Dramaturgy is a multi-faceted word and its etymology can be traced to the French language as derived from the Greek, essentially meaning the composition of drama. Knowing what composes a play can lead to understanding how it works. Understanding how a play works leads to interpreting how the play creates meaning. The meaning of a play can take many forms, but what is central to most theatrical presentations is the representation of conflict: its causes, its consequences, and/or its resolutions. The representation of conflict and how it is resolved often determines the meanings an audience or reader will take away from the work.

Dramaturgical composition also considers the given circumstances of a play, that is, it addresses questions such as Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How. Aristotle wrote of these elements as inherent in dramatic composition. Plot (What happens? When and where?), character (Who is involved?), thought (What is the idea/theme?) language (What words do they use?), music (What sounds accompany the embodied performance?), and spectacle (What are the visual/special effects?). Once the answers to these questions are identified, one arrives at the basic composition of a play and, in this traditional construction a story surfaces from these fundamental elements. In the end, all of the elements should coalesce into what can be called the world of the play.
Beyond referencing a play’s structure or composition, “dramaturgy” can also be used as a noun or a verb. In this sense of the word, dramaturgy becomes active: it questions, tests, extrapolates. Thus, the dramaturgy of a play also describes how all its moving parts work together – like a diagnostic analysis given to a play to ensure it is running properly. When considering these aspects of construction and efficacy a number of queries may arise: How does a given play set the scene and introduce its characters? How do the ideas of the play become more prominent or less so through its duration? Which words and characters become more prominent or less so through its duration? How does the conflict between characters contribute to the overall theme? How are design elements related to the staging and the dialogue? In general, dramaturging a play engages with its mechanics, and conceptualizes its conflict.

Dramaturgy can also be thought of as an application. The methods and components of “dramaturgy” can be applied to almost any dynamic entity: an institution, a person, or a moment in time. Understood this way, dramaturgical analysis of a subject involves mapping and decoding a story. If a subject has been dramaturged successfully, its history, its purpose, and its struggle can be explicated for others. Employing a dramaturgical lens can help uncover a story’s various meanings and intentions. In the words of a critic,

Dramaturgy as the work done by a dramaturg, consists of assembling textual and stage materials, bringing out complex meanings of the text by choosing a particular interpretation, and orientating the performance in the desired direction. . . . To examine
the links between world and stage i.e. ideology and aesthetics, is the main task of dramaturgy. It tries to understand how ideas about human beings and the world are rendered in a form i.e. in a text and on stage. (Pavis 125)

Bertolt Brecht, a German playwright and theatre director of the 20th century has made contributions to dramaturgy and theatrical production. He considers “epic dramaturgy” to be a form of theatre that uses the devices of commentary and alienation effects to describe social reality and contribute to changing it. Brecht has devised special techniques in the areas of dramatic constitution, language, staging and acting since he believes that the realistic drama reflects the ideology of a bourgeois capitalist society, as quoted in Wright, “Old form of theatre taught us to view the world in the way that the ruling classes wanted it to be viewed” (27). Brecht strongly disagrees with the naturalistic illusion of the realistic drama that what happens on the stage is real. According to Brecht, theatre is an illusion, and the audience should be made and kept constantly aware of this fact. Fuegi states that epic theatre's counter-discursive, counter-hegemonic elements have appealed to a new generation of women playwrights. Laughlin points out that the structuring devices and narrative methods of epic theatre have been useful to feminists who seek to move away from realism towards a representational style more relevant to women’s experiences (148).

One of Brecht’s most important principles was what he called the verfremdungseffekt, which may be translated as “defamiliarization effect”,
“distancing effect”, “estrangement effect”, or “alienation effect”. This involved, Brecht wrote, “stripping the event of its self-evident, familiar, obvious quality and creating a sense of astonishment and curiosity about them” (qtd. In Brooker 191). For Brecht, the alienation effect is “designed to free socially-conditioned phenomena from that stamp of familiarity which protects them against our grasp of today” by means of a representation that “allows us to recognize its subject, but at the same time makes it seem unfamiliar” (Brecht 192).

In her essay titled, “Brechtian Theory/Feminist Theory: Towards a Gestic Feminist Criticism”, Elin Diamond argues that in order to resist fetishization of the female body, playwrights should rely on Brecht’s theory that uses gestures and signs to alienate the spectator from the theatrical action, forcing the spectator to recognize the constructed and corrupted nature of the seemingly natural and “normal” behaviour, separating social behaviour from the body that it inhabits: “In performance, the actor ‘alienates’ rather than impersonates her character; she ‘quotes’ or demonstrates the character’s behaviour instead of identifying with it” (Diamond 84). Distance between spectator and actor destroys feelings of empathy or sympathy and clearly exposes the social, cultural, economic and political control over the individual.

Feminist dramatists find Brechtian dramaturgy useful in foregrounding the ideological implications of representation with respect to gender assumptions. “Gender” is a much contested and slippery concept, a site of unease and
disagreement. Robert J. Stoller in his Preface to his seminal work *Sex and Gender* notes:

Dictionaries stress that the major connotation of sex is a biological one, as for example, in the phrases sexual relations or the male sex. . . . the word sexual. . . [has] connotations of anatomy and physiology. This obviously leaves tremendous areas of behaviour, feeling, thoughts, and fantasies that are related to the sexes and yet do not have primarily biological connotations. It is for some of these psychological phenomena that the term gender. . . . [is] used: one can speak of the male sex or the female sex, but one can also talk about masculinity and femininity and not necessarily be implying anything about anatomy or physiology. (vi – vii)

Drawing on Stoller’s work, Kate Millet in *Sexual Politics* underscores her argument that “male and female are really two cultures. . . Sex is biological, gender psychological and therefore cultural” (29 – 31). Gayle Rubin, however, argues that men and women cannot be placed in mutually exclusive categories:

Men and women are, of course, different. But they are not as different as day and night, earth and sky, yin and yang, life and death. In fact, from the standpoint of nature, men and women are closer to each other than either is to anything else – for instance, mountains, kangaroos, or coconut palms. The idea that men and women are more different from one another than either is from anything else must come from somewhere other than nature. . . . Far
from being and expression of natural differences, exclusive gender identity is the suppression of natural similarities. (179 -80)

Thus “gender” lends itself to differing viewpoints. As Glover and Kaplan point out,

. . . gender is never wholly protean nor totally fluid; at any given time and place it is configured within a range of technological, socio-economic and cultural constraints. And though these constraints may mark the discursive limits of our world, they are also the starting point from which our imaginations may defiantly begin again. (160)

Though the contemporary theatre is free of the shackles of gender stereotypes, gender roles are continually being defined and re-negotiated on the stage:

While theatre has certainly freed itself from many of the heavier, confining shackles of gender stereotypes and limitations such as the way in which women and men are portrayed and written about; gender roles are continually being defined and re-negotiated on the stage. The theatre has become a tricky medium for gender and sex as both continue to be volatile subjects politically and in turn, artistically. (Hale 350)

Brecht’s alienation effect addresses and dramatizes the feminist concern of gender. According to Elin Diamond, alienation effect enables the spectators to see
the familiar with a critical and unattached view. Thus it can empower gender critique in the feminist theatre. Brecht’s alienation effect helps expose the ideology and constructedness of gender, which is made natural and fixed as “extension of biological sex” (Diamond 84) in conventional theatre:

When gender is “alienated” or foregrounded, the spectator is enabled to see a sign system as sign system – the appearance, words, gestures, ideas, attitudes etc. that comprise the gender lexicon become so many illusionist trappings to be put on or shed at will. Understanding gender as ideology – as a system of beliefs and behavior mapped across the bodies of females and males, which reinforces a social status quo – is to appreciate the continued timeliness of Verfremdungseffekt, the purpose of which is to denaturalize what ideology makes seem normal, acceptable, inescapable. (Diamond 85)

