Terror on Stage

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Table of Contents

Summary

Perpetrators of terror, torture and war spin language into sophistries, cloak power in illusions and enact a theatre of dismemberment upon their victims and the earth. How might a make-believe art subvert those actions on its stage? Drawing on Anne Ubersfeld's repudiation of "naturalistic realism" for the "passivity" it induces,[1] Joanne Tompkins' study of Australian cultural production that "unsettles" the nation's raced and anxious surface,[2] and Heiner Müller's notion of a performed image generating explosive, border-crossing force,[3] this thesis investigates how two contemporary Australian tragedies and the writer's own playscript may "unsettle" received space and subjectivity, while lighting selfhoods and landscapes that violent power seeks to conceal.

The theme plays through four movements. The first movement – *feroce e lacrimoso* [cruel and sad] – investigates how Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* (an Indigenous re-imagining of Euripides),[4] and Stephen Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt*,[5] each empower a female protagonist to disrupt an annihilating imperial landscape. The wild affective force of Enoch's Medea generates a landscape of the heart that "unsettles" a landscape of terror, while in Sewell's play a trajectory towards idealised closure renders less effective the protagonist's transgressive power.

The second movement – *furioso e scherzando* [raging and playful] – is *Hurricane Eye*, an original tragedy, masked as comedy, inspired by the disruptive, multiple

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[1] Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, Toronto Studies in Semiotics, eds. Patrick Debbèche and Paul Perron, (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 25-7.

[2] Joanne Tompkins, *Unsettling Space: Contestations in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) 6.

[3] Heiner Müller, cited in Carl Weber, "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience," *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage by Heiner Müller*, ed. Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 14. For Müller's comment on the "revolutionary" consequence of "border-crossing" see a fuller version of Müller's text, in "*Deutschland spielt noch immer die Nibelungen: DDR-Dramatiker Heiner Müller über seine Theaterarbeit zwischen Ost und West* [Germany Still Plays the *Nibelungen*: Interview with GDR Playwright Heiner Müller, on his work for the theatre between East and West]," *Der Spiegel* 9 May 1983: 200. Personal translation.

[4] *Black Medea*, by Wesley Enoch (after Euripides), dir. Enoch, first perf. 13 April 2005, Malthouse Theatre production at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney.

[5] *The Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul, first perf. 3 February 2007, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney.

layering in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*,[6] and Peter Weiss' *Marat*.[7] While *Hurricane Eye*'s "real" acts of torture and war are imagined offstage, the Waxworks Chorus performs the waterboarding of Cassandra, the guillotining of Charlotte Corday and War's devouring of its children. The Chorus' fluid identities, as commandeered yet sentient subjects, expose their actions to disruption.

The third movement – *appassionato* [impassioned] – scrutinises the crafting of *Hurricane Eye* in its quest for an "image" (Müller) whose explosion would bring embodied violent power to the self-recognition Raymond Gaita names "remorse".[8] The fourth movement – *finale sognando* [dreamlike conclusion] – reflects on the uncertain ending of *Hurricane Eye* which seeks to unsettle terror's myth of its own righteousness, yet refuses an idealised solution lest its new set of exclusions attract new conquerors. Unresolvable tension remains in a catharsis that re-members self, other, earth and the dance of negotiation between.

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[6] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (London: Methuen, 2001). First produced by the Royal Court Theatre, London, 2000.
[7] Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade*, 1965, trans. Geoffrey Skelton; verse adaptation by Adrian Mitchell, 5th ed., (London: J. Calder, 1969).
[8] Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil : An Absolute Conception*, 1991, (London: Routledge, 2004) 51.

Candidate’s statement

The written material in this thesis is my own original work and has not been submitted for a higher degree to any other university or institution.

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Significant first drafts of scenes for *Hurricane Eye* were written in a seminar room at Macquarie University in the company of a writing group of fellow postgraduate students in the Department of English, Linn Skoglund, Filipa Bellette and Piers Kenna, each of us engaged in our own creative writing project. The stimulus writing exercises we shared, the inspiration of one another's presence and the feedback we gave one another were of great value for my discovery of the setting, mood, characters and action for the play. Crucial scenes written in their company are now

part of the play. Congratulations to Linn and Filipa who have now attained their PhD, and all good wishes to Piers who took his work in a different direction.

A second writing group grew from long term writer friends of mine whose work melds memoir and fiction, Barbara Brooks and Beth Yahp who now both have they doctorates from the University of Technology, Sydney. Our group met regularly in one another's homes, to drink tea and coffee, read one another's drafts, and celebrate writing, friendship, and creativity by cooking one another dinner. Their incisive feedback has been vital for my project, as has that of a fourth member who joined our group, Anne Deveson, who has now published her work: *Waging Peace* (Allen and Unwin: 2013). Very special thanks go to this brilliant group of women for their inspiration, criticism and support.

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Introduction

> To push an open society closer to a closed one, leaders establish state-sanctioned torturers.
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> Naomi Wolf, *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, 2007.[1]

> In this miserable state of mind, I began to understand, toward the end of my stay in prison, that a trap was being laid for me: a relatively innocent turn of phrase – or so I thought at the time – in one of my requests for release was to be published in a falsified version in order to discredit me.
>
> Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 1990.[2]

> SOFIA. I have something to tell you.
>
> > There are villages of the living and villages of the dead, surrounding us always. Press up against the wall. Behind you. There's a hand in the stone. Reach for it, hold it.
>
> Ariel Dorfman, *Widows*, 1998.[3]

This thesis examines how terror and its resistance are represented on stage in two contemporary Australian tragedies: Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* (after Euripides, 2005);[4] and, Stephen Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt* (2007).[5] In each of these plays a female protagonist who is being subjected to physical and psychic terror performs her own transformation of the significance, purpose and ownership of the staged space where the terror is taking place. Her actions challenge not only the physical control over that space being exercised by the man who is terrorising her, but his figurative or subjective conception of that space. Her contestation of how that space is perceived is a crucial component of her resistance to his forcible efforts to control her and her experiences of herself. To counter his performance of that space as a landscape where she is condemned to annihilation – deservedly in his view – she performs the space as her own landscape, one which she perceives as a space, not

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[1] Naomi Wolf, *The End of America: Letter of Warning to a Young Patriot*, (Melbourne: Scribe, 2007) 69.
[2] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace : A Conversation with Karel Hvízdala*, trans. Paul Wilson, (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990) 67.
[3] Ariel Dorfman, *Widows*, *The Resistance Trilogy*, 1997 (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998) 73.
[4] *Black Medea*, by Wesley Enoch (after Euripides), dir. Enoch, perf. by Margaret Harvey, Aaron Pedersen and Justine Saunders, commissioned and produced by Malthouse Theatre, presented by Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, first perf. 13 April 2005. Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*, *Contemporary Indigenous Plays* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2007).
[5] *The Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul, perf. by Lynette Curran and Hazen Shammas, first perf. 3 February 2007, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney. Stephen Sewell, *The Gates of Egypt*, Unpublished Playscript, Adelaide, 23 December 2006. c/- Marquee Management

of hatred, but of love, strength and interconnection. It is not a landscape of reason and logic, but one of affect and this thesis has dubbed it, for convenience, as a landscape of the heart.

As will be argued, the protagonist in *Black Medea* and in *Gates of Egypt* performs the presence of her landscape of the heart as an expression of her desire to reach beyond herself and to enter a negotiation with a wider community and an earth and spirit or way of being whose existence her attacker repudiates. Such a landscape figures in each play as "uncanny", to borrow Sigmund Freud's term, in that the protagonist's landscape haunts the space with her emotion and esoteric knowledge.[6] When the actions of the protagonist charge the landscape with emotions and perceptions that the perpetrator of terror would keep hidden, he intensifies his brutality in his effort to suppress her and her experience. In both *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* the female protagonist performs a personal self that arouses her torturer to fury because she challenges his being and its imbrication in his perception of the space in which he is terrorising her.

> The crucial nexus between space and subjectivity connects contested space and compromised personal subjectivity.[7]

These are the words of Joanne Tompkins whose valuable critical and theoretical insights into the interconnections between space and self have informed the present analysis. In *Unsettling Space*, Tompkins includes an examination of selected Australian works for performance about the asylum seekers who flee persecution to take risky boat journeys to Australia, but to whom successive Australian governments would deny any "land, space, or place."[8] The "alternative (and imagined) spaces" that the performances construct present interlinked spatial and subjective expressions of people whom official policy would punish with incarceration for a perceived violation of the nation's borders.[9]

As well as a study of how *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* perform terror and its resistance by pitting the different subjectivities and landscapes of terror-perpetrator

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[6] See Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny", *Art and Literature*, Vol. 14 (London: Penguin, 1985) 345.
[7] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, 17.
[8] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, 115.
[9] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space*, 115, 115-26.

and victim against one another, this thesis includes the writer's own original playscript, *Hurricane Eye: A Masque for the 21st Century*. The research for the exegesis has been crucial to the crafting of the play. *Hurricane Eye* is set in the Dungeon of the Museum of Horrors where Cassandra is incarcerated and tortured for her protest against the state's use of torture and war. The subjectivities of the Waxworks Chorus and of the protagonist Cassandra contest the meaning of the Dungeon for the ruler, Attercop. Their actions "unsettle" (to borrow Tompkins' term) his command of the space.

One of the many playwrights who have inspired this thesis and its creative writing, is Ariel Dorfman. In the penultimate scene in *Widows*, the militaristic state is about to execute Sofia and her grandson Alexis for protesting against the torture, murder and disappearances that it inflicts upon its political opponents. Sofia creates an uncanny image of "a hand in the stone" that reconnects the boy and herself with one of the legion of those murdered in that prison – the boy's father, Sofia's son. A stage direction places Sofia's hand on her grandson's heart.[10] Her action and words apprehend an affective communication between self and self, past and present, dead and living that renders her and her grandson able to move stone:

> SOFIA. [. . .]. People like us don't die. We will be there in the stones of the wall, you and I and the many others, we will be there together, my little man, my baby, till the walls come down.[11]

Sofia's trope of "a hand in the stone" performs a warmth and fluidity that render the fixity of the state mutable while changing the boy's perception of the prison and of his own imminent death. Sofia sites spaces of love, courage and community as subversive ground within, and beyond, the deadly walls. Through my reading of plays such as Dorfman's *Widows*, my study of the crafting of space in Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, and through the writing of my own script, this thesis explores how a dissident female protagonist may imagine her own space, a ground upon which she challenges the landscape of terror that has captured her.

With world military expenditure reaching $US1,630 billion in 2010, there were plenty of contemporary examples of oppressive regimes which could spark ideas for literal and figurative landscapes of terror, war and resistance that I might create for my

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[10] Dorfman, *Widows*, 72.
[11] Dorfman, *Widows*, 73.

playscript.[12] *The Guardian* reported in May 2013 that U.S. President Obama had been unable to close the military prison at Guantánamo Bay, where many of the remaining 166 detainees who were captured in former President G. W. Bush's "war on terror" have been imprisoned without trial for over a decade.[13]

In a photograph that accompanies a report by Marsha Halper regarding a demonstration held on 11 January 2014, to mark the twelfth anniversary of the prison, protesters wearing the signature orange jump suits of detainees kneel on the pavement outside the Miami headquarters of the U.S. Southern Command.[14] Their feint of subjugation brings a trace of the hidden space and horror of confinement in Guantánamo Bay into visual and symbolic juxtaposition with the commanding premises of the Army and its iron reinforcement of the U.S. Government's imperative to uphold its war on terror.

In her analysis of Legs on the Wall's production of *Homeland* (1988), Tompkins attests to the power of a performance which marks the gaps between different spaces and different configurations of bodies in response to those spaces. In *Homeland* the performers, harnessed to cables, descended one the side of AMP Building, Sydney, while giant images of migrants and their abandoned homes were projected on the surface of the building and over the moving bodies of the performers as they made their way down that façade to the apparent safety of another ground.[15] The gaps between different spaces and experiences were evident, for example, by the performance of the contrast between the "'big-business' function of the building and the projected personal images of suitcases," or between the individual bodies of the descending performers who perform a great physical effort across the space to connect and embrace only to separate again. "These gaps," Tompkins writes, "hold the potential for shifting interpretations [. . .]."[16]

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[12] "Background paper on SIPRI military expenditure data," 2010. 11 April, 2011, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI): 1, accessed 20 August 2011, <http://www.sipri.org/research/armaments/milex/factsheet2010>.
[13] Paul Harris, Tracy McVeigh and Mark Townsend, "How Guantánamo's Horror Forced Inmates to Hunger Strike," *The Guardian; The Observer*. 4 May, 2013, guardian.co.uk, accessed 22 May 2013, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2013/may/04/guantanamo-hunger-strike>.
[14] Marsha Halper, "Guantánamo 12th anniversary protests," *Miami Herald*, 11 January 2014, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2014/01/11/3864497/jan-11-2014-guantanamo-12th-anniversary.html> accessed 14 January 2014.
[15] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 84-5.
[16] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 84.

In the writing of *Hurricane Eye*, I wanted to find a metaphoric way of staging the gaps between a dissenter's and a fictional government's interpretations of the truth. The urgency of that theme has been marked by the work of Julian Assange, a non-violent disseminator of secret government files, who continues (at the time of writing) to reside and work in his sanctuary in Ecuador's Embassy in London, where he has been living since 19 June, 2012. Assange is encircled by armed U.K. police and subjected to heavy U.S. government electronic surveillance as part of what Chris Hedges describes as a "global assault" on disseminators of truth and on the means of its dispersal, WikiLeaks and the internet itself.[17]

Truth has become the crime. Hedges writes that the half a million internal Pentagon and State Department documents that WikiLeaks put on the net "effectively exposed the empire's hypocrisy, indiscriminate violence and its use of torture, lies, bribery and crude tactics of intimidation." In one of the items released, a video from 2007, U.S. helicopter pilots over Baghdad can be seen, in Hedges' words, "nonchalantly gunning down Iraqi civilians, including children, and two Reuters journalists."[18]

Sick to the belly, I watched the video in 2010. By radio, the soldiers request and receive their base's permission to "engage". "Engagement" was their euphemism for shooting from the helicopter unarmed people on the ground who were no threat to them whatsoever.[19]

In *Unspeak* (2006), Steven Poole analyses how contemporary leaders use their influence over the media to promulgate a deliberately misleading language, "engineered to smuggle in their preferred point of view", while shutting down the possibilities for a counter-language able to frame objections to the pre-packaged policies of political, military or corporate rulers.[20] In *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* (2003), Don Watson exhorts citizens to pursue the politicians whose words are "suspicious".[21]

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[17] Chris Hedges, *The Death of Truth*. 6 May, 2013, Hedges' interview with Julian Assange is a joint project of Truthdig and *The Nation*: n. pag, accessed 14 May 2013, <http://www.truthdig.com/dig/irem/thedeathoftruth20130505/>.
[18] Hedges, *Death of Truth* n. pag.
[19] "There's One, Yeah: Video of 12 July 2007 Apache Helicopter Attack [Baghdad]," posted by WikiLeaks, 5 April 2010, accessed 30 June 2010, <www.collateralmurder.com>.
[20] Steven Poole, *Unspeak*, (London: Little Brown, 2006) 8.
[21] Don Watson, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language*, (Sydney: Random House, 2003) 118.

