alienation**

Alienation thwarts the successful pursuit of belonging for the characters in the *Elliot Trilogy*. Any form of human connection that they establish is frail and precarious, but they persist in their search for an allegiance to family and community. In *Water by the Spoonful*, the additional staging of the virtual dimension of the internet as a potential space for human connections furthers the dominant theme of belonging. The chat room complements the other spatial layers of the lecture hall, the realm of the dead, and Elliot’s living environment. Staged at the same time, these spheres resonate with the formal commitment of Hudes to the delineated free jazz aesthetics since their simultaneity shows how Elliot and other characters seek to overcome their sense of isolation. All spaces are equal and prone to intersect at any time throughout the play. Thus, the theatrical stage is fraught with spatial overlaps and the various actions in different places and spheres often intersect in dissonance, threatening to “spin . . . into noise” (18).

The experimental engagement with digital space or, more precisely, the virtual promise of second chances in life upheld by an online community takes center stage in *Water by the Spoonful*. Scenes in the experiential world alternate with staged conversations in an online chat room and a virtual self-help group hosted by Elliot’s birth mother, a recovered drug addict. Her motivation is only revealed when the separation of her online and offline identities collapses and the virtual clashes with the real world. This happens when Elliot walks in on her in a café where she is meeting an online community member who needs advice.

ELLIOT: I looked at that chat room once. The woman I saw there? She’s literally not the same person I know. (*To John*) Did she tell you how she became such a saint?

JOHN: We all have skeletons.

ELLIOT: Yeah well she’s an archeological dig. Did she tell you about her daughter? (51).

During this encounter, two conceptions of community meet: the online communities that emerged in the digital age and the traditional institution of family that Christopher Perricone considers as a classical tragic theme: “It is essential to Aristotle’s idea of tragedy . . . that it be a family affair.”[26] Perricone

argues that the principle of cooperation and support in the family is routinely violated in Greek drama. He writes: “In tragic families, mothers . . . kill their children. Fathers . . . kill their children. Sons routinely kill their fathers. Brothers and sisters . . . kill each other . . . . Tragedy, insofar as it is implicitly a family affair, should not happen. Family members should cooperate.”<sup>[27]</sup> In *Water by the Spoonful*, Elliot’s mother did not offer support because she left her small children to their own devices when they fell sick with the stomach flu, an error in judgement that ends in the death of Elliot’s younger sister. Instead of following the doctor’s orders to “give . . . [the] kids a spoonful of water every five minutes,” she leaves them alone to take drugs (52). Neglecting the easiest task leads to tragedy, as Elliot points out: “But you couldn’t stick to something simple like that. You couldn’t sit still like that. You had to have your thing. That’s where I stop remembering” (52). During the confrontation in the café, the mother’s attempt to reinvent herself online fails. In the end, both mother and son are trapped in a cycle of suffering and trauma caused by their respective share in another person’s loss of life. The *hamartia* becomes a flaw that is passed on from one generation to another. For Perricone, “the ultimate cause of tragedy—is that tragedy hits a Darwinian ‘nerve.’ That ‘nerve’ is the power of the family and the place of the family in the human condition . . . . Think of tragedy as the Darwinian cautionary tale, par excellence.”<sup>[28]</sup> Along these lines, *Water by the Spoonful* taps into the classic material of Greek tragedy and reconfigures it for contemporary purposes.

In *The Happiest Song Plays Last*, tragedy becomes a universal matter for several families because of Elliot’s involvement in the war and his *hamartia*. “Our son is marked. He is going to inherit this,” says Elliot’s pregnant girlfriend Shar, when she learns about the killing of Taarek Taleb (84). The mark of tragedy that she fears her child will inherit echoes the devastation of the remaining family in Iraq. According to a letter that Elliot shares with her, the son who witnesses the violent death of his father does not talk anymore. In the letter, Ali, whom he asked to find the man’s family and to give them the passport that has been in his possession over the years, describes the wife’s account of the situation: “American soldier shoots him in face. He is pretending surprise. American soldier spits on body, she says. American soldier takes wallet and runs away” (83). The roles of father and husband in her account personalize the previously unnamed Iraqi civilian and turn the haunting ghost into a fully fleshed out human being. At the same time, the main protagonist, Elliot, becomes an anonymous American soldier whose actions in this role expose the demise of human ethics in times of war. “I can’t get rid of this,” Elliot says, referring to both the passport and the act itself, after reading the letter (84). The *hamartia* cannot be redeemed and the resulting human connection between the families is irrevocably marked by tragedy.

### Conclusion: Tragic Resonances in Contemporary Drama

The reconceptualization of tragedy lies at the heart of Hudes’s dramatic conception of an experimental exploration of the sensible. The *Elliot Trilogy* serves as a resounding echo chamber between classical drama and a reconfiguration that recognizes the contemporary specificities of the human condition in the twenty-first century. The multiplication and overlap of voices, spaces, and their conjunction with supernatural or spiritual forces invoke haunting echoes that resonate back and forth from one play to another, between each character and the stories they share with their family, and between classical tragic material and contemporary theater. As Robert Andreach concludes in his book *Tragedy in the Contemporary American Theater*: “If Aristotelian form is dead, a new order of forms can restore the genre to life.”<sup>[29]</sup> In the *Elliot Trilogy*, the echoes of a tragic past reverberate in the present and spheres that seem incompatible at first sight reveal their permeability and expose the frailty of the human existence. Overall, Hudes’s playwriting is proof for the ongoing relevance of the tragic in the twenty-first

century and for the genre's extensive capacity to change.

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[1] George Steiner, "'Tragedy,' Reconsidered," *New Literary History* 35, no. 1 (2004): 2–3.

[2] Anne García-Romero, *The Fornes Frame: Contemporary Latina Playwrights and the Legacy of Maria Irene Fornes* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2016), 161.

[3] Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, *Outstanding Broadway Dramas and Comedies: Pulitzer Prize Winning Theater Productions* (Zürich: LIT, 2013), 194.

[4] Oregon Shakespeare Festival, "Playwright Notes: Leaving a Legacy," 7:25, posted on 27 October 2014, *YouTube*, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=YphF3Qe6M54](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YphF3Qe6M54).

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics* (London: Continuum, 2011), 12–13.

[7] Steiner, "'Tragedy': Reconsidered," 4.

[8] *Ibid.*, 2–3. In this sense, *apolis* characterizes the hero as a subject devoid of a place in the world.

[9] Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*, 13.

[10] *Ibid.*, 12.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] *Ibid.*, 14.

[13] *Ibid.*, 17–18.

[14] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1993), 36. (emphasis original)

[15] *Ibid.*

[16] Ibid., 37.

[17] Paul Raimond Daniels, *Nietzsche and "The Birth of Tragedy"* (London: Routledge, 2013), 76.

[18] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 37.

[19] Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Elliot, A Soldier's Fugue* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 12. Further references to this play will be noted parenthetically in the text.

[20] García-Romero, "Fugue, Hip Hop and Soap Opera: Transcultural Connections and Theatrical Experimentation in Twenty-First Century US Latina Playwriting," *Latin American Theatre Review* 43, no. 1 (2009): 88.

[21] Quiara Alegría Hudes, *Water by the Spoonful* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2012), 18. Further references to this play will be noted parenthetically in the text.

[22] Rancière, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 19.

[23] Quiara Alegría Hudes, *The Happiest Song Plays Last* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2014), 85. Further references to this play will be noted parenthetically in the text.

[24] García-Romero, *The Fornes Frame*, 6.

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[27] Ibid. , 81.

[28] Ibid. , 82.

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