Transgression of gender boundaries has become an essential aspect of feminist theatre, and Naomi Wallace’s plays foreground this transgression as an essential for identity formation. A popular understanding of transgression might best be described as the crossing of a line, a boundary, or a commandment. Acts of transgression occur when the line being crossed holds material or symbolic significance. “Transgression describes a high – stakes, challenging violation of boundaries. The crossing of any ol’ line is not an act of transgression. Transgression accrues meaning when the line being crossed represents a normative limit” (Krejsi 4). Naomi Wallace makes a clarion call to young, aspiring playwrights: “Let us
transgress together – and by this heat, by the sparks that are generated, make a light to see by for all of us” (“On Writing” 102). Transgression for Wallace, is a boundary-oriented phenomenon connected to identity. In her plays she makes some characters transgress gender boundaries to explore possibilities of deterritorialization and reterritorialization in Deleuzian terms. An individual Wallace character is not to be seen as the embodiment of his maleness or her femaleness, his wealth or her poverty, his blackness or her whiteness, and so on. As a critic has noted,

Wallace also endows her characters with an imagination that goes beyond the confines of social identity and that often reveals itself in lyrical stage gestures that express a world of possibility. She portrays her characters as resistant to demographic determinism by having them figuratively or metaphorically cross the border – or violate the boundary – between one social identity and its opposite. This dialectical crossing can take theatrical form, with a character putting on the clothes / costume of the ‘other’ or taking on the role of another and ‘acting it out’. (Cummings 9)

Lark Mulligan commends Wallace on her presentation of transgression her plays:

When I think about the kind of theatre I want to create, words like visceral, luminous, playful, unsettling, and sensory come to mind. Wallace is all of those and more. She creates these incredibly sensory, often tactile, moments of deep connection that explode into huge directorial possibilities. Glowing blue hands, the scent of
vinegar, footprints in sand . . . all of her images are striking, organic, and yes – magical. Wallace is also surprisingly transgressive. She is also one of the few playwrights (that I have read) who have strikingly and directly written transgender and queer characters. (para 6)

In *The War Boys*, the acts of transgressive and sexualized violence in the play push at the boundaries of class and ethnic identity as the boys act out both victim and victimizer. The boys use each other’s bodies to act out physical and sexual violence, as in this monologue by David:

> She was my . . . friend. *(David takes off britches, lays them out . . . *The shape of a person is now laid out on the floor.)* . . . Now, which one is me? This one? *(To self)* or that one? *(To suit on floor)* Or is that old Sis lying there? *(Beat)* Sis and I were from an aspiring middle class neighborhood. Even as kids we were smart enough to keep our eyes on the next rung of the ladder. *(While David tells the following, George crawls into David’s space, climbs onto the clothes and does push-ups over them . . . George flips over on his back and is motionless. David stands over him . . . kneels over George’s body. George is lifeless.)* *(War 776-802)*

As David describes the sexual assault on his sister, in both his and his sister’s voices, George remains motionless, even when David provides George with a gestic kick “hard in the side” as he describes the act of penetration. What
begins as a story of sexual awakening becomes a tale of sadistic sexual torture. Once again, Wallace dramatizes it by transposing the violence onto the boys’ bodies.

In Greg’s final monologue, he uses David’s body to illustrate the violence done to Evalina, the female character in Greg’s story.

GREG: . . . (Suddenly Greg grabs David by the collar and swings him to the floor.)

She was so surprised, she couldn’t make a noise.

DAVID (Protesting): Hey!

GREG: Shut up.

DAVID: I’m not taking part ---

(David breaks off as Greg kicks him violently.)

GREG: Shut the fuck up! I said: she was so surprised that she didn’t make a noise. (Lifts his foot) And then he did this.

(Greg puts his foot on David’s throat. David is passive . . .).

(War 1500-1511)

Later in the scene, when he acts out the scenario of his parents’ domestic violence, he uses David’s hand to illustrate how his mother hit him. Thus, in The War Boys, Wallace literally stages a landscape of “crossing borders” in the formation of contemporary American male identity. This construction of male identity is attributed to American consumer culture. For instance, every time David tries to kiss his first girlfriend he hears the jingles of American consumer culture:
I had a fiancée once. But every time I desired her and leaned to deliver the first real kiss of my life, this music began in my ear. 

(Sings:)

Wrigley Spearmint gum, gum, gum,

Wrigley Spearmint gum, gum, gum. . . (War 716-721)

Hegemonic heterosexual relationships are subverted in this heterotopia of the border site, where gender/sexual boundaries are transgressed.

In *In the Heart of America*, a transgression of gender boundaries occurs in the homosexual affair between Remzi and Craver. “The most striking element in Wallace’s work is the use she makes of the erotic. Invariably, at the unexpected moment, between an unlikely pair of characters – an old woman and a young man, two boys, two women – sexual flare will occur that is mysterious and disturbing” (Gornick). In the erotic and disturbing love scenes between the two soldiers, the vocabulary of destruction is co-opted for their mutual seduction:

CRAVER: That’s beautiful. Sad Eyes. The CBU’s were prohibited weapons, like the napalm, cluster and fragmentation. But Sad Eyes. Who would have had the heart to try and stop a weapon named Sad Eyes? Eyes like his. Not sad, really. But confused. Or furious. Or scared.

(*Remzi appears as a vision. Craver speaks to him.*)

The first time we made love, we were so scared and I started to cry.
It was the first time for both of us, and it hurt. You leaned over me
kissed the back of my neck and you said over and over:

REMZI: You are my white trash, and I love you. (America 2. 9. 3-14)

In another scene, Remzi’s sister Fairouz questions Craver how much he
loved her brother, and Craver replies in terms of their military weapons:

FAIROUZ: Did you love my brother?
CRAVER: I can’t remember.
FAIROUZ: But you can. You will. Remember!
CRAVER: I remember . . . what my first . . . favourite was: the B-52, the Buff. B-U-F-F. The Big Ugly Fat Fellow, it can carry up to
sixty thousand pounds of bombs and cruise missiles.
FAIROUZ: All right. Let’s try something more simple.
CRAVER: It has survived in front-line service for three generations.
FAIROUZ: Not about numbers, but about flesh.
CRAVER: It has an engine thrust of thirteen thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds and a maximum speed of five hundred
and ninety-five miles per hour. It’s slow but it’s bad.
FAIROUZ: If you could give his flesh a velocity?
CRAVER: The Buffs, the B-52s, won the Gulf War. Not the smarts.

Not the smarts.
FAIROUZ: Or a number, what would it be?
CRAVER: Ninety-three percent of the bombs dropped were free-falls from the bellies of Fat Fellows.

FAIROUZ: If you could give his flesh a number?

CRAVER: Only seven percent were guided, and, of these half-wits, forty percent missed their targets.

FAIROUZ: A number that’s short of infinity? Was that your desire for him? (*America* 1. 11. 34-60).

Later, when Remzi “appears”, and Fairouz watches Craver’s memory, the erotic affair between the two men is described in terms of airplanes:

CRAVER: I had a thing for the Sentry jet, but how long can love last, after the first kiss, after the second, still around after the third? I dumped the Sentry jet and went on to the Wild Weasel, F-4G. Like a loyal old firehouse, the Weasel was back in action.

REMZI: Have you ever touched the underbelly of a recon plane?

Two General Electric J 79-15 turbojets.

CRAVER: If you run your hand along its flank, just over the hip, to the Rear end, it will go wet. Not damp but I mean wet.

REMZI: Have you ever run your face over the wing of an A 6 Intruder, or opened your mouth onto tail of a AV-8B Harrier II? It’s not steel you taste. It’s not metal.
CRAVER: Ever had a Phonenix missile at the tip of your tongue?

Nine hundred and eighty-five pounds of power, at launch.

(America 1.11.108-123).

The body of an airplane here is likened to human flesh and this may be related to the Deleuzian model of the wasp and the orchid. Each of the becoming – the becoming man of the machine and the becoming machine of the man – brings about the deterritorialization of one and the reterritorialization of the other. Here is an exploding of two heterogeneous series on a line of flight composed by a common rhizome. This takes place in the warfield, which is a heterotopia.

In *One Flea Spare* Bunce tells Darcy about his sexual attraction towards a young lad:

BUNCE: . . . I met a lad in the port of Bristol once, and he had skin so fine it was like running your fingers through water.

DARCY: You speak against God.

BUNCE: I’m speaking of God’s pleasure.

DARCY: *(Picking up the scraps of bandage that Bunce has discarded):*

And his breast. Was it smooth as well?