In his first-hand study, *The Language of the Third Reich: LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii* (1957), Victor Klemperer exposes the fundamental poverty and monotony of the language that Goebbels prescribed for the Nazi empire:[22]

> The sole purpose of the LTI [Language of the Third Reich] is to strip everyone of their individuality, to paralyse them as personalities, to make them into unthinking and docile cattle in a herd driven and hounded in a particular direction, to turn them into atoms in a huge rolling block of stone.[23]

I do not know whether Eugène Ionesco read Klemperer, but in Paris the following November, 1958, Ionesco gave what appears to be the first public reading of the final act of his new play, *Rhinoceros*.[24] Ionesco had created an original representation of the totalitarian trampling herd of "atoms in a huge rolling block of stone." As a metonym for fascism, the rhinoceros makes imaginatively visible the force that threatens Berenger and Daisy through its capture of self, personal desire and reason by a collective, heartless unreason.

Like Ionesco, Heiner Müller uses imagery to disrupt the codes that conquerors use to twist public language, myth and history into their own support systems. Müller's short monologue, *Landscape With Argonauts* (1983), is delivered by an unnamed figure who could represent the playwright himself, or could perhaps be Jason, the traveller and conqueror, whose ancient story Müller describes as "the earliest myth of colonization in Greek legend."[25] The play depicts the transformation of the myth of Jason into a history whose imperial expansion births the threat of its demise:

> Jason is slain by his boat … European history began with colonization … That the vehicle of colonization strikes the colonizer dead anticipates the end of it. That's the threat of the end we're facing, the 'end of growth.'[26]

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[22] Victor Klemperer, *The Language of the Third Reich : LTI, Lingua Tertii Imperii : A Philologist's Notebook*, 1957, trans. Martin Brady, (London: Athlone Press, 2000) 17-20.
[23] Klemperer, *Language of Third Reich*, 21.
[24] Ionesco, public reading, final act of *Rhinoceros*, Théâtre du Vieux Colombier, Paris, Nov. 1958. Source: Søren Olsen, "Eugène Ionesco's theatre play by play (with all the editions and performances I know of)," accessed 9 May 2007, <http://www.ionesco.org/rhinoceros.html>.
Eugene Ionesco, *Rhinoceros*, trans. Derek Prouse, *Penguin Plays: Rhinoceros; The Chairs; The Lesson*, 1959 (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1962). First prod. in English by BBC, trans. Derek Prowse, 1959, and in Paris, 1960.
[25] Heiner Müller, trans. Carl Weber, *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage by Heiner Müller*, ed. Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 124.
[26] Müller, *Hamletmachine* 124.

Landscape With Argonauts is scripted for a sole unnamed performer, but has not created the performer as representative of a single isolated self: “As in every landscape the I in this segment of the text is collective.” The depiction of the landscape is similarly ambiguous. Müller writes that the conquered landscape where it is Jason’s destiny to die might be “a dead star.”[27] Or, one imagines, that landscape might be one’s own ground at any moment to come. Like the identity of the performer, the space shifts between the one and the many, the close at hand and the far away.

With its robust, fractured, allusive and multi-layered imagery and elisions, Müller’s text exposes to shifts in interpretation the history, present and future of conquest and of responses to its horrors. The concentrated attention of the imagination is demanded if it is to follow the irony, poetry and juxtapositions of the spoken texts and the leaps and gaps between. The text gallops and cavorts and springs over obstacles as if the forces of the imagination are being invited to outrun death by bringing to view other possibilities – among them, language itself.

Mid-monologue, Müller’s images of the already deadly impact of “the war that is to happen tomorrow “morph into the bricolage of children, who are conjured for the mind of the audience as if they themselves (like the performer and the imagined children) are the creators of their own landscape designed from the detritus of death:

> [. . .]
> YET WHAT REMAINS IS CREATED BY BOMBS
> In the splendid matting of protein and tin
> The children lay out landscapes with trash
> [. . .] (original emphasis).[28]

By the very act of constructing their landscape – their stage for the imagination – the children perform the immediacy and the core of their own lives. The spoken text does not reveal their future for it slides instead, back through time perhaps, or to an uncertain future, to the source of children, light and life:

[27] Heiner Müller, “Author’s Note”, trans. Weber, *Hamletmachine* ed. Weber 126.
[28] Heiner Müller, *Landscape with Argonauts*, trans. Weber, *Hamletmachine* 134.

> A woman is a familiar ray of hope
> BETWEEN THE THIGHS
> DEATH STILL HAS HOPE
> [. . .] (original emphasis).[29]

Both the children's game of art (and heart) made from death, and the ray (the heat) of possibility between a woman's thighs offer alternative images to the cold aftermath of bombs. Müller writes:

> *Landscape with Argonauts* presumes the catastrophes which mankind is working toward. The theatre's contribution to their prevention can only be their representation.[30]

Landscape with Argonauts opens to view the gaps between the heroic project of conquest and its reality. A playwright's longing for the exposure of those gaps to counter the logic of power and prevent catastrophe is palpable. As a playwright writing this dissertation I have to confess to that putatively illogical longing. In Müller's script the gap between the desire for theatre to halt catastrophe and the recognition of that desire's implausibility finds dramatic expression in the gap between the abjected detritus of the once living ("the splendid matting of protein and tin") and the art of an imagined new unformed or unspoiled generation of children, who, like playwrights, may stage a game that renders death into life. The longing for transgressive power of theatre is present too in a concept of Müller's that if an idea can be transformed into an image, and the image is the right one, that image will explode in performance with transgressive and border-crossing force, a force that is revolutionary.[31] Müller's concept, as will be elaborated, is important for my analysis of how Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* each create transgressive landscapes that counter annihilation.

Like the work of Heiner Müller, Howard Barker's representations of the body pushed to extremes are a significant part of my research for an understanding of how my own play might represent the gap between desire and death. In his essay on Barker's

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[29] Heiner Müller, *Landscape with Argonauts*, trans. Weber, *Hamletmachine* 134.
[30] Heiner Müller, "Author's Note", trans. Weber, *Hamletmachine* ed. Weber 126.
[31] Heiner Müller, in Carl Weber, "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience," *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage by Heiner Müller*, ed. Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 14. For Müller's comment on the "revolutionary" consequence of "border-crossing" see a fuller version of Müller's text, in "*Deutschland spielt noch immer die Nibelungen: DDR-Dramatiker Heiner Müller über seine Theaterarbeit zwischen Ost und West* [Germany Still Plays the *Nibelungen*: Interview with GDR Playwright Heiner Müller, on his work for the theatre between East and West]," *Der Spiegel* 9 May 1983: 200. Personal translation.

Theatre of Catastrophe, Andy W. Smith elaborates on the bodily transformations that theatrical representation of catastrophe excites.[32] Through becoming the voice of Barker's "poetic text" the performer becomes "the *body-in-extremis*, opening up unstable worlds that are governed not by causality but by irrational actions and scenarios that force the actor *and* the watching spectator into the most extreme emotional states" (original emphasis).[33]

Because Barker ruptures "humanist platitudes (meaning / purpose / value)" and drives the staged action independently of the regularity and confinement of customary social discipline, the spectator receives "the catastrophic theatrical experience" as "the experiential act".[34] Smith makes a link with the power of "the amatory flash" that Julia Kristeva identifies in contemporary narrative from James Joyce to Georges Bataille.[35] That which had previously been unrepresentable and therefore invisible becomes imaginatively visible through what Smith calls, paraphrasing Kristeva, "the concentration of the abject and the sublime."[36]

Smith gives examples from Barker's work of the "rupturing of moral and social taboos", such as strictures against infanticide or sexual acts deemed to outrage propriety.[37] Writing in his autobiographical persona of Eduardo Houth, Howard Barker extols the "ecstasy" that is "unleashed" by the performance of contradiction. The actors who performed his play *Ego in Arcadia* in an ancient barn in Tuscany were "plunging from chagrin to self-pity, from whimsy to contempt, simultaneously ugly and beautiful, spiritual and coarse [. . .]."[38] Few saw this performance. Houth muses on "how this struck Barker as the authentic nature of great work, which flourishes as a secret, is witnessed as an accident and is extinguished as swiftly as it is seen…".[39]

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[32] Andy W. Smith, "'I Am Not What I Was': Adaptation and Transformation in the Theatre of Howard Barker and the Wrestling School," *Theatre of Catastrophe : New Essays on Howard Barker*, eds. Karoline Gritzner and David Ian Rabey (London: Oberon, 2006) 38-55.
[33] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 41.
[34] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 41.
[35] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 47-53.
[36] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 51-2. Smith cites J. Kristeva, "Bataille and the sun, or the guilty text," in *Tales of Love* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987), 112.
[37] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 52.
[38] Howard/Edward Houth Barker, *A Style and Its Origins*, (London: Oberon Books, 2007) 37-8.
[39] Barker/Houth, *Style and Its Origins* 38.

Those who do not want their theatre and its experience of the sublime to evaporate quite so readily, may face the abject reality that in the actual world of terror and war theatre – or public performance – exists not as a game, but as an all too real event where those in power create illusions that hide the true consequences of their actions. When U.S. President George W. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld were forging their strategy of shock and awe for their invasion of Iraq which was to begin on 19 March 2003, they drew inspiration from Washington's adoption a decade and a half earlier of advice given in Sun Tzu's two and a half millennia old military manual, *The Art of War*. Assessing for agencies of the United States Government the effectiveness of this strategy, Harlan Ullman reported, with approbation, that "the philosophy of Sun Tzu, shock and awe," had been used because, in Rumsfeld's words, "[it] was a way to get people to do what we wanted and stop doing things that we did not want— or to win the war without having to fight the battle."[40]

Four years after "shock and awe" displayed the invasion of Iraq to a dismayed world and with war still raging, the Sydney Theatre Company [STC] urged its subscribers to take advantage of an offer that would allow them to arrive in luxury when they came to the Wharf Theatre to see Stephen Jeffreys' new play, *The Art of War*:

*** OFFER ***

> As the Sponsor of the STC Actors Company, Audi is offering an extended test drive of any of the Audi vehicles, exclusive to STC subscribers. Imagine driving in style in an Audi TT to the Wharf to see the STC Actors Company in *The Art of War*.
>
> Simply call AUDI [phone number deleted] and mention the "STC subscriber extended test drive offer.[41]

The language of promotion alters the frame in which *The Art of War* is presented. The advertisement seems designed to appeal to the desire to be envied for the

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[40] Harlan K. Ullman, "Shock and Awe a Decade and a Half Later: Still Relevant, Still Misunderstood," *Prism*, Vol. 2.1. December, 2010, Washington: National Defence University (NDU) Press: 80-1, accessed 20 May 2013, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/shock-and-awe.html>. *Prism* describes itself as "a security studies journal chartered to inform members of U.S. Federal Agencies, allies, and other partners on complex and integrated national security operations [. . .]". See "Home Page," *Prism*. Washington: National Defence University (NDU) Press, accessed 20 May 2013, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/prism.html>.

[41] Sydney Theatre Company. Promotional website for *The Art of War* by Stephen Jeffreys, Wharf Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, 14 May, 2007), accessed 3 May 2007, <http://www.sydneytheatre.com.au/education/performance.asp?pid=199&typeid=5>.

accretion of wealth and good taste that allow possession of an object (the luxury car). Yet the big U.S. corporations' profits from oil, the generally used fuel for the car, have been cited by Carl Boggs as having risen substantially following the 2003 invasion of Iraq and the corporate penetration of its economy.[42] The Sydney Theatre Company's promotion of the car as a symbol for envy might shift an audience's attention away from the significance of any critique of war that the staging of Jeffrey's play might provoke.

As the playwright Jeffreys explains, *The Art of War* is not only about war itself, but about the tactics of war as a metaphor for activities in civilian / corporate life:

> [. . .] I've widened the focus by writing about the tactical manoeuvring (to use Sun Tzu's phrase) we employ in sexual and business relationships.[43]

Jeffreys does not specify who "we" are. It would perhaps be redundant to attempt a definition of "we", for the glossy programme gleams with young, glamorous and sexually-alluring white models, all but one of them women. Their images sell an intimacy of diamond-studded Swiss watches, investments banking opportunities and harbourside apartments. There is a picture of the Audi too. The shining car does not need a woman for company – its image is paused in a magical onanistic space of self-reverence. The caption reads:

> Perfection is the result of passion.
> On the stage and on the road.[44]

Jeffreys writes in programme notes that his play "seeks to combine post-modern techniques and contemporary themes", revives the use of the chorus, and uses multiple narratives to enact different approaches to the themes of strategy and deception.[45] The playwright uses these technique to create an entertaining play, but an analysis of the work has not been included in this research because its greater focus was on staging a witty work of art rather than on wringing war and terror to "the

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[42] Carl Boggs, *The Crimes of Empire: Rogue Superpower and World Domination*, (London: Pluto Press, 2010) 40-41. Boggs writes: "The year 2004 was Chevron's most profitable ever (at $13.3 billion) while Bechtel's gain reached a new high at $17.4 billion the same year." *Crimes of Empire* 41.
[43] Stephen Jeffreys, "Writer's Note," Programme, *The Art of War*, by Jeffreys, dir. Annabel Arden (Sydney: The Wharf Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, 19 May 2007).
[44] "Audi on Stage," advertisement, programme, *The Art of War*, by Stephen Jeffreys, dir. Annabel Arden (Sydney: The Wharf Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, 19 May 2007) n. pag.
[45] Jeffreys, "Writer's Note".

catastrophic theatrical experience" extolled by Barker.[46] Furthermore, together with the framing of the play in a theatre whose promotions extol luxury, the paucity of a catastrophic or overturning theatrical experience rendered, I would argue, the play's post-modern techniques effective enhancements of the play's entertainment while failing to engage the audience in the unleashing of emotions and of bodily experiences that might bring into question the safety and comfort of the Sydney Theatre Company's Wharf Theatre with its harbour views from the foyer and its alluring advertisements in its programmes.

