

“At any given Before moment”: Post-Apocalyptic Trauma and the Collective Memory in
Washburn’s *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*

This paper investigates the interconnectivity of trauma, fetishization, and collective memory in Anne Washburn’s dark comedy, *Mr. Burns: A Post-Electric Play*. With her interpolation of the “Cape Feare” episode of FOX’s *The Simpsons*, American consumer products like Diet Coke, and contemporary American pop music, Washburn creates a space that is hyper aware of its new but necessary deviance from the norm. As the characters in the play attempt to perform “normalcy” in this space—that is to say their daily actions prior to the crash of the electric grid—they struggle with recreating the “Before moment.” And, while they are remembered by the characters, the products of popular culture are also misremembered in the tense, pregnant pauses that Washburn creates. It is within these pauses that the characters are able to, and almost necessarily, fetishize and effectively rewrite aspects of the American narrative in order to cope with their trauma, including the representations of sexuality and gender. Thus, though an apocalyptic imaginary, Washburn understands the interpolation of pop culture in American memory as it specifically relates to our collective processing and misremembering of trauma.