BUNCE: His breast. It was darker. Like the skin of an apple it smelled, and as smooth.

DARCY: Did you love him?
BUNCE: For those few months I loved him better than I could
love another in years. . . (Flea 1. 7. 89-100).

Darcy comments that such a relationship is blasphemous, as God has
ordained only heterosexual relationships. Heterosexual relations form the fixed
grid or molar lines in Deleuzian terms. The characters on the margins presented by
Wallace take lines of flight along a molecular path by transgressing gender
boundaries.

In Slaughter City, Wallace exposes the gendered assumptions of factory
work and the physical assaults on women’s bodies in this environment. In one
scene, Cod, a recent immigrant to the US, is encouraging the other workers to go
on strike. Brandon, a young man on leave from college who is angry for having
been passed over for promotion to management, challenges Cod. Brandon turns on
Cod and begins to verbally and physically assault him. While this is occurring, the
two female workers, Maggot and Roach, are “mesmerized. They are watching
themselves in Cod” (Slaughter 1. 10. 77, 78). Wallace’s stage directions are just as
important as the dialogue in this scene: “He runs the knife up and down Cod’s
body, sensually . . . He knocks Cod down . . . He hits Cod . . .” (Slaughter 1. 10.
86-97)

In the character of Cod, Wallace problematizes gender, as Cod is a
character whose gender placement is unclear. What the audience doesn’t know yet
is that Cod is a cross-dressed “ghost” character. By presenting this cross-dressed
character, Wallace displaces gender as she reveals the need for a female worker to
hide her gender in a place where the female body attracts ridicule and abuse. Wallace addresses the imbalance of gendered power dynamics by having Cod explain to Sausage Man why she dresses as a man: “This garb? You think I’d have had a chance in hell of catching their attention – of catching anyone’s attention in the last fifteen decades – if I hadn’t worn this garb?” (Slaughter 1. 15. 11-14). Bonnie Tsui, in her book, She Went to the Field: Women Soldiers of the Civil War, has chronicled women who masked as military men during the American Civil War and convincingly argued that they did so to escape detection in a traditional male environment. To travel or work in a female body invites harassment and violation. Elizabeth Reitz Mullenix, in Wearing the Breeches: Gender on the Antebellum Stage, has convincingly argued that cross-dressed performers were able to subvert hegemonic institutions and categories. Her point is that when women wear men’s clothing, they “threaten both the status quo, by questioning the legitimacy of social asymmetry . . . and the institutions that perpetuated such separate spheres” (11 – 12). Cod is a threat to the company and, as a result, invites violence.

The play’s landscape of industrial violence and abuses by those in power against women is even more cruelly depicted in a later scene in the manager’s office. Under the guise of corporate ownership of their uniforms, he orders the female workers Maggot and Roach to remove their uniforms. Wallace exposes not just the cruelty, but also the voyeurism and exploitation of these women, as the manager humiliates them. This brutal scene also opens a crack through which to view the double dehumanization of race and gender in the industrial workplace, as
the manager humiliates Tuck, the African–American supervisor, by forcing him to assist in the physical act of “cleansing” the women, especially the African–American female character, Roach.

In *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, trauma has blurred important distinctions in Pace’s life. Having endured apparent ridicule and even emotional neglect, Pace has become tough emotionally and physically, rejecting a feminine role of compliance. In one of her first encounters with Dalton, he points out her absence of stereotypical female characteristics. Not only does she bring a pair of her brother’s pants to wear to run the trestle, but Dalton states, “You don’t talk like a girl. Should” (*Trestle* 1. 1. 55). Ignoring the ridicule in Dalton’s observation, Pace thanks him for it. With her short answer, Pace reverses Dalton’s reverses Dalton’s ridicule and flings it back at him. Along with her absence of femininity, we also find a profound lack of genuine connection with other females. She talks about their classmate Mary Ellen much like a male would with comments such as: “I’d say she was on the menu. Front, back, and in reverse” (*Trestle* 1. 1. 162,163), and when she pays Mary Ellen a compliment, she couples it with a memory of how she could exert control. Pace would instruct her to take off her clothes and Mary Ellen would comply. This is one of the first indications that Pace is relatively free from the confines of gender. Her world cannot harbour femininity or any other form of weakness. Gender is a luxury that would allow Pace a clearly defined role. However, Pace’s world, while free from the fetters of such roles, is complicated by the fact that she must forge her own path. No one in her life can instruct her on how to be a strong, independent woman. She is in a purgatory of blurred gender
roles because she is neither wholly male nor female, and she must define who she is independently of any available definitions and even in the fact of brutal circumstances.

Dalton gets angry due to his sexual frustration with Pace. Pace refuses to kiss Dalton on the mouth because: “that’s common”, and kisses him on the back of the knee for ten seconds as she makes him count. Pace also tells Dalton to take off his clothes so she can merely look at him. His hopes for sex are destroyed when Pace asks him to get dressed. The life Dalton wants is one in which Pace allows him to be the dominant partner, and one in which she acquiesces to sex. But Pace has her own ideas about sex and love, which cannot be reconciled with Dalton’s sexual frustration.

In the last scene of the play, Wallace dramatizes a vision of Dalton and Pace consummating their relationship, not through a realistic coupling, but through a transgressive role-playing of both gender and sexual assumptions and expectations. The scene uses a dramaturgical device of sexual displacement to illustrate a healing integration of the two characters. Pace spreads out her dress and tells Dalton to lie down on it as she instructs him on how to “make something happen”. Female sexual pleasure is displaced into Dalton as he feels the sexual release and energy no longer allowed to the dead Pace. While Wallace, the playwright, does not allow the physical gesture of the characters touching each other, Dalton touches himself as Pace would experience it and in this sexual transgression, the audience is complicit as they gaze on it.
As Dalton and Pace switch sexual roles, they enter into a new place, a new landscape of hope and possibility, and even a new identity. As Pace relates in the closing lines: “There. We’re something else now. You see? We’re in another place” (Trestle 2. 9. 60, 61). Wallace writes about her position:

I also wrote the play because I wanted to examine the confines of heterosexual culture and sexuality. Theatre, good theatre, can be a site for resistance, and this includes resistance to the brutally conformist notions of sexuality that are imposed upon us from childhood. Heterosexuals function within the absurd delusion that they are sexually free. That they can do what they want with their bodies, no holds barred. But this belies the fact that an extreme system of homophobia functions at all times, which censors us, consciously and unconsciously. In writing Trestle, I wanted to take a look at the heterosexual body, and how it is rife with censorship: Where we can touch each other, where we are allowed to be touched, what sites are considered sites of desire, what sites are not. While mainstream culture tells us that our bodies are for consuming and labouring, we can resist this notion. Our bodies are alive with hunger and sensuality that have been gutted since we were children. If we re-imagine the sites of desire on the body, we may possibly be able to re-imagine ourselves. (qtd. in Schmookler 35)

In Things of Dry Hours, in a scene between Teel and Cali, Wallace once again has a man and a woman role-playing as the sexualized “other.” She does not
allow Teel to touch Cali, which reverses the power dynamic of the sexual tension.
Cali controls the physical gestures and actions, while Teel is forced to remain still.
In the first part of this scene, Cali binds him with her laundry, pinning his arms to
his side. The winding of the sheet around Teel resembles a dress, in effect
transgressing his gender, making him into a woman. Cali, however, goes further,
reversing their skin color by applying black shoe polish to Teel’s face, turning his
face black, and grits (a form of corn ground into a cereal and popular in the South)
to her face, turning her face white. Cali controls the touching until the end when
Teel escapes in “bonds” of captivity and explodes into violence, but is checked by
Cali’s words “you are a decent man”. This is a charged scene of race, sex, desire,
control, and privilege.