Anne Ubersfeld writes that naturalistic theatre, which she calls "the theatre of illusion", is not an illusion at all, but "a perverse fulfilment of denial". In my understanding of the framing and content of the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *The Art of War* what was being denied was the recognition of war's horrors or of the contribution to war and terror made by the gap between the world's privileged few and those who live in great poverty. Ubersfeld argues that a theatre that uses its seductive pleasures to stage a reality whose attempt at the perfect mimesis of "the socio-economic reality of the spectator" forces the spectator into passivity, not only in the theatre where intervention in "the magic circle of the world on that stage" is unthinkable, but "in the real universe":[47]

> The spectator, having become a powerless voyeur, repeats in the theatre the role she or he plays or will play in real life; she or he contemplates without taking action, is implicated but not involved.[48]

Such a seduction, Ubersfeld writes, reduces theatre to "nothing more than a means of entertainment for the pleasure of the dominant class."[49] Heiner Müller is even more trenchant in his critique of a hierarchy of dominance and its turning of art itself into a gaol:

> As long as freedom is based on force, and the creation of art is based on privilege, works of art will tend to be prisons, and masterpieces the accomplices of power.[50]

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[46] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 41.
[47] Anne Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, trans. Frank Collins, Toronto Studies in Semiotics, eds. Patrick Debbèche and Paul Perron, (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1999) 25.
[48] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, 26.
[49] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, 4.
[50] Heiner Müller, in Sylvère Lotringer, "Terror Is the First Appearance of the New (About a Discussion on Postmodernism with Heiner Müller in New York)," in Müller, trans. Marc Silberman, *Germania*, ed. Lotringer (New York, N.Y.: Semiotext(e), 1990) 114-23. First published in *Theatre Heute* [Theatre Today], 3, 1979.

There is an allied difficulty for a theatre that seeks to find a language with which to break the twin traps of its own capture and the passivity induced in the spectator. The perpetrators of dominance themselves use terror and war as public acts of theatre which they play upon the bodies and places of their victims. Alfred McCoy writes of the Philippines, under the martial rule of President Marcos (1972-86), where torture methods from CIA integration manuals were used, "dumped for display" the tortured and murdered bodies of approximately 2,520 victims.[51]

Similarly, the United States' tactical manoeuvre of "shock and awe" had a wider purpose than merely winning the battle for Baghdad. The strategic analyst, Ullman, cited earlier, depicts the policy of state-inflicted violence as a mind-bending display:

> Shock and awe was about affecting, influencing, and controlling will and perception.[52]

The counter narratives researched by Carl Boggs, who describes the shock and awe campaign as having been "modeled on the Nazi *Blitzkrieg*", report the invasion as "a perfect case study in wanton violence against civilians, with indiscriminate death and destruction brought to densely populated urban centres."[53] The invasion's consequences, for which Boggs argues those guilty must be held responsible, included "atrocities, combat debacles, collapse of infrastructure, social breakdown, civil strife, [and] torture of detainees [. . .].[54]

This thesis is presented in four sections, which I call movements, for they play variations on the theme of theatre's poetic power to perform resistance to terror and war.

The first movement, designated *feroce e lacrimoso* [cruel and sad], is entitled "Re-membering the body politic in Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea*,[55] and Stephen

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[51] Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture : CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, The American Empire Project, 1st ed., (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2006) 76. McCoy cites Richard J. Kessler, *Rebellion and Repression in the Philippines* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989, 137.
[52] Ullman, "Shock and Awe", 80 (where the quoted text is featured) and 81 (where the sentence is set in its original context).
[53] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 60.
[54] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 60.
[55] Enoch, *Black Medea*, 2007. First perf. 2005.

Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt.*"[56] In each of the two Australian tragedies that are investigated here, the protagonist brings centre stage two contemporaneous and coextensive landscapes, her own landscape of the heart and the landscape of annihilation generated by the desire abjected by conquest. I argue that the explosion that results from the colliding landscapes of heart and annihilation has a much greater force in Enoch's play than in Sewell's where the playwright's imposition of the head, a guarded, cognitive force driven by political argument, wrests control of the drama from the wild, affective force of the heart.

The second movement is my original full length play, *Hurricane Eye: A Masque for the 21st Century*. The script is as yet untested by actors in a workshop, reading or performance. The action in *Hurricane Eye* is a contradictory one – *furioso e scherzando* [raging and playful] – for the play is a tragedy disrupted by comic masquerade. Performance treads the knife edge between pain and laughter for the Chorus of Waxworks in the Dungeon of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors, in the Republic of Stygia, performs the pain of war and terror as entertainment. Among those diversionary performances of horrors is the rehearsal of a "fake" waterboarding of Cassandra whose "real" torture is being enacted out of sight. In another scene the Chorus brings to the brink of ecstasy the President and the Crowd by performing the guillotining of Charlotte Corday. The President's interruption of the orgiastic decapitation so that he can seduce the beautiful Charlotte causes mayhem that the Riot Squad quell with the bravado of thugs in a comic book. In the play's climactic scene, War's banquet, the President sets loose the Chorus, transformed into the Dogs of War. They encircle the General, baying at him to eat, eat, eat his own children whom his brother the President has killed and cooked and served in a dish.

Running with fury through *Hurricane Eye* is a counter text which disrupts the Chorus' performance of a simulated horror designed for public pleasure and ecstatic, often sexualised, worship. The counter text makes visible the actual trauma and pain of terror and war. In that counter text, the "real" atrocities – torture by water-boarding, rape, mutilation and the killing of children – take place offstage, as in the ancient Greek tradition, while onstage the unseen trauma is made imaginatively present through dialogue, silence, subtext, song, dance and, of course, the performing body. At the height of the banquet scene, the fury of the abjected counter-text, which

[56] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt*, 2006. First perf. 2007.

Cassandra embodies and performs at the cost of her life, creates action that generates a wrestling match between the President and the General. The life-threatening intimacy of that physical encounter brings the two men to recognise in the other's eyes the harm each has done not only to the other but to the self. It is a recognition that Raymond Gaita names remorse.[57]

The third movement, "The Crafting of *Hurricane Eye*" is designated *appassionato* [impassioned] for it explores my own search for a form and language through which *Hurricane Eye* could perform the bringing of War to the recognition of the pain, passion and otherness it abjects from itself. The writing of this extended essay has proved invaluable for the crafting of the play. Throughout draft after uncertain draft, the critical thinking demanded by the essay generated imagery, action and dialogue that fed the developing script.

The fourth movement, "Subverting closure", is designated *finale sognando* [dreamlike conclusion] for it looks in the studied plays (Enoch's *Black Medea*, Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt* and my own raw script, *Hurricane Eye*) for images whose performance reveals terror and pleasure that the waking life denies. The search here is not for images that bring closure through the certainty of an idealised solution but for a performed experience that stirs our recognition of the pain caused by war and terror, and of the complexity and ambiguity of the negotiation between self and other that may bring healing.

Antonin Artaud writes:

> In the anguished, catastrophic times we live in, we feel an urgent need for theatre that is not overshadowed by events, but arouses deep echoes within us [. . .].[58]

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[57] Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil : An Absolute Conception*, 1991, 2nd. ed., (London: Routledge, 2004) 51.
[58] Antonin Artaud, "Theatre and Cruelty," trans. Victor Corti, *The Theatre and Its Double* (London: John Calder, 1977) 69.

First Movement:
Re-membering the body politic

– *feroce e lacrimoso* [cruel and sad] –

> The Classics allow us to think bigger than the everyday. The Classics allow us to curse.
>
> Wesley Enoch.[1]

> Postmen are paid to deliver messages, not playwrights.
>
> Stephen Sewell.[2]

> If you translate an idea into an image, either the image is the wrong one, or the idea explodes. I am more for the explosion.
>
> Heiner Müller.[3]

The staging of terror and resistance in two Australian plays of the new millennium is investigated here. *Black Medea*, by writer-director Wesley Enoch, is a radical re-imagining of Euripides' *Medea*, set in contemporary Australia and re-cast with Indigenous characters. Having first been produced at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2000, *Black Medea* was presented in a reworked version at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, in April 2005.[4] Stephen Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt*, which explores the personal response of an woman, Clarice, to Australia's participation in the war on

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[1] Wesley Enoch, "Director's Notes: Hell Hath No Fury," Programme, *Black Medea*, by Enoch after Euripides, dir. Enoch (Sydney: Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 13 April 2005) n. pag.

[2] 'Interview: Louis Nowra, Stephen Sewell and Neil Armfield talk to Jeremy Ridgman', *Australian Drama Studies*, 1:2, April 1983, 120. Cited in Peter Fitzpatrick, *Stephen Sewell : The Playwright as Revolutionary*, Currency Dramatists Series, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1991) 22, 152 note 28.

[3] Heiner Müller, cited in Carl Weber, "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience," *Hamletmachine and Other Texts for the Stage by Heiner Müller*, ed. Weber (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 14.

[4] *Black Medea*, by Wesley Enoch (after Euripides), dir. Enoch, perf. by Margaret Harvey, Aaron Pedersen and Justine Saunders, first perf. 13 April 2005, Commissioned and produced by Malthouse Theatre, presented by Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney. An earlier version of *Black Medea* was commissioned and produced by Sydney Theatre Company's Blueprints Program, 2000. The focus of this study is on the later version, which I saw on 16 April 2005. See Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*, *Contemporary Indigenous Plays* (Sydney: Currency Press, 2007) 55-81. See also Euripides, *Medea*, trans. Philip Vellacott, *Medea and Other Plays*, 431B.C., eds. Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Classics, 1963) 17-61.

Iraq, had its première in a production by Company B, at Belvoir Street Theatre, directed by Kate Gaul, in February 2007.[5]

Although the acts of terror represented in these plays have their own uniquely imagined sources and manifestations, it will be argued that in their performance texts and each playwright's ancillary writings, both *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* open for contemplation links between the terror that is staged and perceived fractures in the Australian body politic. In programme notes and in his performed text, Enoch makes clear that *Black Medea* has political sources as well as theatrical ones.[6] The domestic violence with which Jason terrorises Medea is fuelled by the loss of identity suffered by Indigenous communities. It is a suffering which is represented on stage as a legacy of a settler nation failing to make proper redress for the iniquities of its past which forcibly displaced the original inhabitants from their land, while, at the same time the inequities of the present continue to amplify that loss. In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* and in the playwright's programme notes the terror suffered by the protagonist Clarice is directly linked with official Australian policy which, in 2003 followed the United States of America into the war on Iraq as part of the then President George W. Bush's "war on terror".[7] In regard to both the discussed plays, the links between the terror the protagonist suffers and the depicted constructions of race, gender and place will be analysed with reference to the theoretical work of Joanne Tompkins, Helen Gilbert, Peggy Phelan, Mary-Rose Casey, Jill Dolan and Jennifer Rutherford.

In both *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* the protagonist defies the cruelties inflicted on her body – cruelties that appear to erupt from below the veneer of so-called Australian values. In *The Gauche Intruder*, Jennifer Rutherford argues that the fantasy of a "good Australia", one that lauds itself as "a multicultural and feminist

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[5] *The Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul, perf. by Lynette Curran and Hazen Shammas, first perf. 3 February 2007, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney. I saw the performance on 2 March 2007. Stephen Sewell, *The Gates of Egypt*, Unpublished Playscript, Adelaide, 23 December 2006. c/- Marquee Management Pty Ltd, The Gatehouse, Studio B, 188 Oxford St., Paddington, NSW, Australia, 2021. Ph: +61 2 9368 7477. Email: davidsheridan@marqueemgt.com.au

[6] Enoch, "Director's Notes: Hell Hath No Fury," n. pag.

[7] Stephen Sewell, "Writer's Note," Programme, *The Gates of Egypt*, by Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul (Sydney: Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 7 Feb. 2007) n. pag.

utopia", shields from national scrutiny "a sustained aggression to alterity both in the self and other", while denying the racism and sexism that are its actual practice:[8]

> Different laws, different voices, different fantasises do not have equal regulatory power in Australia, and the fantasy that they do only serves to perpetuate this fact. It does so in a way that is endemic to white Australia, via a fantasy of Australia as the site of a privileged and realised good.[9]

As Rutherford attests, the fantasy of Australian goodness is a powerful one. Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* each expose the violence, racism and sexism that the fantasy seeks to mask. In different contexts in each play, the protagonist reels from terror and racism played in violence upon her body. It is a terror that thrives in Australia in the gulf between privilege and lack. In each play, an aggressive whiteness and/or maleness assumes the right to the privilege of invasion, and the right to be affronted when the suppressed other acts counter to that perceived right. In *Black Medea* the trauma of white invasion is felt in the Indigenous bodies of both Medea and Jason, while the trauma of male domination is marked in Medea's vulnerability to assault from her husband. In *Gates of Egypt*, the vulnerability to pain is expressed through the white body of Clarice and also through the narrated experiences of her Egyptian kidnapper and torturer who blames his bewildered white captive for complicity in the suffering he shares with fellow Arabic-Moslem peoples in the Middle East as a result of a prolonged history of white western invasion and war.

In *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea* the actions of each protagonist express her complex desires, not only to love but to shape the ground she occupies into a place of love. Her actions stage a challenge to the fantasy of "a good Australia". With detailed evidence from the text of each play, it will be argued that when each protagonist is trapped within that fantasy of goodness she cannot feel at home because that fantasy rejects the love she generates and turns it back against her as abuse. When she responds with her heart-driven and apparently irrational actions, her antagonist intensifies his punishment of her.

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[8] Jennifer Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder : Freud, Lacan and the White Australian Fantasy*, (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne UP, 2000) 11.
[9] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 15.

Although Enoch's Medea, who breaks the death-trap of her husband's domestic violence by killing her son, appears remote from Sewell's Clarice, who begs her torturers to forgive *her* for her ignorance of their people's suffering, there is a connection between the two works: each of the male playwrights gifts explosive power to his female protagonist in her struggle against annihilation. By freeing her from the purportedly rational demands of the space in which she is confined, that gift of power allows her to act upon visceral intuition, affect, desire or uncanny spirit (which, for brevity is symbolised here as 'the heart'). That access to her affective power enables her to destabilise or unsettle the ostensibly ordered obedience that her antagonist demands of her.

As will be argued, however, *Gates of Egypt* is less consistent than *Black Medea* in the freedom it grants to its protagonist to shape the dramatic action in defiance of putative reason, logic, morality and understanding. Whereas in *Gates of Egypt* the protagonist's emotions must compete with the apparent need of the playwright to shape an idealised, ideological ending that returns the audience to the fantasy of a "good Australia" (Rutherford), in *Black Medea* the desire of the protagonist is untrammelled by external law. It is my argument that in *Gates of Egypt* there are times when the bodily and affective experience of the protagonist is elided or weakened, reducing her effectiveness as the instigator of the action and reducing the transgressive and explosive power of the play.

In both plays the punishments, which are meted out by the male antagonist against the female protagonist's body, are furious ones, but he presents his cruelty to her as a conviction that is warranted by his own supposedly reasonable response to her actions, a response that he grounds in various combinations of personal experience, history, race, gender, divinity, cartography, economy, or other self-satisfying truth. His truth denies her truth, a denial that he uses to his advantage as he subjects her to his vicious attacks. Her repudiation of his attacks makes visible, if only fleetingly, a shifting of power that makes her the new attacker. In the face of his greater physical prowess, she finds her own disparate way of marking him with her need. Medea's murder of her Child (*Black Medea*) and Clarice's verbal assaults on her torturer (*Gates of Egypt*) will be discussed further. The point being made here is that the shifting of power from the male torturer to the female tortured challenges perceptions of the greater security of the male body.

