

Border-Crossing Experiences in Contemporary War Literature

Seminar within the research project “Rewriting War: The Paradigms of Contemporary War Fiction in English”

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Title of proposal:

“Crossing Representational Borders on Stage in Lola Arias’ *Minefield/Campo Minado* (2016)”

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Abstract:

Minefield/Campo Minado is a bilingual play by Argentine writer, theatre and film director and performer Lola Arias first staged in the United Kingdom in 2016. The play was crafted as a collaborative project involving British and Argentine veterans of war. The cast is formed by six Malvinas/Falklands war combatants who act out their own war experiences. The fact that the scripts were written by the performers with the assistance of the director challenges the very concept of authorship and reflects, at the same time, the overt initial intention of the director to give voice to those who were first-hand witnesses of the conflict. This paper will discuss how and why aspects such as past/present, friend/foe, fact/fiction, amongst others, are blended together in an effort to challenge, reframe and deconstruct fixed categorizations, enabling the intersection and crossing of representational borders. By doing so, we argue that the play invites readers/viewers to rethink and/or cross borders within social, political and cultural spaces on the stage.

In drawing from documentary records, the theatre of testimony has become a genre of rupture that responds to the trauma of war, as it calls upon the conceptual framework of ‘witness literature’ to respond, in this particular case, to the devastation of the Malvinas/Falklands war, all the while recreating within this responsive framework a reinterpretation of more conventional forms of expression. We argue that *Minefield/Campo Minado* produces the effects of estrangement and instability that

represent the enormity of war trauma, inviting the reader/viewer to participate in an ethical, social and cultural act of reading/watching but also of bearing witness. Moreover, we will explore the healing power of the theatre of testimony, and how personal testimony becomes a political and social act. Our contention is that the crossing of borders between the documentary and the fictional, between personal and cultural memory in *Minefield/Campo Minado* lends itself to wide-ranging texts that not only call upon diverse narrative strategies of destabilisation, but tend both to closure and to the shaping of British and Argentinian memory.