In two later scenes, Cali still controls the gestic touch. In one silent scene
they kiss, but their lips do not touch; they kiss through Cali’s hand, Teel kissing
Cali’s palm as she holds her hand to her mouth. The characters stand close, but the
touch is gestic. In the final scene of the play, as Teel is dying, he asks Cali if he
can touch her. She takes his hand and places it on different parts of her body – “not
necessarily sexual places, but also on her ribs, her breastbone, her arm, elbow”-
controlling Teel’s access to her body (Things 90). Cali’s most intimate scene is not
with a person, but with the laundry of the white people for whom she works. In this
“labor love scene,” Cali laughs and seems to be free, as she runs around the stage
trying to “catch” the sheets. The sheets are what imprison Cali but now they
entertain her. They’re free like she wants to be. They refuse to be folded as they
take to the air and rise like beautiful, elusive cloth birds.
Lesbianism is another instance of gender transgression. In an interview with Connie Julian, Wallace points out that the way heterosexuals touch and act out their sexuality is extremely overdetermined and restrictive. So she has tried to break that down. Lesbianism becomes one of Wallace’s preoccupations in *And I and Silence*. The intimacy between the black Jamie and the white Dee transcending race and class serves as a psycho-erotic release from their emotionally parched lives:

JAMIE. There’s the weather. To make our skin wet.

DEE. That’s romance.

JAMIE. No. That’s rain. (*Beat.*) You think you’re the only one?

You think I don’t know that everything we planned is behind us? I can’t get quiet in my head. Nothin’ in my skull but loose change, rattlin’, rattlin’ and it don’t stop. But I’m not gonna stop. But I’m not gonna stop. Givin’ up, it’s gutless.

DEE. Yeah, but I’m gonna stop, Jamie. I’m gonna stop. Are you with me?

JAMIE. Go to hell. I don’t give up, remember? I never have.

DEE. Close your eyes. Close your eyes!

*Jamie closes her eyes. Dee circles her, talking.*

Feel that? Quiet. All over you. And somewhere there’s something falling easy on you. Sand. Water. But soundless. Yeah. It’ll be just
like that. It’s not a givin’ up. It’s a givin’ in, to a world where we almost are. Almost. Are.

*Jamie stays with her eyes closed.*

I love you.

*Jamie opens her eyes.* *(Silence 1. 9. 69-82)*

Dee harbours a submerged sexual attraction to Jamie. Though she plays along with Jamie’s dreams of their meeting and marrying a pair of brothers, we can sense that her real interest is in living a life with Jamie alone.

Apart from demystifying gender boundaries, Wallace also makes use of Brechtian dramaturgical techniques to foreground her resistance to established hegemonic discourses. Her use of *verfremdungseffekt* or alienation effect advocated by Brecht helps spectators to understand the complex nexuses of historical development and societal relationships. She intends to enable viewers to distance themselves emotionally from problems that demand intellectual solutions.

An instance of this alienation effect is found in the play *In the Heart of America*, where the character Remzi poses the following questions to Craver, his fellow soldier and soon-to-be lover: “Let’s say I’m lying over there, dead as can be, and then you see it’s me, from a distance. But you still have to walk over to my body to check it out. So, how would you walk?” *(America” 1. 3. 59-62).*

In *One Flea Spare*, Naomi Wallace has used the technique of *verfremdungseffekt*. The play takes the theme of epidemic, but distances the drama
by setting it in seventeenth-century London during the Great Plague (1665). Such a historical subject and setting is unusual for contemporary American drama. Wallace’s foreign setting also breaks the mould, as few American dramatists seem interested in foreign characters in overseas settings. Utilizing a version of Verfremdungseffekt, Wallace creates a degree of cultural and historical foreignness that allows for more disinterested reflection. The play is set in a plague ridden London, 1665, which Wallace has conceived as a brilliant situation to level the classes. As Laurie Stone states, “Wallace, by setting her play in a plague-ridden London, 1665, has conceived a brilliant situation to level the classes, so that a pound of rich flesh is in just as much peril as a pound of poor flesh” (34, 35). Brecht has noted, “The historical conditions must of course not be imagined (nor will they be co constructed) as mysterious powers (in the background); on the contrary, they are created and maintained by men (and will in due course be altered by them). It is the actions taking place before us that allow us to see what they are” (qtd. in Bechtel 19). Following this premise, Wallace initially gives the audience a distant world with a familiar power structure. However, as characters interact in new circumstances, the modes of operating are subverted. Naomi Wallace clearly subverts the history by telling how class distinctions are erased in an extraordinarily stressful situation.

In Slaughter City, the Sausage Man forbids Cod, the young female/man moving through time and space, from touching her desired interest, a feminine young female worker named Maggot, institutionally patrolling her sexuality and expression of desire/love. Cod can only use her hands for labour that inherently
perpetuates the capitalism and not the expression of her desire and sexuality. Wallace lyrically demonstrates the emotional and personal frustration that is a direct result of having one’s body’s construction at odds with one’s sexual and erotic desires. Cod’s monologue in the second act of *Slaughter City* wherein she expresses her total desire to simply touch Maggot provides the most beautiful example of this conflict among body, desire and state:

> But, even in my own head, I’ can’t make her touch me. Because I don’t know what it’s like to be touched. What? Does it cut or maul? Scratch or tear? Tell me. Is it pain? . . . And what would it be like to stop moving at that touch? To stand still and listen? To pulse in her wrist. No rage, no hurry, no you and me, no struggle. Just her blood, to and fro, in her wrist, against my ear . . . I am alone. I have never been anything but alone. Let her touch me. And I’ll know where I am. (*Slaughter* 2. 9. 35-49)

The Brechtian alienation technique is seen in this world of institutional oppression and domination.

Brecht encouraged characters to directly address the audience, as part of the alienation technique, reminding the audience to remain emotionally detached from the action of the play. Without notice, a character would address the audience directly, jolting their intellectual reaction to the plot and themes of the play. In *In the Heart of America* Boxler addresses the audience directly making them think about how military offences go unpunished in the name of amnesty:
Trust me. I’m the man with the box. The Amnesty box. And this time I’m in Iraq. Is that right? (Beat) This box you see before you is a very special box. It’s a common device we use here within the military, a receptacle in which soldiers can relieve themselves of contraband, no questions asked . . . . What distinguishes this particular box is its stench. Now some soldiers are more attached to their souvenirs than others; in one instance, a severed arm was discovered on a military flight leaving the base for Chicago. One might assume that someone somewhere would be disciplined for anatomical trophy-hunting, but no, not this time. Lucky, lucky. . . .

(Ameriça 2. 5. 3-19)

In Slaughter City, Sausage Man, decked out in dapper, old-timey wear and a necklace made of sausage links, and sporting an old-fashioned meat grinder, is the devilish spirit of capitalism personified. He is the facilitator of the whole grim system. He addresses the audience directly, making them reflect upon the perpetuation of the system:

I came across the ocean, from Zweibrucken, in the late 1800s. I ground meat in my own backyard. I didn’t have a pot to piss in. Sausages. I made sausages. All the little bits of bone and gut and cartilage that the rest of the world threw away, I made into something useful. Something edible . . . . With my two hands I created an empire out of a single sausage . . . . Ah, what a sound. The sound of hundreds, thousands of sausages filling up the empty spaces
in the world. Sausages filling up the empty spaces in our very souls. I love that sound. Like the world in my hands. Like the world going to pieces in my hands. (*Slaughter* 1. 6. 6-26)

This address reflects the theme of the play, the effects of capitalism. Ali in “The Retreating World” and Basheer in “One Short Sleepe” address the audience directly in monologues which illustrate the monstrosities of war. Ali speaks to the audience about his hobby of collecting pigeons. As he remembers his darling birds, we come to realize that he doesn't have them anymore. They were also collateral damage in a war. His advice on raising pigeons dovetails into the state of Iraq after nearly a decade of sanctions. Basheer, a student of entomology, in his address to the audience, replays how he and his little sister Ghada lost their lives in an air-raid during summer 2006.

Episodic, disconnected montage of scenes and styles is another characteristic of the epic theatre. In many of Wallace’s plays, coherent, or linear arrangement of scenes is not found. Past and present often overlap. The dramaturgical use of shifting time and the alternation of past and present is found in almost all of Wallace’s plays. The past penetrates the present again and again in Wallace’s plays, in the form of a historically significant setting or event, a mysterious figure who travels magically through time, a theatrical re-enactment of an earlier event, a ghost girl who is dead and gone yet walks among the living, or the permanent scars that experience has left on the bodies of her characters.
In the play, *In the Heart of America*, Lue Ming, a ghost character from the past, who appears as a real character says, “The past is never over” (*America* 2. 5. 45). Remzi Saboura is already dead, but appears in many scenes to be alive. The past and present collide in some scenes. The opening scene of *In the Heart of America* is set in a cheap motel room with Craver (a white man) and Fairouz (a Palestinian-American woman), and in the second scene Lue Ming, a ghost from the past enters the room. Lue Ming is searching for Remzi and she enquires about Calley:

CRAVER: Are you looking for him too?