In *Unmarked*, where the encoding and performance of raced and gendered subjectivity is investigated, Peggy Phelan considers how the search for a representation to confirm one's own reality may be experienced as a suspension of the self between disappointment and hope, and how the bodies that give material form to that search between self and other are politically and materially marked:[10]

> For some bodies are always more secure than others. The institutionalized forces of misogyny, racism, and economic injustice (to rehearse just the short list) register real effects across different bodies. The means of propping up and recognizing the corpo-Real [i.e. the body's representation] are unequally distributed. So some bodies become *apparently* more valuable legally, psychically 'healthier,' aesthetically more appealing, and seemingly more Real than other bodies (original emphasis).[11]

In *Black Medea* and in *Gates of Egypt* the female protagonist responds (albeit in very different ways) to the violence inflicted upon her by valuing her heart (her body, emotions and spirit) and thereby allowing herself to perform the seemingly ungovernable or dangerous actions to which her heart drives her. In the context of her discussion of what happens in a pedagogical setting, as in one of performance, Phelan argues that an inescapable binary is always being brought into being between the self who makes and the self who looks:

> Communication cannot escape this binary. But it must continually be provoked out of its fixity: the static positions in the binary must be mobilized and made continually to disappear. In the performance of that disappearance, the interpretation of power changes.[12]

When Sewell's Clarice and Enoch's Medea each severally challenge their position as the one who is required to look on while the antagonist makes hell of her life, the action that each female character performs rocks the fixity that the antagonist would impose upon their roles in communication. Her actions mark a value in herself and her body that arrests the antagonist's denigration of her. It is violently imposed denigration and it uses a circular self-fulfilling logic that derives from the disparately valued markings that he places upon both their bodies. The setting for such a valuation, as the earlier passage quoted from Phelan makes clear, is "institutionalized" in the culture to which he assigns himself.

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[10] Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: the politics of performance*, (London: Routledge, 1993) 172.
[11] Phelan, *Unmarked* 173.
[12] Phelan, *Unmarked* 173.

In Euripides' *Medea*, both Medea and her husband Jason find themselves on dangerous ground, when her heart feels and acts upon a truth that his reason denies. The Nurse establishes that Medea makes an explosive retreat from the intellect to a visceral desire that menaces established order by its very existence, constructed as outside a prefigured Enlightenment:

> NURSE. Reason with her, she might be a rock or wave of the sea,
> For all she hears [. . .].
> [. . .]. She hates her sons:
> [. . .]. She is
> A frightening woman; no one who makes an enemy
> Of her will carry off an easy victory.[13]

Euripides' Jason presents to Medea an impeccably argued case that she allow herself to be offloaded in favour of a younger woman in possession of a suitable fortune earned through unimpeachable ancestry:

> JASON. Understand this:
> It's not for the sake of any woman that I have made
> This royal marriage, but, as I've already said,
> To ensure your future, and to give my children brothers
> Of royal blood, and build security for us all.[14]

Reason is presented by Jason as the maker of understanding, History and Future. The fury enacted by Euripides' Medea through her murder of her children reveals a shocking face of pain – a marking of her performing body – that Jason's well argued reason would metaphorically batter into compliance.

The word "perform" came into Middle English from the French *par* [through] and *fournir* [furnish].[15] In both *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* the protagonist comes from the periphery of the Australian nation's history to per-form, or furnish, an experience of trauma not able to be narrated in ordained myth or official history made glorious. In both plays the tragic death of a lone and humble protagonist performs an affective testimony. Within a poetic structure that upsets linear time, cartographer's space and rational order, Clarice in *Gates of Egypt* and Medea in *Black Medea* each per-form national History as disorder: the disorder that history makes of her life.

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[13] Euripides, trans. Vellacott, *Medea* 17 lines 27-28.
[14] Euripides, trans. Vellacott, *Medea* 34-5 lines 593-597.
[15] *OED*.

In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt,* the threatened obliteration of the self begins in a suburban Australian home where Clarice, a white widowed grandmother perceives that her life is not "real".[16] Her remedy for the vacuity she feels in Australia is to go elsewhere. At a time when the Middle East is being shattered by war and terrorism, she abandons her uncomprehending daughters and their derisive xenophobic husbands and sets out for Egypt, pressed by an inner need she has difficulty naming:

> CLARICE. I don't know what I hope's going to happen, [. . .] but I think I hope my life will become a little more real.
>
> [. . .].
>
> I'm on a kind of spiritual journey.[17]

In an ancient pharaoh's tomb in Egypt's desert Valley of the Kings, Clarice is taken prisoner by Moslem men who condemn her and her country for the West's 2003 invasion of Iraq and for Israeli government violence against Palestinians. Her pleas for forgiveness and her expressions of love fail to defuse her captors' hostility. Making her body their metonym for western aggression, they knock out one of her teeth, amputate a finger and prepare to rape her.[18]

Moments before Clarice is raped and murdered offstage, an onstage transfiguration heals her torn mind and heart and returns that healing to her home in Australia where a feather falls from the sky and is picked up by her daughter Leanne who recognises it as her mother's message of love.[19] The shock of her mother's capture having opened her eyes to the reality of her own life, Leanne is now ready to divorce her husband Ralph for his failure to comprehend her mother's kidnapping. In Leanne's appellation, the man is a "mental fucking dwarf".[20] Leanne's self-liberating reaction to her husband's vacuity could be read as a reinstatement of her mother's rebellion – a resurgence of a neglected feminist heart in a re-membered Australian body politic.

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[16] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4.
[17] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4-6.
[18] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 21-26, 66-67, 72-76, 83-84, 98-99, 108.
[19] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 108.
[20] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt*: 78-81.

In *Black Medea,* the turbulence and violence of Australia's history plays and re-plays through the bodies of Medea and her husband Jason.[21] Enoch's Medea is a woman from the desert who betrays her "Land",[22] law and community to follow her husband Jason, "a blackfella in a suit", to a paradoxically isolated existence on the much more densely settled coast.[23] Tormented by being unable to keep in employment in a white-dominated society where he feels himself unaccepted, Jason batters his wife, replicating his own boyhood suffering at the hands of his alcoholic father.[24] Like her Euripidean mentor, Enoch's Medea has three crucial attributes that fire her heart as she resists the egregious destruction of the love she held for her husband*:* the power to feel, the power to curse, and the power to change the trajectory of the action.[25]

There the resemblance with the ancient Medea ends. Euripides' Medea curses her unfaithful husband and confides to the Chorus that she kills the children she loves because "This is the way to deal Jason the deepest wound."[26] While the antipodean Medea is equally conflicted, equally passionate in her love for her Child, and similarly exultant in her vengeful cursing of Jason, her revenge contains within it a diametrically opposite action for she kills their beloved Child to stop him becoming his father and perpetuating the violence of despair.[27]

Enoch's Medea enacts an allegorical murder of the falsehood of the "goodness" with which her adopted whiteness has coloured and ruined her life and her husband's and now threatens to destroy her son. Under the pretence of a "good" white culture, Medea and her family suffer a betrayed past and a flayed present whose trajectory is a dismembered future. Medea's slaying of her boy reunites him with "the spirits of his Land."[28] In a complex integration of rescue and pain, Medea's action re-members heart, self, community and spirit. The Chorus voices for Medea the counter-morality

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[21] For a study of the legacy of settlement and the highly political nature of debate about its interpretation, see Robert Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash : On Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History*, ed. Manne (Melbourne: Black Inc., 2003) 1-13.
[22] For Enoch's first use of the capitalised "Land" in the script, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.
[23] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66.
[24] Enoch, *Black Medea* 62-64, 70.
[25] For Medea's cursing of Jason, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 80. For the ancient Medea's representation of herself as a curse on Jason and his house, "On your house too Fate sends me as a curse," see Euripides, *Medea* 35, lines 606-7.
[26] Euripides, *Medea* 42, line 815. For an expression of Medea's inner conflict see the apostrophe of love and horror that she addresses to her children, Euripides 48-49, lines 996-1045.
[27] Enoch, *Black Medea* 78-80.
[28] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.

of her action, the perpetual punishment to her heart and the pain that she vents in curses that will punish Jason even after her own death:

> CHORUS. [. . .].
>
> When my time comes watch for me
> For I have learnt to stone my heart,
> Learnt to put aside my joy
> For some other life.
>
> When my time comes I will wait for you
> In the secret place with all your fears
> And I shall scream, to shatter
> Any peace you have.[29]

In her review of *Black Medea*, which she experienced as "thrilling" and "unapologetically theatrical", Alison Croggon celebrates Enoch's "muscularly poetic text" for bringing back the ancient gods, which post-Enlightenment culture had subjected to "psychological domestication" by confining them to "subconscious desires." Recognising that "the sacred and the divine are as much part of the tragic experience as catastrophe," Enoch replaces Euripides' Cypris (Aphrodite) as the main mover of events and refigures the "chthonic energy" of the Greek legend as "the vengeful ancestral spirits of Central Australia." These spirits are also the land itself and like the Greek gods are "as potent, implacable and bloody as ever." That "literal potency," Croggon writes, "can resonate with even the most secular white."[30]

When Medea in Enoch's play and Clarice in Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* each appeal to the sacred, tragedy is not averted, but intensified. The appeal of the heart for help that cannot come makes the catastrophe more chilling, but the pain makes visible the failure of the morality of the existing order, exposing what Rutherford calls the "sustained aggression to alterity both in the self and other" that lurks beneath the "good Australia".[31] In hailing the antiphony of order that plays in Howard Barker's theatre, David Ian Rabey writes that when "marginalized" pain performs, it ruptures narratives of stability and morality:

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[29] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.
[30] Alison Croggon, rev. of Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*, dir. Enoch, perf. Margaret Harvey, Justine Saunders, Aaron Pedersen, Beckett Theatre @ The Malthouse, Melbourne, 12 May – 5 June 2005, *Theatre Notes*, 18 May 2005, <http://theatrenotes.blogspot.com.au/2005/05/black-medea.html.> accessed 22 January 2014. Note: I saw the same production in its Sydney season in April 2005.
[31] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 11.

> [. . .] Barker opposes History – the imposition of ideological and moral narrative form – with Anti-History – the disruptive fragmentation of this form by the testimony and performance of individual pain, a pain articulated by characters who are socially maginalized but capable of displacing the labellers and 'Historical Authorities" from centre stage; thereby these characters demonstrate the insecurity of all promised reconciliation and the instability of all order.[32]

Barker's characters, Rabey writes, "are frequently, if not always willingly or enviably, propelled into particularly stark forms of 'cultural embodiment'."[33] Such characters embody a quality Kristeva identifies as the Abject: "something rejected from which one does not part …what does not respect borders, positions, rules."[34] Paraphrasing Kristeva, Rabey argues that such a character brings to the stage "the embarrassing possibility" which "the symbolism of a dominant social system tries to exclude".[35]

Kristeva's concept of the "Abject" makes an apt label for the heart as the quality revulsed by and repulsed from the Australian body politic. The programme notes by Enoch for *Black Medea*, and by Sewell for *Gates of Egyp*t reveal that each writer's specific concerns about Australian culture intertwine with personal and political histories. These interconnections are significant for an understanding of the heart's action in both plays.

The central action of *Black Medea*, Enoch writes, is fed and impassioned by the playwright-director's lived experience:

> This is a personal journey for me – the death of Medea's child is the metaphoric death of the 'boy' I was and marks the moment in time that I chose to become the man I strive to be.[36]

Cognizant of the Australian political context, its detrimental impact upon Indigenous lives and the subversive power of theatre, Enoch chose a poetic form for *Black Medea*, rather than "playing out obviously biographical stories through naturalistic performance modes," a documentary form that has often been used in Indigenous theatre. Enoch links his use of the classic story and the "catharsis" with the

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[32] David Ian Rabey, "Raising Hell: An Introduction to Howard Barker's Theatre of Catastrophe," *Theatre of Catastrophe : New Essays on Howard Barker*, eds. Gritzner and Rabey (London: Oberon, 2006) 17-18.
[33] Rabey, "Raising Hell" 20.
[34] Rabey, "Raising Hell" 21. Rabey cites: Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, trans. L. S. Roudiez (NY, Columbia UP, 1982) 5. See Rabey 28, footnote 17.
[35] Rabey, "Raising Hell" 20, citing Kristeva, 8. See Rabey 28, footnote 13.
[36] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag.

imaginative possibilities of theatre "through which we can play out the tragedies of life rather than experience them in our everyday lives." Such a theatre, he argues, has the cathartic power to transport us to the depths of the hero's "heartache and struggle" and return us to the "real world", "transformed" by the experience.

In *Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre*, Maryrose Casey investigates Indigenous theatre's subversion of non-Indigenous writers depictions of the Indigenous character the authentic "noble savage", a tragedy and silent figure of victimhood who is rarely given any voice or agency and whose fate is likely to be rape or murder:[37]

> Australian literature expresses the colonialist gaze that renders the non-white person as a fixed identity, collectivised, no matter what interior differences exist among them.[38]

Using finely observed cultural and personal details, Enoch does not relegate Indigenous Australians to an aberrant periphery within a white culture that asserts itself as the measure of everything. Nor are his characters romanticised or simplified or called upon to create idealised portraits of rescue from the colonising literary and theatrical history that Casey discusses. Enoch's characters, all of whom are Indigenous Australians, are active in a non-fixed, dynamic and tremulous negotiation with their own self and with one another, community, culture and place:

> The story of an Aboriginal woman from the desert coming to the city and coping with seeing her love slip away is so potent for Indigenous Australians. I want to tackle the issue of domestic violence in our community. We don't talk about it often enough. I am interested in Medea's choice to kill her son to stop a cycle of violence in her home. She is striving to save her son from the destiny that seems to be his inheritance: a father who is grappling with identity issues, loss of cultural practices and alcoholism.[39]

Concerned that Indigenous communities do not talk often enough about domestic violence, Enoch offers a play where Medea speaks what could not be said. The performance is not presented as a romanticisation of Indigenous' relationships, but as a vigorous communication of a testimony to atrocity.

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[37] Casey, *Creating Frames* 83.
[38] Maryrose Casey, *Creating Frames: Contemporary Indigenous Theatre* (St Lucia, Qld.: University of Queensland, 2004) 83.
[39] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag.

The significance of rendering the experience of atrocity as performance rather than through “language, text and narrative” is posited by Carol Nordstrom in her study of the culture of terror warfare, *A Different Kind of War Story*, 1997. Nordstrom investigates how survivors of “front-line atrocities” in Mozambique narrate their experiences, and invites the reader to ponder what cannot be expressed through narrative: ”What do people’s narratives contain or delete that makes living in danger bearable?”[40] Nordstrom attests that “scholarly literature” has a “widespread tendency” to presuppose that it is their own primary foci, “language, text and narrative [,] that [. . .] constitute the core of communication and understanding.” Nordstrom might have been addressing herself to the power of theatre when she adds: “The ineffable events – non-discursive, nonverbal, and nontranscribable actions and behaviors – are difficult to render transparent in the way reproducible texts are. But they are equally communicative.”[41] Enoch has created a work where Medea’s performed silences and actions are as significant as her words.

Enoch has created many projects which use the power of affect to perform Indigenous experience of the legacy of Australia’s settlement by Europeans since 1788, a legacy which has prematurely ended, displaced or otherwise disrupted the lives of the original inhabitants, often without acknowledgment by those who mark their bodies in the colours of privilege.[42] *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, which Enoch co-wrote with Deborah Mailman and directed in its first production, Metro Arts Theatre, Brisbane, 13 September 1995, performs the grief of dislocation and its survival.[43] The performance of “shape, body, space, skin and emotion” warm a stage marked by the physical presence of a melting block of ice, while the spoken “language is full of avoidance, the words sometimes acting as a screen for turmoil.”[44] *Stolen*, by Jane Harrison, which reveals the pain caused by government policies of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families, was first performed at

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[40] Carolyn Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997) 22.
[41] Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* 22.
[42] The anthropologist W.E.H. Stanner argued that Australia had developed “a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale” and argued that “[w]e have been able for so long to disremember the aborigines that we are now hard put to keep them in mind even when we most want to do so.” W.E.H. Stanner, “The Great Australian Silence,” *After the Dreaming: The Boyer Lectures 1968*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 1969, 25, cited in Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 1.
[43] Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman, *The 7 Stages of Grieving*, (Brisbane: Playlab Press, 1996).
[44] Wesley Enoch, "Artistic Statement: *The 7 Stages of Grieving*," *Performing the Unnameable : An Anthology of Australian Performance Texts*, eds. Richard Allen and Karen Pearlman (Sydney: Currency Press in assoc. with *RealTime*, 1999) 26.

Belvoir Street Theatre in 2000, directed by Enoch.[45] *Stolen*, Enoch writes, performs "an accumulation of affecting experiences for an audience", a transmission of experience that "gives an emotional resonance to a political issue".[46]

In 2003, Enoch directed the Belvoir Street Theatre production of Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*, which exposes the trauma of the greatly disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous people in Australian gaols and their far too frequent deaths in custody. In his "Director's Note" for the programme, Enoch writes that Indigenous theatre offers people's traumatic history as a shared experience. The revelation of truth affirms survival while stripping away non-Indigenous Australia's false representation of that spirit as sentiment and myth:

> So much of our theatre when written by us is about documenting our survival through our extraordinary past and attempting to dispel the romantic notions of our spirituality. Hence it's the hard issues that get dealt with: stolen generations, deaths in custody, domestic hardship etc … as if somehow by sharing the story we are sharing the burden or even through the telling of a personal story a collective truth is expressed. I guess all good theatre has this at its core – universal themes told through the specifics of a character and life, but in Indigenous theatre we layer this with an authenticity, an historical truth that is inescapable.[47]

In his programme notes for *Black Medea*, Enoch makes a brief but unmistakable allusion to that still alive history of dispossession and suffering. It is "because of politics" that Medea's love for Jason "is overturned".[48]

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[45] *Stolen*, by Jane Harrison, dir. Wesley Enoch, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 19 April 2000. Enoch was Assoc. Director for the first production of Stolen, dir. Rachel Maza Long, Melbourne International Festival, Beckett Theatre, Southbank, Vic., 21 Oct 1998. For the published play, see Jane Harrison, *Stolen*, (Sydney: Currency Press, 1998, 2007).

[46] Wesley Enoch, Making History: Directing the First Production of *Stolen*, November 2006, *Stolen*, by Jane Harrison (Sydney: Currency Press, 2007) ix.

[47] Wesley Enoch, "Director's Note," *Conversations with the Dead*, by Richard J Frankland, dir. Wesley Enoch (Sydney: Company B Belvoir, 30 July 2003) n. pag. The original production, directed by the playwright, a 'Blak Inside' event, opened at CUB Malthouse, Southbank, VIC, 26 Feb 2002. For the published play see Richard J. Frankland, *Conversations with the Dead*, *Blak Inside : 6 Indigenous Plays from Victoria*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2002) 215-87. *Conversations with the Dead* was one of four Australian plays I examined in my Masters' thesis for their dramatic representations of the legacy of Australia's black and white history. See Alison Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History: Acts of Danger in Four Australian Plays of the Early 21st Century," Masters in English, Macquarie University, 2006, 17-23 and 156-78. For a distillation of this thesis, see Alison Lyssa, "Black and White: Australia's History Onstage in Four Plays of the New Millennium," *Australasian Drama Studies*. 48 (2006): 217-20.

[48] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag.

Although the scenario that brings suffering to the characters in *Gates of Egypt* may appear unrelated to that of *Black Medea*, there is a thematic link. In Sewell's play, as in Enoch's, the devastating consequences of the often unrecognised racism that pervades Australian culture play upon the bodies of both protagonist and antagonist. Like Enoch, Sewell uses programme notes to present impassioned concerns about Australian politics and to link those concerns with lived experience.[49] While Sewell's mother is a significant source of his creation of the character of Clarice, there are significant sources too in his own political experience of contemporary Australia. He describes living here as "a kind of ghost life [. . .] in a land where our reality has always been somewhat problematic." Citing Australia's official attitude to the 2003 invasion of Iraq as a disturbing symptom of the nation's disconnection from reality, Sewell excoriates the then Prime Minister, the conservative John Howard, for having "foisted" upon the Australian people a war that served the "self interest" of "our great and powerful friend" America". Howard, Sewell writes, not only counted as "nothing" the large number of Australians who opposed the war, but also disregarded the international of Kofi Annan, the former head of the United Nations, who declared the invasion "illegal".[50] In the character of Clarice and her opposition to the war, Sewell gives voice to the many white Australians who found the war abhorrent.

In "Notes on the War", in the *Gates of Egypt* programme, journalist and author Marian Wilkinson elaborates on Sewell's theme of a dangerous falsity at the heart of the nation's political life. Wilkinson contrasts the reality of Iraq, which at the time of her writing had been subjected to four years of war and was mired in civilian deaths, "sectarian violence", "corruption" and "chaos", with the speciousness of the Australian Government's argument that the 2003 invasion of Iraq was necessary because Saddam Hussein's regime possessed weapons of mass destruction. Prime Minister Howard's assertion that, were terrorists to obtain those weapons, this would "constitute a direct, undeniable and lethal threat to Australia and its people," is set against the proven reality that the weapons had never existed and that the war appeared to have increased rather than decreased the terrorist threat in Australia.[51]

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[49] Stephen Sewell, "Writer's Note," n. pag.
[50] Sewell, "Writer's Note" n. pag.
[51] Wilkinson, "Notes on Iraq" Programme, *The Gates of Egypt*, by Sewell (Sydney: Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 7 Feb. 2007) n. pag.

Gates of Egypt is set in an Australia caught in a flurry of national fear of terrorist attack. The play's scenario blends a political exposé and satire of that fear with a fictional journey to the Middle East embarked upon by the protagonist Clarice. Sewell writes in his programme notes that while "the starting point" for the play was the masquerade of Australian public life, epitomised by the war on Iraq, it was his mother's death in 2006 that prompted him to create Clarice who, like his mother, would not be "a political person", but would be imbued with her personal qualities:

> She [Sewell's mother] was a caring and compassionate person who could recognise injustice when she saw it, but her concerns remained with her family [. . .] and our large extended family. She was a loving person, but as she approached death, I began to recognise in her deeper features than I'd seen before. Her courage, her sense of personal dignity and valour, the deep wellsprings of her Irish ancestors to whom she saw her life returning, and it was in this context that I began to think about our present plight, this sense of phony unreality [*sic*] infecting everything, where we're not even sure anymore what we're supposed to be pale imitations of.[52]

Despite the above text of Sewell's sliding, in the breadth of a sentence, from a tender eulogy for a loved mother to his political lambasting of an infected Australian fatherland, it is my perception that the death of Sewell's mother created in *Gates of Egypt* a different register – a different experience in the theatre from the intense focus on political need that appears to drive much of Sewell's work. This question will be discussed further, but it is important to note here that Sewell weaves two disparate threads to create the character of Clarice – a sentient, loving mother, concerned for her family and for fairness and peace, but not interested in politics, and a fictional late-in-life adventurer who travels to Egypt, in search of "peace" at a time when her nation is engaged in a morally contentious armed conflict in the region, and tourists are being warned to avoid the area because of dangers from terrorists.[53] Although the two elements of Clarice's character prove an uneasy melding, the combination, at its best, offers an affecting portrait of a politically charged and personally felt torment. Clarice's heart, which cannot accept the "good" Australian fantasy that war on Iraq will ensure peace, brings a personal search for peace, love and connection from the margin to the centre.

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[52] Sewell, "Writer's Note" n. pag.
[53] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 2-3, 5.

Like Enoch, Sewell creates a work where the protagonist's heart sets out into a dangerous unknown without allegiance to a political creed, code of morality or theory of history. In *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt*, the freedom seized by the heart to transgress accepted moral order has kinship with Howard Barker's jubilation at theatre's power to perform the reprehensible. Barker relishes his "Theatre of Catastrophe," a term he coined for plays of his maturity that thrive on action that is "profoundly resistant to conventional morality."[54] Barker imagines the foundations of order rocked from beneath his audience: "the public doesn't quite know where to place its feet, there is an insecurity, but one which is simultaneously exhilarating."[55] It is an exhilaration that destabilises, heightens awareness and intensifies longing. Giving as an example the "shock and freedom" that the fall of the social system brings to Katrin in *The Europeans*, Barker describes his plays as "types of prayer, they demand something of a world which won't give it, but one does not cease praying … Isn't one anxious when one prays? Tragedy originates from these same sources."[56] Barker does not proffer theatre as a prayer of sentiment to be answered by the benevolent and comforting falsehood of a happy end to the human predicament. From his writings one might deduce that theatre construed as the tension of unanswerable prayer is theatre construed as a revered dance of instability where discovery is trespass. Barker writes:

> Great art lives outside the moral system, and its audience, consciously or unconsciously demands it, particularly in theatre whose very darkness is the condition of a secret past, the past of wilful infringement, of the suspension of conscience, between actor and audience.[57]

Against the daring of the actor who is "unafraid of tragedy", Barker sets the hostility with which the actor may be viewed by those in authority:

> He sins for the audience, living on the very fringes of morality. This is the reason the actor in historic periods was banned, even in death – from hallowed ground – he was the player of the forbidden action, the manifestation of forbidden life."[58]

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[54] "Howard Barker in Conversation," eds. Gritzner and Rabey, *Theatre of Catastrophe : New Essays on Howard Barker* (London: Oberon, 2006) 33.
[55] "Barker in Conversation," 34.
[56] "Barker in Conversation," 34.
[57] Howard Barker, *Arguments for a Theatre*, 3rd. (Manchester, Eng.: Manchester UP, 1997) 77. I cited aspects of Barker's arguments in Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 39-40.
[58] Barker, *Arguments* 77.

In Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, the freedom to act against established order, tragic in its outcome, allows the heart of the protagonist to commit outrage against putative morality while imagining a transfigured future, akin to prayer.

Where Barker writes of the nurture – the protection – that the black box of theatre gives to the "wild and tragic" imagination with "its criminality unfettered",[59] Enoch cites Medea's freedom to transgress as crucial to his interest in her as a subject for theatre: "What attracts me to Medea is that she is forced to go against every instinct one would expect from a mother: she kills her child."[60]

In contrast to Medea's unfettered deed, Clarice's trespass in *Gates of Egypt* is physically gentle, but nevertheless outrageous in its apostasy. She repudiates the familial, nationalistic and imperial beliefs with which her Australian world justifies vengeance against terrorists through war on Iraq. The shock of her kidnapping moves Clarice to repudiate her nation's belligerence, take upon herself the burden of the sins of the West, and plead with her torturers for forgiveness. Her action is a heretical reversal of the ethos of politics by punishment that has led to her capture.

In *Gates of Egypt*, as in *Black Medea*, the woman's heart rips the illusion that hers is a family of love, desire, connectedness, success and safety within a nation whose values are goodness, freedom and self-merited progress towards victory against an outsider who is classed as darkness.

[59] Barker, *Arguments* 78.
[60] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag.

Choice of plays: acts of haunting

The plays for this study chose themselves in heart-shocks felt during their performance. In 2007, watching Lynnette Curran play Clarice in Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt* at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney,[61] my body re-connected with heart-shocks I had felt in that same theatre two years earlier, watching Margaret Harvey as Medea in Enoch's *Black Medea*.[62] Shortly after seeing *Gates of Egypt*, and while vividly recalling my similar response to *Black Medea* I wrote in my journal:

> The protagonist moves my heart to uncensored sensations. Fear thumps as desire drives her to trespass. Love feasts on her face and body, lest the heart lose a moment of tremor as her actions become a hypnotic overturning of morality. Unsanctioned desire begs for her to commit her acts of transgression and survive.[63]

In watching Harvey's performance of Enoch's Medea (2005) and Curran's of Sewell's Clarice (2007) I was transfixed. Disruptive of my heart's usual quiescent rhythm, my unbidden shudders pushed my mind to bypass the years of cognitive training that seek to order the separation between self and other. It was as if the pounding of my heart transported me across the gap that separates a watching self from a performing other, so that I felt myself implicated in the action, with power to intervene and effect the outcome. It is a transitory moment, for the self is at once aware of the codes of behaviour that distance oneself from the performer, but cognisance stills neither the aroused body's absorption in the passion it is witnessing, nor the heart's urging for fulfilment. In watching the extremity to which the staged action pushed Medea in *Black Medea* and Clarice in *Gates of Egypt*, the desire that I experienced was for rescue. The heart's wild behaviour conflated rescue and love, for it was not only the performed character whose rescue I desired, but my own. I felt her travail as if it were mine, and her fear as if it were my responsibility.

In *Utopia in Performance*, Jill Dolan uses the term "utopian performatives" to describe transient moments – "small but profound" – where the performance lifts its audience

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[61] *Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul, perf. by Lynette Curran, Hazen Shammas and Anna Lise Phillips, first perf. 3 February 2007, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 2 March 2007.

[62] *Black Medea*, by Wesley Enoch (after Euripides), dir. Enoch, perf. by Margaret Harvey, Aaron Pedersen and Justine Saunders, first perf. 13 April 2005, commissioned and produced by Malthouse Theatre, presented by Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 16 April 2005.