LUE MING: I might be. Who?


LUE MING: Are you Mr. Calley?

CRAVER: No. I’m not. (*America* 1. 2. 3-7)

The next scene shifts to a year earlier in the Saudi desert. Thus there is a constant shifting of scenes and time.

*One Flea Spare* opens with the little girl Morse, holding her white gauzy skirt over her face, so she seems a phantasm. She asks the blank air, “What are you doing out of your grave?” (*Flea* 1. 1. 7). A visible ghost seems to be asking a question of an invisible ghost. Morse locked in an empty room or cell is the present, and the rest of the action takes place in the past. *Slaughter City* opens in a textile factory setting, “somewhere” in the past, with the textile worker and cod, both ghost-characters. Then the scene shifts to the present in the meat-packing
plant, and the sausage man, the textile worker and Cod, characters from the past interact with the characters in the present. *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, takes place in two times, both past and present. The play begins in the present with Dalton in jail, but quickly transitions to a landscape of the past where Dalton and Pace, teenagers “hanging out” at the trestle, talk of courage and outrunning trains. The play oscillates in time between the jail cell, the trestle, and the Chance home. The action in “A State of Innocence” takes place in “something like a zoo. . .or a space that once dreamed it was a zoo” (*Fever* 6). Yuval is already dead, but he appears as a zookeeper in the Rafah zoo which lives in his mind. So there is a collision of the past and the present, and at the close of the play there is a connecting gesture:

> . . . Um Hisham begins to sing the same song she sang. . . as Yuval died. Her back is to Yuval as she sings. Yuval, his back also to Um Hisham, hears the song and becomes still, listening. Then Yuval slowly turns his head as though the song is calling to him from some long distance. Then one of his knees gives way and he slowly sinks to the ground. . . . Um Hisham. . . turns her head and stares at the dead Yuval. In this fleeting gesture/moment, they connect. (*Fever* 24)

The words of Ali in “The Retreating World” are a significant comment on the merging of past and present: “The dead are dead. The living, we are the ghosts. . . . With the pencils we do not have we write our names so the future will know we were here. So that the past will know we are coming” (*Fever* 66).
In the play *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* the character Dalton starts to talk in a corner of a room and he is showing some animal shadows and at this time Pace comes to the stage and the audience can see her. Dalton speaks to her but he doesn’t see her image. The first scene opens under the trestle where Pace and Dalton meet. They are talking about how they have to run towards the train to challenge the train. Pace has practiced the match and she won twice and she says:

PACE: She comes through at 7:10. Sometimes 7:12. Sometimes she’ll Come on at 7:09 for ten days straight and then band, she’s off three minutes. She’s never exact; you can’t trust her. That’s what I like.

DALTON: How many times have you done it?

PACE: Twice. Once with Jeff Farley. Once alone.

(Trestle 1. 1. 22-27).

The next scene shifts to the present where Dalton is in prison and he doesn’t want to talk with others. Past and present are spliced together nearly alternating. Time is presented as a continuum in which history helplessly, inevitable recurs.

In *And I and Silence*, two sets of actors take the parts of Dee, Jamie, young Dee and young Jamie. The scenes alternate between the past when they became friends in the jail, and the present when they are trying to get jobs. However, in the final scene, the past and the present merge: “*Young Jamie and Young Dee are suddenly with them now. The two realities happen simultaneously*” (Silence 1.
The young Dee and young Jamie taking leave of each other at the end of their prison sentence is juxtaposed with the elder Dee and Jamie leaving this world together by stabbing each other.

The use of ghost characters is found in almost all the plays of Naomi Wallace. In the play *Trestle at Pope Lick Creek* the opening scene introduces Dalton who is sitting on the stage doing some hand shadows. While he does hand shadows Pace appears but Dalton is not able to see him. “He (Dalton) makes another hand shadow. Pace appears. She is there but not there” (*Slaughter* 1. Prologue. 10,11). Yuval in the play “A State of Innocence”, is already struck by a sniper’s bullet and has died in the arms of Um Hisham. Basheer, a Beirut University student has already died from an Israeli bombing raid. In the play *Slaughter City*, the dramatist introduces the characters Textile Worker and Cod, and informs that the situation has already occurred in the past and is portrayed in the present. “We (workers) are in a textile factory setting. “somewhere” in the past” (*Slaughter* 1. Prologue 3,4). Cod, a worker declares that he is not in the world, but the character is present on the stage: “I (Cod) haven’t got eyes. I’m not even born yet. (The woman turns to her cloth to work. Transfixed, Cod watches her)” (*Slaughter* 1. Prelude 24-26). Tice Hogan in *Things of Dry Hours* is already a dead black man come from another world to tell the story of the knock at the door that brings the white man into his house. In the epilogue, he prepares “to return to where he came from” (*Things* 91). The ghost characters may be seen as embodiments of how time comes back blurring the boundary between past and present. “A State of Innocence” takes place in “a space that once dreamed it was a
zoo” (*Fever* 6). There is a merging of the past and the present, as the zoo which was bulldozed earlier is now reconstructed in memory as a ghost zoo.

A montage of speech styles is found in *The War Boys*, where the three boys are poles apart. Greg is a working class Mexican-American, George is white trash, while David is white, college-educated. Greg’s speech-style is mixed, as in, “This half of me is *Mejicano*. This other half of me is WASP. Como sabes which side is which? My mother was Mexican. She used to tell me: “*Este lado es Mejicano*. This side is Mexican” (*War* 294-297). The educated David criticises his accent: “. . . your prose is a tad flat, somewhat backwards too . . . working class. You’ve got to flex it up a bit” (*War* 598-600). In *One Flea Spare*, Bunce who speaks normally, sometimes punctuates his conversation with the coarse language of sailors and lewd expressions. In *The Heart of America*, a play basically about war, involves a lot of military terminology.

To distance the audience from performance, Brecht encouraged the use of songs to “interrupt the flow of action through the insertion of narration” and “direct address which draws attention to the social causes of the events” (Mumford 176). Brecht refers to the use of songs in creating the alienation effect:

> When an actor sings he undergoes a change of function. Nothing is more revolting than when the actor pretends not to notice that he has left the level of plain speech and started to sing. The three levels – plain speech, heightened speech, and singing – must always remain distinct, and in no case should heightened speech represent
an intensification of plain speech or singing of heightened speech. In no case therefore should singing take place where words are prevented by excess of feeling. The actor must not only sing but show a man singing. (44-45)

In Naomi Wallace’s plays, songs heighten the alienation effect. They distance the audience from emotional engagement with the play. The character steps out of his/her role, and partially removes himself/herself from the action of the play to become a narrator or commentator who interprets the actions of the play for the audience, giving more information than may be obtained from the main action. For instance, in One Flea Spare, Kabe a watchman serves as a commentator on the events taking place in the play. This play is set in the time of plague when everyone is seeking shelter elsewhere. But Kabe doesn’t want to escape from the situation and still he guards the apartment. Everyone is worried about the plague and conscious of the effect the plague can have on one’s body. In this situation Kabe wants to see the beautiful neck of Morse who is twelve years old and who has come to Snelgrave’s house without their permission. Kabe sings:

One o’clock, two o’clock, three o’ clock, four, here’s a red cross for your door.
Where’s my enemy?
Flown to the country!