[63] Alison Lyssa, personal notebook, 4 March 2007.

above the present and "into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking and intersubjectively intense."[64] While the ephemeral qualities of these performative moments mean that they resist a fixed solution, the fleeting experience that has been felt as if it were indeed lived, leaves the audience "seared by the promise of a present that gestures toward a better later." By offering experiences beyond the "material oppression and unequal power relations" of the present, such "utopian performatives" have the radical power to provoke "affective rehearsals for revolution":[65]

> The utopian performative's fleetingness leaves us melancholy yet cheered, because for however brief a moment, we felt something of what redemption might be like, of what humanism could really mean, of how powerful might be a world in which our commonalities would hail us over our differences.[66]

The particular qualities that "seared" me when I saw *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* were not only the risks to which the female protagonist was exposed but also the risks that each of these women took in challenging the power that assaulted her. I would suggest that Dolan's account of the intersubjective intensity of the performative experience could be extended to embrace not only the performance of redemption as a rehearsal for revolution, but of the risk that performance (and revolution) brings to the self and to one's own constructed vision of what ought to be.

Phelan gives weight to the risks inherent in communication across boundaries. Drawing on Freud's psychoanalytic theories of transference, Phelan describes the psychic crossing of the gap between self and other as "[t]he leap of the quantum" or "[t]he undocumentable performance" for the gap is anxiety-ridden. Like the ephemera of performance or of sub-atomic particles, Phelan argues, the self is perpetually shifting as each encounter with an other puts at risk the construction and measurement of one's own subjectivity:

> There is no apprehension of the body of the other without a corresponding (re)vision of one's own. These revisions constitute the energetic force of sexual/textual/commodity desire.[67]

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[64] Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Michigan: University of Michigan, 2005, 2008) 5.
[65] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* 7.
[66] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* 8.
[67] Phelan, *Unmarked* 171.

Howard Barker celebrates a radical exchange between performers and audience that puts the recognised order at risk. “Hypnotic” is Barker’s epithet for the attention of eye and ear that he desires his audience to fix on the action of his plays.[68] By creating work that “eradicates sympathy”, he seeks to counter the audience’s expectations that their response will be one of liberal humanist “understanding”. Rather, on a stage cleared of “morality”, in a theatre re-conceived “as a site of the ordeal”, Barker’s “Theatre of Catastrophe” elicits “a visceral, instinctive emotional energy”.[69]

The shocks to the heart – Barker’s “visceral, instinctive emotional energy” – that I felt at *Black Medea* haunted my experience of *Gates of Egypt*. I hesitate at the word “haunted” because, in her essay “Haunted Places,” Jane Goodall gives cogent argument that although a theatre building may be famously haunted by ghosts, it is a requirement of classical European theatre traditions that the stage be “evacuated”. The playing space is made “psychically sterile” and freed of any identity or ghost that would mark it as local, because the performers need an emptiness for their presence to fill.[70] Yet, for me, watching *Gates of Egypt* on that supposedly “evacuated” Belvoir Street stage, something in the performance of *Black Medea* interposed. That unnameable something affected my experience of *Gates of Egypt* and I needed to understand why. Goodall contrasts the western tradition, where an “empty” space endows the actor with “a spiritual authority” to take command, with traditions, such as those of Australian Indigenous dancers. Far from demanding a “sterile” site, their performance draws on traditions that take place outdoors, in “a zone that must be shared with other presences, whether ghostly or mortal, human or belonging to other organic forms.”[71] It is important to note that this discussion is not intended to proscribe performance by Indigenous dancers or imply that it must be “authentic” or always outdoors or frozen in past time. Enoch and the Indigenous cast performed in *Black Medea* a unique work that drew freely on Indigenous and Western traditions and contemporary experience.

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[68] "Howard Barker in Conversation” 33.
[69] Howard Barker / Edward Houth, *A Style and Its Origins*, (London: Oberon Books, 2007) 33.
[70] Jane Goodall, "Haunted Places," *Unstable Ground: Performance and the Politics of Place*, ed. Gay McAuley (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang S.A., 2007) 112-3.
[71] Goodall, "Haunted Places" 115.

The powerful "other presence" that Enoch brings onstage in *Black Medea* is the land of Medea and her people, personified in the spirit wind whose voice the Chorus represents and whose presence the characters feel. That presence of the land as a living force challenges Western conceptions of the stage as "empty space." There are parallels here with Indigenous challenges to the settlers' concept of *terra nullius* or "land belonging to no one". The settlers' representation of the land as unowned, unfenced and uncultivated allowed a possession that brought great power and wealth to the people who cast themselves and their occupation as legitimate.

Joanne Tompkins, drawing on Henry Reynolds, writes that from the mid-nineteenth century the retrospective land management policy of *terra nullius* aided squatters in their acquisition of vast lands whose indigenous occupants were "displaced, dispossessed, and killed under its authoritative sign."[72] The management of the land as *terra nullius* remained as policy until 1992 when the High Court's judgment in the Mabo Case gave a limited recognition to native title.[73] In that judgment, the members of the Australian judiciary used a sanctioned western institution, the court, to enact into law a revision of the colonialists' historically enforced perceptions that the land was unsettled prior to their arrival.

While the actors in *Black Medea* cannot perform legally enforceable acts, I would suggest that they, like the judges in the Mabo Case, use a revered western institution (not a court in this case, but a theatre) to represent a re-imagining of history that is also a re-imagining of land. Whether performed in a court or in the theatre, the acts of re-perceiving history and reinterpreting space bring anxiety to those whose preference is for a history and landscape that exclude otherness. Tompkins cites fear as a key source of the anxiety inherent in the discourse and history of *terra nullius* – "the fear that maybe the empty land was not as empty of other inhabitants as settlers wished to believe." It is a fear that encourages "'the will to forget'" unwanted aspects

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[72] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 25. Tompkins cities Henry Reynolds, "Frontier History after Mabo,' *Journal of Australian Studies*, 49: 4-11.

[73] In the Mabo case (1992) the High Court "rejected the idea that Australia was *terra nullius* ('land belonging to no one') at the time of European settlement," and "recognised the common law right of Indigenous peoples to land based on their continuing use and connection to land." "Social Justice and Human Rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples," 2003, Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, <http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/info_sheet.html> accessed 2 Nov. 2005. See also Manne, Introduction, *Whitewash*, 2-3. For an account of actions by non-Indigenous Australians who challenged the legal and moral blindness and the cruelty of the doctrine of *terra nullius*, see Henry Reynolds, *This Whispering in Our Hearts*, (St. Leonards, N.S.W.: Allen and Unwin, 1998).

of Australian history, including not only the massacres and dispossession suffered by the Indigenous people, but also their many contributions and acts of cooperation that were crucial to white survival and prosperity in the course of white exploration and settlement.[74]

As will be argued in the section called "Landscape of the heart", Enoch's Medea performs an engagement with her community's traditional landscape that her footprints, dreams, memories, passage and desire mark as alive with spirit. I am indebted here to Tompkins for her elaboration of Paul Carter's theory of "methexis", a fluid relationship with space, a concept he has developed from Aboriginal Australian perceptions and figurations of the land. A methektic relationship with land suggests an alternative to the linear approach which seeks to enclose and control space, and impose upon it a mimesis of the coloniser's home.[75]

In *Black Medea*, the enclosed and controlled space of her and her husband's suburban home mimics both the settlers' linear approach to the land and their attempts to confine and mine Medea's traditional Land (a word capitalised by Enoch in his script).[76] By bringing into her suburban space the methektic presence of her walked-upon Land, Medea reveals the absence and loss that the suburban space tries to hide. In concluding her study of how selected Australian plays offer "reinterpretation of history, spatiality, and subjectivity," Tompkins writes that the ability of theatre to perform "a particularly methektic intervention in culture and politics [. . .] has the potential to offer its audience substantially new visions of how they might inhabit their cultural landscape."[77]

In reflecting on how my vivid visceral memory of seeing *Black Medea* reverberated in my body and mind while I was watching *Gates of Egypt*, I wanted to explore the commonalities of these two very different works, and their power to make felt what Tompkins refers to as "the Freudian uncanny, the repressed alterity generating an anxiety that may be surprising and confronting."[78] Two questions grew. What was there in the structure, language and performance of *Black Medea* that created an

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[74] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 24.
[75] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 10-11. Tompkins cites Paul Carter*, The Lie of the Land*, (London: Faber, 1996, 2, 5, 357.
[76] For Enoch's first use of the capitalised "Land" in the script, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.
[77] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 165.
[78] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 46.

unsettling presence on that supposedly “empty” stage – a presence with the power to give the lie to *terra nullius* and its legacy of havoc? And, in defiance of the cultural tradition of a society proudly settled on an “empty stage” that is not supposed to be haunted, what was there in *Gates of Egypt* that called those other spirits back?

Goodall offers the intriguing hypothesis that western treasuring of an “empty space” for performance, a space freed of haunting, may presage a cultural hollowness:

> The suggestion I want to entertain is that the stage is a sterilising influence on performance because it is not a haunted place. There are no presences there to negotiate with. The actor can realise him or herself as a presence on stage too easily, so that a culture of false pretence is fostered.”[79]

Goodall’s insights make sense in the light of the perceptions of Rutherford that there is a strand of Australian culture that presents a fantasy of a “good Australia”. Clarice, in Sewell’s *Gates of Egypt*, like Medea in Enoch’s play, performs a challenge to “a culture of false pretence”. Like Goodall, I look for tendrils of work in Australian performance where a challenge to “false pretence” is alive and exploratory. As well as expounding work of Indigenous artists and their traditional connection with their sacred habitation of the land, Goodall draws attention to the “highly sensitised” and physical site-specific work of contemporary non-Indigenous performers, such as Mim Tanaka or Tess de Quincey who draw on – and depart from – traditions such as Japanese Butoh to create work that challenges the western pretence that the body may be severed from the environment without severe consequences.[80] Goodall writes that what non-Indigenous Australian performers can do “is develop forms of sensory awareness and physiological literacy that equip them to negotiate with the presences of the land.”[81] While appreciating the deep cultural and environmental significance of the performance work of which Goodall writes, my focus here is on the scripted, authored work and its potential to challenge pretence through the experience of its performance, despite the confines of a building designated a theatre.

My suggestion regarding the “haunting” (the visceral experience of otherness) I felt during *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* is that by letting the protagonist’s heart

[79] Goodall, "Haunted Places" 114.
[80] Goodall, "Haunted Places" 115-6, 118.
[81] Goodall, "Haunted Places" 117.

create the imagined ground upon which her action plays, each of these works has the power to transform the stage from the place of easy self-congratulation that Goodall names “a culture of false pretence” to a place of unease. Performers and spectators have to negotiate with the otherness of a transgressive heart and the imagery it manifests from beyond the boundaries of a moral, cognitive narrative.

Pause for a playful aside: perhaps the holy authorities were so fearful of the lingering presence of the actor-daemon, who, as Barker reminds us, “sins for the audience”, that they demanded that as soon as the caravan departed their town, the ground be swept clean of all traces of what might now be called “otherness”, thus giving rise to the traditional western insistence that the stage, like conquered ground, be declared empty space.

In Enoch’s *Black Medea* the shaking of the moral expectation of being on incontestably settled ground has the force of a psychic earthquake. In Sewell’s *Gates of Egypt* the tremor is not always sustained, but there are parallels. In each of these plays, on quaking ground, the riven heart of the protagonist performs a metaphoric dance into the depths of her tragic knowledge. In that dance the “unfettered” heart reclaims stage space and transforms it into its own hallowed / haunted ground, where it performs its journey of ambivalence, sin and otherness, through pain and dismemberment, to re-membering.

Un-mapping the earth; un-clocking time; awakening the heart

Howard Barker conceives a play as a wild scape of the imagination. To read Barker is to imagine theatre's black box as a paradox – a gift within whose apparent confinement the forbidden may be experienced. The walls disappear:

> The play is a landscape in which the audience is encouraged to wander without maps.[82]

In Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* the heart dares to undo the map of received morality, an act that *un-maps* the world. A map marks space as its possession. A map empties that space, except for the marks that it puts there. In the imaginations of Medea in *Black Medea* and Clarice in *Gates of Egypt,* space that has been marked as territory, space whose otherness has been turned into tribute, measured, enclosed, moralised and emptied of its right to itself, opens to a landscape of fullness and danger, seething with being. In each play the heart speaks through images, silences, motion, emotion, or, as Enoch puts it in his description of the staging of Deborah Mailman's performance of *7 Stages of Grieving*, the "skin".[83] The heart speaks where words cannot, or where words fail to communicate because they have learned too well to string their patterns according to the conqueror's marks on the map he makes of space, language, body and mind.

In Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz*, set in post-war Vienna, Professor Robert responds to the seemingly undying echoes of the holocaust the Nazi regime inflicted on Austria's Jewish population by chopping at words with a gutting knife, his speech a testimony to the power of theatre to notice what no-one can say:

> PROFESSOR ROBERT. What writers write
> is nothing compared to reality
> yes yes they do write that everything is awful
> that everything is rotten and corrupt
> that everything is catastrophic
> and everything is hopeless
> but whatever they write
> is nothing compared to reality
> reality is so bad
> it defies description
> no writer has ever described reality

[82] Barker, *Arguments* 83.
[83] Enoch, "Artistic Statement: *The 7 Stages of Grieving*" 26.

> as it really is
> that's the horror[84]

The speech is a tribute to the fire of Bernhard's language and the skill of his translator. Even transposed into English, the language frights us with the rhythm of the blade against the board. The words do not need to describe "reality" to shock the heart open.

In *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* the heart testifies to atrocity by summoning the ground upon which it performs its story. That ground has two antagonistic manifestations. One is an imposed landscape, confined in space and time, where the heart performs the horror of its suffering. The other is a co-temporal and co-extensive landscape of un-mapped earth where the heart performs its release from pain.

To trace with words the heart's performance in *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea* as it undoes the map that generates perpetual harm, a conceptual model was needed. Help came from a veteran of a riven body politic, German playwright Heiner Müller (1929-95). For much of his lifetime, Müller's nation was a synecdoche for a riven world, whose empires fought proxy wars in other people's places, while tilting their nuclear arsenals at the destruction of their own and everyone else's enlightenment.[85] As a small boy Müller witnessed his Social Democrat father taken from their home by the Nazis and as a youth saw the nation's wreckage from Hitler's war against enemies deemed to be within the Reich's boundaries as well as without. The Cold War hardened a new map of empires, confining Müller to walled citizenship of the German Democratic Republic.[86] Overcoming punitive censorship from Communist party authorities, Müller created a theatre for east and west that performs Germany's terror through a surreal, grotesque, comic, tragic, gory and poetic volcano of pain that erupts onstage from his own and his country's experience.[87]

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[84] Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz*, trans. Gitta Honegger, ed. Bradford Morrow, *Conjunctions*. 33 (1999): 375.

[85] For a perspective on the proxy wars fought by the U.S.A. during the Cold War, see Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 89-97.

[86] See Weber, "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience" 19-26. Weber reports Müller's recollection of his traumatised witness through the keyhole of his bedroom when the Nazis arrested his father in their own home. When his door opened and his father stood in the doorway flanked by Storm-troopers and calling to him to say goodbye, the boy could not reply and pretended to be asleep. Weber cites, "Interview with Müller," *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 198.

[87] Weber cites a line from a poem by Müller: "The terror I write about is of Germany." See Weber, "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience" 28. No name is given for the poem.

Müller's wordless *Medeaplay* brings the horror into the bridal chamber where sex and birth are conceived as acts of cruelty that can only inspire killing. Masked figures of death, female and male, strap and trap the masked figures of the bride and groom, until the man is reduced to moving on all fours and the woman pulls off her face and rips her child to pieces.[88]

Carl Weber describes how Müller's writing for theatre grew from early work, which the playwright tasked with the "transmission of knowledge", to work created from the desire "to make experiences possible."[89] There is a commonality here with Barker's and Enoch's concepts of theatre as a place that offers "experiences", and with Sewell's cry against the fixity of a didactic theatre: "Postmen are paid to deliver messages, not playwrights."[90]

In a border- and boundary-crossing interview given to the West German publication *Der Spiegel* in 1983, Müller ascribes to theatre a power that is, at once, imagination, experience, transgression and desire:

> If you translate an idea into an image, either the image is the wrong one, or the idea explodes. I am more for the explosion.[91] I believe that Genet articulated very precisely and correctly: the only thing a work of art can achieve is to create the desire for a different state of the world. And this desire is revolutionary.[92]

Dolan's theory of the powerful affective moments or "utopian performatives" which, as discussed earlier, are experienced by the audience as a rehearsal for revolution,[93] corroborates Müller's understanding of his own theatre practice. Müller does not define revolution as a violent overturning of the state, nor as an act of revenge, nor as redemption, nor as a millenarian promise of perfectible man, but as an experience, a crossing of boundaries:

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[88] Heiner Müller, *Medeaplay* (1974), trans. Weber, *Hamletmachine and other texts for the stage by Heiner Müller* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1984) 46-7.
[89] Weber "Introduction: The Pressure of Experience" 28.
[90] Fitzpatrick, *Stephen Sewell* 22.
[91] Müller, Interview, *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 200, cited in Weber, *Hamletmachine* 14.
[92] Müller, in "*Deutschland spielt noch immer die Nibelungen: DDR-Dramatiker Heiner Müller über seine Theaterarbeit zwischen Ost und West* [Germany Still Plays the *Nibelungen*: Interview with GDR Playwright Heiner Müller, on his work for the theatre between East and West]," *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 200. My attention was drawn to the interview by Weber, who quotes part of it in "Pressure of Experience," *Hamletmachine* 14.
[93] Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* 7.

> Revolution is border-crossing
> [*Revolution ist Grenzüberschreitung*]."[94]

Prescient words, given the fall of the Wall in 1989. That crossing of the boundary made visible the hell the East German dictatorship had erected around itself. As Anna Funder writes in her post-fall investigation of the East German secret police, *Stasiland*, the bordered world of the German Democratic Republic had become "a secret walled-in garden, a place lost in time." Rich with irony, Funder riffs on sensations stirred by a regime whose control over the contours of its world squeezed its citizens' perceptions into a cartoon of its own tortures:

> It wouldn't have surprised me if things had tasted different here – apples like pears, say, or wine like blood."[95]

Given empire's distortion of perception, Müller's and Genet's concepts of revolution appear as performances that free perception from the borders behind which a savagely "enlightened" state scores its own emptiness of heart into everything it touches: the performing bodies of its citizens, the earth that nourishes them, and the history that transposes their savaging into glory.

Genet reminds us that theatre not only undoes the map, it undoes time, offering us "a vertiginous liberation" from the limits imposed by the 'calendar coup' of the West – the naming of its own "theological time" as "historical time".[96] In Enoch's *Black Medea*, the Chorus (played in the 2005 production by a woman, the late Justine Saunders) presents herself and her fellow Indigenous performers as "the storytellers". Their authority comes not from official history but from a living time that jumps forwards and backwards while being communally created by the players, the audience and the imaginatively summoned voices of "this Land and the people who have gone before us."

Enoch's fluid use of time as distinct from the classical "unity of time" represents a radical transformation of the ancient theatre from which he took inspiration for his reworking of Medea's story. As Ubersfeld expounds, classical unity of time separates time from its lived, psychological experience:

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[94] Interview with Müller, *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 200. Personal translation.
[95] Anna Funder, *Stasiland*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2002) 5.
[96] Jean Genet, *Reflections on the Theatre, and Other Writings*, trans. Richard Seaver, (London: Faber, 1972) 64.

> Unity of time presents history not as a process, but as irreversible, unchangeable destiny. In a tragic text the historical solution is necessarily present from the beginning; it is never independent of the actions of humans. [. . .]. The rule of unity of time from classical dramatic art necessarily excludes the phenomenon of becoming.[97]

Enoch's text presents theatrical time as a plentiful, flowing exchange of a story created in the moment. When the Chorus confides in her audience it is as if she is drawing us closer to the fire, to stir our imagination and awaken our senses to action:

> CHORUS. G'day, you fellas. Tonight. . . we got to sing up this story for youse and we call upon the spirits of this Land and the people who have gone before us. We got to make it real but it doesn't mean it is real, we just got to think it is. You got to use your imagination now, bugger this TV shit, you got to work at it and listen.[98]

The story of Medea that unfolds on stage through recurrent time is told as a story of the audience's own personal time and personal history, embraced by the Chorus' address to the communal pronoun, "we".

> CHORUS. [. . .]. No one wants to say, 'The grog's got the stop, the violence has got to stop, what we do to this country has got to stop'. Like being a warrior means being angry. But maybe being a warrior means being strong, knowing right from wrong and doing something about it.
>
> But tonight you're witness, judge and jury… and we are the storytellers. It's one person's story but somehow it's about everyone. And this black woman she goes against everything that seems right… everything that seems proper… But that's what makes a story worth telling, doesn't it? So let's get on with it.[99]

The story and its connection with "everyone" affronts the official version of History that clings to what it defines as "proper". The Chorus performs a deeper morality, one that is able to know "right from wrong" through a judgment of the heart, not a court of ideological authority. Cast by the Chorus as "witness, judge and jury", the audience are compelled to pay attention. There is to be no lulling into passivity, no pretence that the story of domestic violence will remain "that story that gets whispered in the corner 'cause no one wants to come out with it and say, 'Things have got to

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[97] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 129.
[98] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65.
[99] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65.

change'."[100] Medea's story is "worth telling" because of its border-crossing power to defy the constraints of the "proper" and reveal the unspeakable.

In *Gates of Egypt*, Clarice's voyage to Egypt frees her from the order of time, place, morality and mortality. She enters territory marked by the Australian Government as off-limits to tourists because of the risk from the foreign "other", branded in government propaganda as a would-be terrorist, but she takes with her the power of the heart to disregard ordinary physical laws of distance, time and death. From Egypt Clarice talks directly to the physical presence of her daughter Leanne in Australia. Clarice's late husband Frank manifests from beyond the grave as a confidant with whom she tries to fathom the meaning of their life together and of the life she is now discovering in Egypt: a life of suffering – her own and that of others.

To trace the heart's journey in *Black Medea* and in *Gates of Egypt* as it wanders and wonders beyond History, Morality, Chronology and the Map, I follow Müller's notion of theatre as movement. In the beginning there is an idea that becomes an image. That image moves to an explosion that tears apart itself and the world that brings it pain, and thence to a yearning for a different being – a crossing of the border that separates self from perception, self from body, self from other. This journey of the heart in *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* is mapped in four idealised steps, although as befits an unmapped path against History, each step is not necessarily discreet, or in a settled chronological order.

In taking the first step, which I call the protagonist's *landscape of annihilation*, the heart generates an image of the emptied ground upon which it stands, a ground scourged of otherness, a ground that nails its death of feeling into the body of protagonist and antagonist alike. Recognition of this walled-in world of always threatened death is the protagonist's first step to the moment of knowing.

The second step – the counter-image – is the protagonist's *landscape of the heart*, a manifestation of an earth outside History, Time and Death where feeling finds unconstrained expression.

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[100] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65.

The third step is the metaphoric *explosion.* In its pursuit of protection from the terror it feels emanating from the un-walled world, the walled world generates a pain that causes the heart to detonate itself and its landscape of annihilation.

The final step is the border-crossing *question mark* of unfulfillable prayer in an un-mapped world.

Detour: weighing the heart in *The Gates of Egypt*

So that the steps by which Sewell's Clarice and Enoch's Medea each un-map the world can be traced and compared, a digression is needed to examine how Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* may be unwittingly constraining the heart by subordinating its action to a narrative purpose directed from the head. That constraint, it will be argued, lessens the explosive power of the heart.

Although, like Enoch, Sewell is a highly acclaimed and experienced theatre practitioner, the première of *Gates of Egypt* attracted a weaker critical response than did *Black Medea*. To date *Gates of Egypt* has garnered neither awards nor publication, despite the ongoing success of the great body of Sewell's work for the stage and other media.[101] In contrast, *Black Medea* has received critical praise, award nominations and publication.[102] The freedom given to the heart's action throughout *Black Medea* makes a powerful experience in the theatre. Where a comparable freedom is granted to the heart in *Gates of Egypt*, that play, too, creates a memorable experience. The critical examination of Sewell's structuring of the heart's journey in *Gates of Egypt* may contribute to an understanding of why that play has less resonance in the theatre than might have been expected.

In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* the protagonist's heart contends not only with the terrifying consequences of her challenge to the emptiness at the heart of her nation's stage, but with the apparent need of the playwright to present his audience with a

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[101] Stephen Sewell's plays "are widely and regularly performed, and have attracted numerous awards. Sewell has also written scripts for television and cinema, and has been writer-in-residence at several theatre companies and institutions. In 2008-2009 Sewell was Literary Fellow at the University of New South Wales. "Although *The Gates of Egypt* has not received awards, many of Sewell's works have been, including *Welcome the Bright World* which won Sewell his first AWGIE Awards, Stage Award in 1983 and *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America : A Drama in 30 Scenes*, which won an AWGIE in 2004 as well as the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, Play Award and, Victorian Premier's Literary Awards, Louis Esson Prize for Drama in the same year. <http://www.austlit.edu.au.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=ApJ> accessed 6 January 2012.

[102] Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea*, in its Company B production, 2005, was nominated for: Sydney Theatre Awards, Best Mainstage Production, 2005; and, Green Room Awards Association, Drama, Best Adaptation, 2005. "In 2002 Enoch was the recipient of the Cite International des Arts residency in Paris and in 2003 he was named Artistic Director of the Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Co-operative. He has also been Artistic Director of Kooemba Jdarra Indigenous Performing Arts Company, Associate Artist with the Queensland Theatre Company, director of the Indigenous component of the Opening Ceremony of the 2006 Commonwealth Games and Artistic Director at Company B, Belvoir St." *AustLit: The Australian Literature Resource*, <http://www.austlit.edu.au.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/run?ex=ShowAgent&agentId=A%2bFX> accessed 6 January 2012.

political argument and an idealised solution. As noted already, Clarice's character is an uneasy melding of personal and political strands. To clarify: when news reaches Australia of Clarice's kidnapping in Egypt, her daughter Leanne has a soliloquy which makes palpable shifts between the character's concern for the thread of her mother's life (the heart) and the playwright's explicit political purpose – to draw attention to and parody the national imperative to defeat terrorism promulgated by the Australian Government to justify their entry into the war on Iraq.

Leanne's soliloquy opens with her musing on her mother's resistance to official pressure to "believe in" the war on Iraq:

> LEANNE. [. . .] she wasn't going to let no Government hunt her into something she didn't believe in."[103]

The trajectory of the script then forces Leanne's character to set aside her feelings about her kidnapped mother's safety and put on instead the mask of a compliant citizen, who dismisses the pricks of her Christian conscience, all the better to swallow the Government's argument for sending Australian troops to the war:

> LEANNE. [. . .] *People shouldn't go to war*, she'd say – And of course she was right – No-one wants to go to war – Any Christian'd tell you that: but sometimes you've got to go to war, haven't you – Well, not you, but the soldiers – Have got to go to war to protect us from people attacking us – And I'm not saying they're – like – here, are they – No-one's attacking us exactly – We're the ones over there – but the white people – The Christian people – *are* being attacked and we don't want to give them the chance to do it to us here in Australia – that's right, isn't it – We don't want them blowing things up, killing people just because they're different, so we've got to nip them in the bud, where they are. Over there. In their own place. Well, that's what I believe, anyhow, and it's what the Government says [. . .] [original emphases].[104]

Leanne moulds the Government's public rationale for war into her personal moral necessity. Her speech, in the gasping rhythm of a hooked flounder exposed to the air, is well-crafted political satire. A well-informed audience could read in Leanne's ill-informed subservience to the Australian Government's hypocrisy and folly a parody of the Government's own servile relationship to the United States. The exposure of Leanne's dutiful character to ridicule for her ignorance and credulity has no dramatic

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[103] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 63.
[104] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 62-3.

consequences. Her monologue of belief in the honour of the government appears to have no dramatic purpose other than to be a foil to her absent mother's disbelief.

The next section of Leanne's speech requires her to remove the mask of loyal voter and grope instead for the unpatterned words of the heart as she tries to grasp the import of her mother's lack of belief in war and relate that to the anguish of her being held by kidnappers. A stage direction unequivocally signals the leap from the political world of the head to the personal one of the heart:

> *She begins to get emotional*.[105]

In a script where Sewell makes sparse use of stage directions, usually for judicious and minimal evocations of place or action and almost never for coaching of an actor in the interpretation of a line, the instruction "to get emotional" indicates an uncharacteristic lack of writerly trust in his scripted dialogue which would usually be expected to engage the actor's intuition and cognition in the performance of its subtext. Sewell's apparent need to point the actor to the heart of the speech suggests he knew only too well that the speech would require the actor to make a treacherous shift from one mode of being to another – from cognitively conceived political cartoon to affectively expressive being.[106]

Once freed from political imperatives, Leanne's speech resonates with fear for her mother's safety and admiration for the response of her heart to the world:

> LEANNE. [. . .] her heart was opened outward, yes, outward, and though I just said that, I'm not exactly sure what I mean, but she was looking for something – higher – yes, higher [. . .] she was trying to understand things that I didn't even think about, things about the world [. . .].[107]

While Clarice's heart and its defiance of terror initiates much of the action in *Gates of Egypt*, Sewell's crusade to give unambiguous political education to his audience trammels the power of the heart to perform itself. As evidence for this assertion, the scene where Clarice has a sexual experience that could be interpreted as rape will

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[105] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 63.
[106] This analysis is intended as commentary on Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* script and not on the actor, Anna Lise Phillips, who played Leanne superbly in the premier production. Phillips created an emotional cohesion for her character despite the centrifugal forces that I argue are discernible here in the script.
[107] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 63.

be subjected to forensic study.[108] First, however, it is important to set my assessment of the scene and its significance for the action of *Gates of Egypt* in the context of my responses to some of Sewell's other works.