Never mind that, coz . . . . (Flea 1. 2. 115-119)
Kabe says that it's getting time for the plague to creep into the apartment. He is able to face the plague, but before that he is asking Morse to show her neck. In one instant Morse and Kabe have an argument showing that Morse is superior to the guard. Kabe says that in this world we can see the division but in a few days everyone is going to die because of plague and so all of them will be buried. In that there is no difference between rich and the poor, high class and the low class. They all should be graved equally and so with this intention he sings:

We'll all meet in the grave
Then we'll all be saved.
You with your coins
Me with the scabs.
You with clean loins
Me with the crabs.
We'll meet in the grave
Then we'll all get laid down
Oh, down, deep down. (*Flea* 1. 5. 117-125)

Bunce, a sailor too has come to Snelgrave's house without their permission. Once Bunce wraps himself under his shirt and the door is not locked. Darcy notices it and she enters into the room without his knowledge. Kabe imagines that cloth and all the worldly materials are same for the rich and the poor and now too the plague is not only for the poor but for the entire people of England. He sings:

“Calico, silk, porcelain, tea/ It’s all the same to the poor and me,/ Steal it in the
Indies, haul it cross the sea/ And now it’s nothing between the plague, you and me” (*Flea* 1. 7. 6-11).

Songs and music, featured in a great number of Brecht’s plays, do not merge with the dramatic action to enhance its emotional undertone, but – on the contrary – to distance it, thus foregrounding the constructedness of the text and performance. Sometimes, they punctuate the scene where a major dramatic change occurs and are in other instances used as a point of contrast and / or irony. For instance, in “Between This Breath and You”, Mourid who takes comfort in the fact that his dead son Ahmed’s breath is still living in the lungs donated to an Israeli girl, sings a song his son used to sing in the mornings before school:

She take my money.

Well I’m in need.

Yeah she’s a triflin’ friend indeed.

Oh she’s a gold digger,

Way over town.

That digs in me! (*Fever* 47)

Here the song is used as a point of contrast or irony, comparing the way a girl robbed him of money in school, and how now an Israeli girl has robbed him of his lungs.

In “One Short Sleepe”, Basheer, who is digging his dead sister’s grave, recollects the song her sister used to sing holding an ant on the end of her finger:
“Little ant, little ant,/ God lives in you./Take me to your home,/The sky’s no longer blue” (Fever 73). It is ironic that he should be thinking of the little ant at such a tragic moment. At the close of the play he sings another song about a spider, this time to the audience:

Spider, spider, little joy

Who lives in your eyes?

It was so long ago.

It was just yesterday.

Eight times I saw love.

Eight times love saw me. (Fever 77)

This is a song that her sister heard with her eighth eye, a paradox which is significant.

In The War Boys, the boys sing together the “Border Song”, which gives the sense of a chain-gang-type ballad:

On the border, we can see the pretty sights,

Some in the day, but the best once at night

Bring a six-pack of Bud and a bag of chips,

Bring some soda pop and some tamale dip.

We can spot them running, we can watch them crawl,

We can tie them up, we can have a ball.

We can make ten dollars if we catch one alive,
The feds will pay us money and they’ll give us no jive. (*War* 191-198)

This is soon followed by David’s song:

America, America

God shed his grace and thee

And crown thy good

With brotherhood

From sea to shining sea. (*War* 267-271)

The latter song which sings of the “brotherhood” of Americans is ironical, because the American characters in the play are divided on the basis of race and class. The first song highlights how money is foremost in the minds of the American, who can indulge in selfish pleasures at the expense of the “others”, the marginalized.

In *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, Chas sings to put Dalton to sleep:

“Rocking on the sea, looking for my soul,/ Dead man’s blood from an old boat hole./ Sail to the lefty, sail to the right/ Sail to the end in the cold moon light” (*Trestle* 2. 1. 8-11). Dalton’s sleep becomes the sleep of the dead and there is only a thin veil separating the living from the dead. Chas goes on to remember his fighting in the sea with bullets and dive-bombers and contrasts Dalton’s peaceful sleep “Sweet as baby’s breath” (*Trestle* 2. 1. 29). He sings of apples:

Apples, apples, buy a veteran’s apples,

Sweet and hard as ruby rocks.
Five cents a piece, two dollars for a box.

Apples, apples, buy an old man’s apples,

Fought for his country, left on his back.

Won’t you taste his apples, they’re black, black, black?

*(Trestle* 2.1.33-38)

Here, Chas’s song serves as a point of contrast, distancing the audience from emotional entanglement in Pace’s condition.

In a similar vein, in *And I and Silence*, Jamie’s mother Betty’s song sung by Jamie offers a comic relief, distancing the audience from the dystopian condition of the working class blacks: “I’m down to he park with my hula hoop/ And all the sweet greasers gonna watch me hoop./ Get in line, you wanna squeeze my hand/ See me twirl and twist, I’m a marchin’ band” (*Silence* 1. 8. 70-73). However, another that Jamie and Dee sing together, celebrating the hand-me-downs which they may receive from their masters, offers a comment on the poor living conditions of the working class:

If you don’t want that thing no more,

I’ll take it home, ‘cause I so poor

And you so kind, your heart so big.

If you’re sweet to me, I’ll dance a jig! . . .

I’ll take those socks, I can mend that hole,

On that broke chair, I’ll rest my bones.

A piece of glass, ma’am I can use that too.
A dress that’s stained to me is new. . . .

I’ll have that broken birthday toy,

That rug with burns, it’ll bring me joy.

Oh let me kiss your generous hand.

What’s garbage to you, to me is grand! (*Silence* 1. 4. 124-138)

The song is an ironic comment on the so-called generosity of the rich masters, and it is ironical in another sense too, because the girls are not even given such privileges, as they are unable to find any sort of employment.

Wallace employs metaphors in her plays for interpreting expressive forms of action. Rhys Isaac expounds upon the use of metaphor in historical research and presentation: “Great metaphors of the culture enter into a creation and interpretation of setting; they are a major source of available roles; and they also govern the actors’ styles of presentation. Above all it is the great metaphors that control the very perception of what constitutes significant action or drama” (351). Isaac further asserts that the theatre model provides a useful metaphor for historians and ethnographers to reconstruct lives of the past.

The objective of the ethnographic historian’s enterprise – understanding and depicting life itself – is, however, very close to the aims of the artist. It should not be surprising, therefore, that devices developed in forms of art, and concepts arising in discourse concerning art, such as metaphor, dramaturgy, and milieu, have been
found serviceable for incorporation in the models proposed for use in ethnographic analysis. (357)

Bertolt Brecht employed the butchering business in “Saint Joan of Stockyards” as a metaphor for the use of workers, politics and religion under capitalism. Naomi Wallace has given similar meat-market politics an erotic twist in Slaughter City.

Wallace makes repeated use of the metaphor of the prison to signify the prison-like existence of man in a capitalist society. The Snelgrave home has been boarded up and guarded by a watchman. The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek takes place in a jail cell. Michel Foucault writes in Discipline and Punish about architecture in modern prison. Standing at the centre of Bentham’s Panopticon, the spectator can see every inmate, as Foucault explains: “By effect of backlighting, one can observe from the tower, standing point precisely against the light, the small captive shadows in the periphery. They are like so many cages. So many small theatres in which each action is alone, perfectly individualized and constantly visible” (Discipline 200). Like Foucault, Wallace parallels the theatre with the prison, challenging by her audience to recognize and transgress its own societal conscription.

In her depiction of the prison on stage, Wallace challenges traditional definitions of crime and punishment, victim and abuser. Many of the women playwrights present their women characters as helpless victims of a patriarchal, white, oppressive society. Wallace creates situations in which the blame is shared
by all and the criminals are often indistinguishable from the victims who may or may not be women. She reconsiders the stereotype of woman as victim and examines how that image affects both the participant and the viewers the voyeurs of crimes. Using the metaphor of prison throughout her plays, she questions definitions of crime and punishment in our gender and class oriented society. In *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, in prison, Dalton turns on his jailor Chas, Brett’s father, forcing him to admit that he had hit his own son. He tells Chas that Pace had seen him hit Brett regularly, and that Brett had liked for Pace to watch. Brett had enjoyed having a witness: “Brett would take Pace aside and ask her if she saw it. . . . Brett wanted to make sure” (*Trestle* 2. 7. 39-42). Then in a strange turn of events, Brett began to hit himself each morning, as if to save his father the trouble and Chas remembers: “I just watch” (*Trestle* 2. 7. 50). Thus the abuser becomes the witness, the victims the abusers. The witness, Pace, becomes the victim. Yet she is also the abuser, forcing Dalton into a life he does not want.

In this play, every character plays nearly every role and as the number of roles seems finite, even society itself seems a prison. These characters attempt to fill new roles as a sort of escape from the old but they find themselves instead repeating cycles. These roles are random and not ultimately fulfilling. (Barnett “Prisons” 159)

Wounds, scars and deformities are metaphors employed by Wallace to depict the violations inflicted on the body and soul by the oppressive structures of capitalism and imperial aggression. In *In the Heart of America*, Lue Ming and
Fairouz have deformities which document the history of their nations and the political violations these nations suffered.

The physical defects of all these women signal the hostile times they lived in, which are usually reflected on the female body as carrier and display of the ideologies and social constructions of the era, turning women’s bodies into representatives of their nations’ whole sociopolitical ideology. Fairouz and Lue Ming have their regions’ ideology inscribed on their bodies as physical wounds, making these bodies battlefields on which colonizers and soldiers demonstrate their political muscles. Wallace demonstrates how the female body, through its sexual orientation, its color, its exposure, and its movements and gestures, can tell the whole story of violence and violation. (El-Sawy 56)

In *One Flea Spare*, we see the deformities and the festering wounds of the house's survivors, especially the endless torment of Darcy, who was painfully disfigured in a fire years before and ever since has been an object of disgust to her insensitive husband. Near the climax of the play, Darcy asks to see Bunce's wound, an unhealed hole in his side. Earlier, Bunce explains to Snelgrave, how he got the scar:

Sail hook . . . The press gangs were looking for fresh recruits and boarded us just as we came into port... To keep from the press, sometimes we’d cut ourselves a wound and then burn it with vitriol. Make it look like scurvy. They wanted whole men, so I stuck
myself in the neck with a sail hook. They passed me over when they saw the blood. (Flea 1. 3. 112-116)

In Bunce’s case it is a self-inflicted wound for the sake of survival. Darcy wants to touch Bunce’s unhealed wound. Bunce guides her hand, allowing her to probe the wound with her finger. The episode suggests that sexuality and violence are bound up with one another.

Wallace employs shoes as a metaphor for the economic condition of the poor, who cannot afford to wear expensive shoes. In One Flea Spare, she makes the working class Bunce wear the shoes of the aristocratic Mr. Snelgrave, and through this incident tries to show that class statuses may be reversed. Mr. Snelgrave categorically states that “. . . the poor do not take to fine shoes. They never have and never will” (Flea 1. 6. 53,54). However, history is reversed, as Bunce takes Snelgrave’s shoes by force and wears them. Morse looks at Snelgrave’s bare feet, and remarks: “. . . even the rich had shoes. But one day the world changed . . . . And it never changed back” (Flea 2. 4. 90). Thus the shoes stand for the economic status of a person.

In Things of Dry Hours, Cali keeps the shoes that wealthy clients carelessly discard amongst the laundry. The polishing of shoes becomes the action through which Corbin displays his newfound education and self-respect through his relationship with Tice.

In The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, the poor economic status of Dalton is pointed out by Pace through the metaphor of the shoes:
DALTON: Hey, I might go to college when I graduate.

PACE: You’re not going to college. None of us are going to college.

DALTON: I got the grades for it. That’s what Mr. Pearson says.

PACE: And who’s gonna pay for it? Look at your shoes.

DALTON: Huh?

PACE: Your shoes. (Trestle 1. 1. 89-94)

The mop becomes a dominant metaphor in “Between This Breath and You”, where an Israeli janitor of Moroccan descent sees the mop as a divine agent in the cleansing and building up of mankind:

I’d spend my life as a mop in the arms of an earnest cleaner, licking up the refuse from the linoleum, the slate, the marble. . . . Because there is no surface in the world more intimate than a human floor. We leave everything behind on it: our hair, our skin, our drippings and drooling, our lint, our nefarious discards, our shameful discords. With what this mop gathers I could build particle by particle, out of abandoned parts, an entirely new human being! A mop is an extension of Divine power, a gatherer of the slough; a mop is, in short, a functional God. (Fever 29)

Dress is another metaphor used extensively in Wallace’s plays where dressing and undressing recur. In One Flea Spare, Darcy is figuratively imprisoned by her dress. At age 17, when she had been married to Snelgrave for two years, she
was badly burned in a fire. Since that time, she has hidden her disfigurement with a long dress and white gloves. The dress is a permanent shell, both prison and protection. When Morse asks Darcy, “Are you not hot in all that dress” (*Flea* 1. 4. 32), she responds, “No, child. I never wear anything but this sort of dress” (*Flea* 1. 4. 33,34). When Bunce tells her, as she is dying, to take it off, she says “Never” (*Flea* 2. 8. 71). She dies wearing that dress. She has been punished not for a crime but for a heroic attempt in trying to save her horse, a wedding gift. Snelgrave has tormented her by refusing to look at or touch her since the time of the fire. She has lived in isolation with her dress. During the course of the play the characters exchange clothing. Morse takes off Darcy’s dress, Snelgrave wears Bunce’s clothing, and Bunce puts on Snelgrave’s pants. This exchange of clothing suggests the levelling of social class distinctions. The Faber edition of *And I and Silence* sports a girl’s dress on its cover page highlighting the importance of dress in the play.

The dominant metaphor in *One Flea Spare* is the ship. The quarantined room is the ship which leaves the port for a four-week voyage, with Snelgrave as the captain, Darcy as the chief mate, Bunce as a sailor and Morse as a stowaway turned passenger. Bunce and Morse overcoming Snelgrave and tying him up is the mutiny of the sailor

Wallace’s use of unexpected metaphors is striking. For instance, in *The War Boys*, she uses the metaphors of radish, camel and a heart split in two to bring out the class/race differences. David, the educated white, identifies himself with
the radish with growing roots: “You can hear them growing . . . radish roots. They make a sound when they grow – (Makes a sound) radiating out minute bits of heat into the wet dirt, making the wet dirt hiss” (War 64-65). George, the white trash, explains how he got a hump on his back:

It just popped up one day when I was standing in front of this billboard waiting for the school bus. On the billboard was the picture of a camel, sitting on a beach with sunglasses, smoking a cigarette. The camel had this smile on his face I’d never seen on any human face before: this smile of slap-happiness, of some just-do-it secret. And that’s when I felt it pop up on my back: the hump. (War 950-960)

For Greg, the working class Mexican- American, it is the heart split into two which is the dominant metaphor. It is George, the marginalized, who wants to score over the others through the use of the metaphors: “Is a camel worth any less than a radish? Than a half-breed with a heart split in two? . . . my camel could eat your radish any day” (War 1171-1176).

Potatoes in a box form a metaphor for the meaningless existence of the working class under the capitalist system. When Dalton accuses Pace of having no determination or plan for the future, Pace replies:

Yeah, but I watch . . . . Things. People. I’ve been watching. And this is how things are. (Casually) You and me and the rest of us kids out here, we’re just like. Okay. Like potatoes left in a box. You ever
seen a potato that’s been left in a box? The potato thinks the dark is the dirt and it starts to grow roots so it can survive, but the dark isn’t the dirt and all it ends up sucking on is a fistful of air. And then it dies. (Trestle 1. 4. 18-27)

In Wallace’s plays, the apple is a romantic metaphor of hope. In Things of Dry Hours, Tice is seen holding an apple at the close of the play. Tice explores the apple’s “white meat with black seeds,” which hints at a possible racial harmony. Tice tells us: “Or hey, maybe, just maybe, an apple is a letter from another world. The world that walks behind us. The world that won’t let us go. The world that whispers: ‘We lived. We lived. Oh listen to our call.’ And all you have to do . . . (neatly cuts the apple in two) is open it. Read what it says on the inside. And then, get to work” (Things 93).

The orange becomes a metaphor for sexuality in One Flea Spare. When Snelgrave asks Bunce how he controlled his sexual urges when he was aboard the ship, Bunce forces Snelgrave’s finger through the rind of an orange in response. Then he squeezes it and drinks the juice that runs out of the hole in the rind. At the end of the play, as Morse covers the bodies of Snelgrave and Darcy, she sings of “oranges and lemons”, takes out an orange from her pocket, tosses it high in the air, and catches it, conveying an optimistic note in the presence of death.

Another feature of the epic theatre, found in the plays of Naomi Wallace, is the self-conscious presentation of role-play, emphasizing a distanced display of behavioural attitudes. For instance, in The War Boys, Greg plays the role of a
Mexican woman, but the playwright has made it clear in the stage directions that
the actor should not imitate a female voice: “Greg crawls from the border. Though
he pretends to be a Mexican woman, it is important that his voice is not affected.
He does not try to sound like a woman, instead he speaks with his own voice. He
may affect a slight accent but then drop it when the action gets more violent” (War
1332-1336). The self-conscious nature of role-play is emphasized.

Another instance of self-conscious role-play is found in Act ii Scene vii of
Slaughter City, where Brandon puts on a woman’s work dress and plays the role of
a helpless girl, observed and directed by Roach:

Brendon sneaks into the women’s changing room. He’s not sure
what he’s looking for. He sees a woman’s work dress. He smells
and touches it sensually.

. . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . .

ROACH (makes herself known): Now I like this show better than
the last one, cherub. But you could use some lessons. (beat)

Put the dress on. (They watch each other some moments). I
mean it.

(Brendon glances quickly over his shoulder to make sure
they’re alone)

BRANDON: . . . (Roach watches him undress and put the dress on
as he speaks)
Oh, I’m just a girl, a waif like a wafer you could snap in two, just a
gosling in distress, an egret with no inlet to satisfy my pitiable
appetites. (*Slaughter* 2. 7. 1-30)

In between, Roach says that she has forgotten the script, making the audience
aware of this self-conscious role-play.

In *And I and Silence* Dee and Jamie engage in role-playing in which they
teach each other the proper way to become the perfect servant. Young Dee plays
the role of a domineering, condescending employer while Jamie plays the role of a
submissive servant. Dee even switches Jamie on the legs with a stick.

YOUNG DEE. (*as herself*) should I get the stick?

YOUNG JAMIE. Not yet.

YOUNG DEE. You tell me when.

YOUNG JAMIE. (*as a servant again*) What did I forget, ma’am?

YOUNG DEE. Something real important.

YOUNG JAMIE. But I don’t know what I forgot. (*Whispers, as *herself*)
Now get the stick.

*Young Dee gets the ‘stick’, which is a thin, strong piece of wood,*

*three feet long.*

YOUNG DEE. I don’t want as maid that can’t remember.

YOUNG JAMIE. But I can. If you help me.

YOUNG DEE. You are a real. Dis-ap-pointment.

*Young Dee suddenly switches Jamie on the legs with the stick, but
not hard. (*Silence* 1. 8. 17-27)*
It is a dark lesson meant to prepare them for the outer world. Later the old Jamie becomes the master with the stick while Dee fawns on Jamie.

DEE. . . . would you like a cup of coffee, sir?

JAMIE. No. I’d like a piece of cake.

DEE. (as herself) Give me the bread.

_Jamie hands her the piece of bread._

Here’s a piece of cake, sir.

JAMIE. What kind of cake?

DEE. Coffee cake. With almonds, sir.

_Jamie nibbles the bread_

JAMIE. This cake is stale. How dare you serve me stale cake?

DEE. But I just baked it.

JAMIE. Stale! You eat it. You eat it or I’ll hit you! Jamie 

brandishes the stick. Dee takes the bread and eats it. She’s hungry.

With satisfaction, Jamie watches her eat.

(Silence 1. 3. 72-84)

Through this pretending gesture, the women struggle to find their identity and “maintain their sanity in the midst of crushing social injustice” (Hurst).

In a similar vein, in _Slaughter City_, Brandon plays the role of the boss, and Roach takes up the role later:

BRANDON. . . . Let’s say I’m running this packhouse. I’m running this whole joke.
(Tears off his apron and throws it aside.)

BRANDON. Listen young lady, I offered you that nice little office job, with a window to look out of. (Starts to laugh) But you couldn’t handle it. (Hits Cod again) No. I mean, this little bitch couldn’t even read! Can you believe it? That’s what he said. That’s what he said to me: this little bitch can’t even read!

(Brandon raises his arm to strike Cod again, but Roach’s voice stops him. She plays the “boss” to get Brandon’s attention.)

ROACH. Can you believe it? This little bitch can’t even read! How do you sign your name, then, baby, with what’s left of your thumb? Can’t you even defend yourself like a decent woman? (Slaughter 1. 10. 61-115)

In *In the Heart of America*, Boxler plays the role of Lieutenant Calley, who is dead. Lue Ming, a ghost from the Vietnam War, accosts Boxler, mistaking him for Calley, and Boxler falls into the role, acknowledging that he shot her daughter: “. . . shooting a child, if you must know, is rather exceptional. It’s like shooting an angel. There’s something religious about it” (*America* 2. 8. 27-30). Thus enactment or role-play is a trope that triggers a Brechtian awareness of the contrived nature of the theatrical fiction and raises questions about alternative courses of action and different possible outcomes.
Wallace’s use of light and shadow is noteworthy. For instance, at the opening of The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek, there is “Darkness for some moments. Then we see Dalton sitting upstage, in a corner. His back is all we see. Beside him is a small candle. From the light of the candle, Dalton makes hand shadows. We can see the shadows but we cannot discern what they are” (Trestle “Prelude” 1-4). At the end of the play, both Dalton and Pace blow out the candle, and there is a blackout. The use of candles, silhouettes and shadows gives the feeling of a cavernous and dangerous space, creating a mood of eerie foreboding. Light in literature refers to joy, happiness, achievements, power etc. In Bible too we can come across light. God created light and this is something associated with conquering. God divided the light into two. One is to control in the day time and another is to control over night. In literature night or darkness symbolizes disaster and death. Dalton in The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek says, “Some people think there’s a light. Some say it comes from above. I don’t believe it. If there’s anything at all, it’ll come up from under the ground. Where we don’t expect it. A light. A warm light and it’ll cover us” (Trestle 2. 4. 76-80).

The play One Flea Spare starts in a dim light and so the readers can easily find out that some disastrous things are going to take place. The play opens in a room and the character is hiding her face not to reveal herself, and someone is beating her to reveal the truth about what happened to the gentleman. It is Morse who is in the centre of the room and “She is wearing a torn pair of boys britches or long underwear under her dress. She is just barely visible in the dim light. She repeats the words that her interrogator might have used earlier” (Flea 1. 1. 3-6).
Apart from the hand shadows made by Dalton and Dray in *The Trestle at Pope Lick Creek*, we see characters watching others from shadows in most of the plays. “In the shadows we see the dead Snelgraves” (Flea 1.9.2); “Fairouz is standing in the shadows, watching” (Heart 1.1.2); “Lue Ming stands watching him [Boxler] in the shadows” (Heart 2.5.1,2); “Craver listens from the shadows” (Heart 2.10.2,3); “Roach and Maggot are still standing together in the shadows” (Slaughter 2.9.1); “Sausage Man gestures to the shadows” (Slaughter 2.9.66); “Sausage Man eaters and watches them all from the shadows” (Slaughter 2.12.2,3). Darkness and semi-darkness are seen in the following instances: “She [Morse] is just barely visible in the dim light” (Flea 1.1.4,5); They [Bunce and Darcy] watch each other in the dark” (Flea 2.3.2,3); “Semi-darkness” (Flea 2.9.1); She [Fairouz] moves about the dark motel room” (Heart 1.7.1); “Darkness for some moments” (Trestle 1.1.1); “We hear Dalton’s voice in the dark” (Trestle 1.10.167); “In the semi-dark we see the hands of someone” (Trestle 1.11.1).

To sum up the arguments made in this chapter, Wallace is mainly interested in transgression of boundaries, specifically gender boundaries. In the established order of things, the fixed binary of man and woman as opposite genders is the given, but Wallace transgresses the fixed grid showing that the marginalized take lines of flight along the molecular path of escape. It is the line of absolute deterritorialization which subverts traditional binary oppositions, destabilizing the distinction between the categories of man and woman. In Deleuzian terms, the revolutionary objective of Wallace’s writing is to break down molar aggregates in favour of molecularity and the “microphysics of desire.”
This chapter has also highlighted the features of epic theatre discernible in the selected plays, mainly the alienation effect advocated by Brecht, and its accessories like direct address to the audience, use of songs, montage of speech styles and scenes, overlapping of the past and the present, use of metaphors and self-conscious role-play.