The unanticipated heart-shocks that I felt when I saw *Gates of Egypt* in 2007 took me to a different territory from other Sewell plays I had seen in the quarter century since I had first encountered his work in the Nimrod production of *Traitors*, directed by Neil Armfield in 1980.[109] In his introduction to the publication of *Traitors*, Dan O'Neill used language surging with a revolutionary optimism in praise of the play's thematic and structural challenges to orthodoxy in its depiction of an increasingly totalitarian and self-punitive Communist Party in the Soviet Union of the 1920s. O'Neill gives Sewell rightful acclaim for his craft, which allows him "to break the Lukacsian mould" with its "heroic, classic form" and, by so doing, to "let loose the demons" who dare to doubt "the Party conceived as a monolithic mind and will".[110] O'Neill responds to Sewell's work with fervour, describing his plays as "studies of the political and spiritual terrain that presents itself to the activist mind, of the travail that awaits the committed soul, of the pain that almost overwhelms the radical sensibility unguarded by illusion or self-deception."[111]

If memory serves, and it may distort, the play pressed deeply upon me in 1980 and stirred my need for a better world. What one remembers, or thinks one remembers, becomes the play in one's mind. Sewell's characters are there still, as loud, flamboyant and passionate sinners against political orthodoxy. I felt the Stalinist political dogma exploding in their bodies as brutality and anarchy. Yet when I next saw a work of Sewell's, *Welcome the Bright World* (1982), I named an oddly different experience to myself.[112] The visceral was there – certainly! Characters in *Welcome the Bright World* talked (often at fever pitch) about feelings as well as ideas. Characters' passions drove them to extreme states – adultery, betrayal, murder –

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[108] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 33-36, sc. 10.
[109] *Traitors*, by Stephen Sewell, first perf. 26 April 1979, dir. Kerry Dwyer, Australian Performing Group, Pram Factory Theatre, Melbourne. 20 February 1980, dir. Neil Armfield, Nimrod Theatre, Sydney. Stephen Sewell, *Traitors*, (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative Limited with Nimrod Theatre Press, 1983).
[110] Dan O'Neill, Introduction, *Traitors*, by Stephen Sewell (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative Limited with Nimrod Theatre Press, 1983) 13.
[111] O'Neill, Introduction 18.
[112] *Welcome the Bright World*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Neil Armfield, first perf. 27 January 1982, Nimrod Theatre, Sydney. Stephen Sewell, *Welcome the Bright World*, (Sydney: Alternative Publishing Co-operative : Nimrod Theatre Press, 1983).

with dire consequences for themselves and others. My response was personal and probably unarguable. but I felt that the heart of the characters, though ripped and flagellated, remained the servant of the head in the search for truth.

A generous ongoing Sewell feast followed, including such recent works as *The United States of Nothing*,[113] and *It Just Stopped*.[114] Each new play served me the accustomed adrenalin, spiced with squirming at horror, cruelty and pain, while being lifted from despair by an optimism that here was understanding – here was exposure of the social, cultural, political, economical, historical, factional and familial arrangements that perpetuate trauma. In Sewell's revelations of those connections, there was hope indeed – if only the world would take notice of theatre as a medium of message. Yet something had changed for me since my experience of *Traitors*. The performing body seemed to have escaped from its body and become trapped in rational, cognitive space where it was the task of enlightenment to fix the outcome.

In his 1991 study, *Stephen Sewell: The Playwright as Revolutionary*, Peter Fitzpatrick reports that Sewell "sometimes talked of his kind of theatre as offering 'a roller-coaster ride on razor-blades'."[115] Until I saw *The Gates of Egypt*, each new play of Sewell's reinforced my experience of his work as the butting of a brilliant head against injustice, a head that while it gave the spectator a heart-thumping roller-coaster of fear and hope was somehow disengaged from the body. The disengagement of the heart that I was sensing in Sewell's work is perhaps corroborated by John McCallum's description of Sewell as having reacted to "the Catholicism of his working-class family background" by embracing Marxism and "the rational, scientific view of the world that he found at university."[116]

The struggle I perceived in Sewell's plays between the heart, expressive of passion, chaos, anarchy and nihilism, and the head, possessed of rationalism, Enlightenment, Marxism, and order – with liberty the precarious prize of both camps – would be

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[113] *United States of Nothing*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Sewell, first perf. 10 January 2006, SBW Stables Theatre, Sydney.
[114] *It Just Stopped*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Neil Armfield, first perf. 5 April 2006, Malthouse Theatre and Company B Belvoir, Malthouse Theatre, Melbourne, and 4 October 2006, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney. Stephen Sewell, *It Just Stopped [and] Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America: A Drama in 30 Scenes : Two Plays*, (Strawberry Hills, New South Wales: Currency Press, 2007).
[115] Fitzpatrick, Stephen Sewell 143.
[116] John McCallum, "Stephen Sewell," *Companion to Theatre in Australia*, eds. Philip Parsons and Victoria Chance (Sydney: Currency, 1995) 520.

worthy of a thesis of its own, but is beyond the scope of the current investigation. Here, I am only able to give an impression of that struggle in so far as it is relevant to my perception that in *Gates of Egypt* there is a shift in Sewell's writing that accords intense power to his protagonist to perform according to subjective desire whereas in previous work of his it was my perception that it was not desire but a cognitive political purpose that was the major structuring principle of his work. Sewell makes it clear in his programme notes that he created the character of Clarice in response to his mother's death.[117]

Sewell's writing for theatre both exposes and conceals, perhaps unconsciously, the confusions and contradictions of a search for liberty, a value claimed in different guises by both the sensate heart and the rational head. As a quality of the heart, liberty is feminised in *Gates of Egypt*, where Clarice expresses freedom as the action of the compassionate mother who breaks the rules. There is an outstanding example of the cognitive head as it fights to its death in defense of its liberty, engendered as masculine, in Sewell's brilliant and widely acclaimed critique of American society and politics, *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America*, 2003.[118] The play's tragic hero is the articulate, free thinking Talbot, who argues his case against the War on Terror that U.S. President George W. Bush has instigated in response to the terror attacks of September 11, 2001.

Sewell's work creates a dramatic action where heroic liberty, which behaves as the revered conception of the head, struggles to connect with its own longed-for Dionysiac liberty of the heart. Triumphant at having freed its crowning alliance of reason, mind and science from the scoriae of body, instinct and spirit, the enlightened brain struggles against its perception that were it to set loose the liberty of heart, belly and loins, the resulting unlicensed freedom could only lead to the kind of chaos, that fascism lurks ready to gazump, whether it be a fascism of the left, as demonstrated in Sewell's *Traitors*, or a terror of the right, as depicted in his *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster*.

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[117] See Sewell, "Writer's Note" n. pag.
[118] Stephen Sewell, *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster in Nazi Germany and Contemporary America: A Drama in Thirty Scenes*, (Sydney: Currency Press in assn. with Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, 2003) 91.

In 2003, with *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster* soon to open in Adelaide, Sewell's critique of the Australian Government's participation in the USA-led Coalition of the Willing to invade Iraq was published in *HQ*, among the magazine's shiny advertisements for designer garments, beer and holiday resorts:

> We are the dead, deceived into imagining we are as one with our killers. Here in this room look at the blood-spattered walls. [. . .] See the butchers grunting and huffing, their gaze flickering over each of us as they seek their next victim. [. . .] and all the while we natter on, [. . .] thinking that if we say such and such and if we vote that way next, it will all change, [. . .] the pigs with the meat cleavers will get back into their sties and we'll all be safe again.[119]

The ferocious and irrational fascism, Sewell describes, with its ability to harness a population fed on propaganda and made vulnerable by fear, war or economic insecurity, is given form in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster* as the anonymous Man. He is the nemesis of the hero Talbot and a metonym for the popularly supported, draconian and prevaricating empire of the United States of America.

In *Gates of Egypt*, fascism takes the form of a two-headed, mutually-snapping monster, whose heads are governed not by enlightenment but by viscera. One of those heads, the western one, which spouts populist sexism and anti-Moslem jingoism, is embodied in Clarice's son-in-law, Ralph, a metonym for the Australian Government and its allies in Coalition of the Willing. The other head, the eastern one, is embodied in Abu Abbas who captures and tortures Clarice and subjects her to diatribes that are a complex and even contradictory combination of anti-Semitic Islamic fundamentalism, vengeance against westerners and appeals for compassion for his fellows Muslims whose lives are taken by western interventions in the Middle East. Neither of these passion-ravaged heads can let go of its war to the death with the other. Nor can either let go of snapping at Clarice.

The inarticulate pilgrimage for peace embarked upon by Clarice, who enters unknown territory driven by the desire rather than rational intent, struck me as a radical departure for Sewell from the intellectual charge to defeat fascism that Talbot, the epitome of a thinking, knowing self, undertakes in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster*.[120] In a world where reason and feeling are depicted as irreconcilable

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[119] Stephen Sewell, "We Are the Dead," *HQ*, May-June 2003: 38.
[120] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 91.

enemies, Talbot, an Australian academic working in the USA, is confronted by the daemonic Man who embodies an irrational neo-conservative state whose acts of terror and war mock its mission to export democracy to the world. Whether myth, figment of the imagination, secret agent of the state, or credentialed torturer, Man has protean powers of invasion. He subjects Talbot to Kafkaesque horror for having suggested to his students and his colleagues that their university and their country are using the fear of terrorism to hide their violations of human rights and of the rule of law. A vociferous opponent of the Enlightenment, Man denounces Reason for having overthrown the divine right of kings, undermined religion, ruined social cohesion and fomented revolutions, wars, concentration camps and Pol Pot's Killing Fields. Talbot retaliates as the rational conscience of America – and by extension the world. He extols Reason as the source of justice – a humanist bulwark against the fear and destruction wreaked by "the dumb animal desire to lash out and hurt."[121]

In *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster*, the opposition that Sewell creates between feeling, depicted as the dumb manipulable passion of the mob embarking on murderous rampage in support of tyranny, and the enlightenment project, where reason and morality are in perfectible alignment, the affective and the cognitive qualities of humanity are rendered mutually exclusive antagonists. In *Gates of Egypt*, where a significant aspect of Sewell's project was to give life to the heart of an old, loved woman with the qualities of his late mother, the binary oppositions of head and heart find themselves blurring. The mother, to whom Sewell gives the name "Clarice" (endowing her with clear eyes, clear sight), creates the landscape of a different enlightenment from that of Talbot in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster*. Where Talbot in his final speech before his murder emphasises secular Reason as the pointer to "the path to justice and survival",[122] Clarice in her last words claims the enlightenment of testimony to feeling, in a text that the author capitalises:

> CLARICE.
> PLEASE GOD GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO LOVE [original emphasis]![123]

Yet – and this reservation is a large one – in their fight against fascism there is a commonality of feeling between Talbot in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster* and

[121] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 89.
[122] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 91.
[123] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 111.

Clarice in *Gates of Egypt* that gives the lie to my argument that Sewell makes an unchanging opposition between reason and feeling. Both Talbot and Clarice profess a Christ-like love for humanity, even in the teeth of torture and certain death. In *Gates of Egypt* the war on terror in Iraq is played out in Clarice's one-woman campaign to bring love to Arabia. For Talbot the imminence of violent death jolts his bout with the unforgiving Man from an opposition between argued reason and rampant brutality to a contest between the emotions of hatred and love. In that final bout, the humanity of Talbot whose own emotions swirl between anger and love, faces anti-humanity, enacted by Man as the refusal of love.

Insisting, in the face of death, on a common humanity, Talbot ceases to decry ungoverned feelings as the primary source of dumb brutality. Instead Talbot acknowledges his connection with his tormentor, by naming the shared experience of the emotions of fear and hope, anger and love, positing that "We are the same." He confesses that he too has felt the brutality for which Man stands condemned: "that dumb animal desire to hurt." Talbot prophesises that his own death will not stop the death of Man, nor the death of the prison system that Man is building, nor the struggle of human beings with their own conflicted feelings in their effort "to find some truth and dignity in this world."[124]

Three times Man tests Talbot's humanism by asking if he loves him, and three times, despite Man's retaliatory and painful thumping, Talbot's steadfast reply is "Yes."[125] Talbot's admission proves him a more loyal disciple of love than the biblical Peter who thrice refuses to acknowledge that he knows Jesus lest he too be captured by Roman soldiers.[126] Peter's response is an earthly, human one, that acknowledges fear. Talbot's performance of infallible love, even under escalating physical duress, construes his love for his torturer as contingent not upon human emotion, nor upon Faith in a divine entity, nor upon the Faith of his torturer in a deified (daemonic) America, but upon a love that Talbot sources in Reason itself, as if Love were an artefact of the will.

It is Reason to which Talbot returns in his peroration, whose language has the oddly remote yet lilting cadences of a lecture to his students. Allying himself with his

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[124] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 89
[125] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 89-90.
[126] *Luke* 22.54-62.

audience whom he addresses as “we”, Talbot praises Reason as the guide “to justice and survival”, that will carry humanity beyond “brutal injustice” and beyond the crippling fear of the opponents of Reason. The “we” of the audience are not exonerated:

> TALBOT. [. . .] for all our pretence at honour, grace and beauty, we are broken monsters plundering the earth [. . .].[127]

Mid-speech, with barely time for a breath, his mode of address changes and he decries his audience in the second person, as “you mental dwarfs with your sticks and your burning crosses and your hate”. Accusing his listeners of being “morons quoting literature without understanding it”, and of indulging in “guns” and “madness” and “tantrums”, he offers the rescue of Reason:

> TALBOT. [. . .]. But Reason still stands unsullied, and Reason will be there in a thousand years time when this new dark age will itself be no more than a footnote in history [. . .].[128]

Love is omitted from Talbot’s closing vision of Reason’s millennial triumph. I leave the theatre in awe of the playwright’s intellect and wincing from having witnessed the blows with which Man and his cohort batter Talbot for his dissent from their fascist Faith in America. But, I am puzzled by the sleight of hand that dispatches Love from the pulpit of Reason, even though Love appeared earlier as Reason’s apotheosis. Why does Sewell’s hero demonstrate three times the power of Love against the onslaught of terror, only to snatch Love out of public sight again because Reason must command the lectern. Does the thousand year plan allow no co-habitation of heart and head, no negotiation of one with the other?

Reversing Talbot’s concluding priorities in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster*, Clarice, in *Gates of Egypt,* makes her final apostrophe to God, pleading, as quoted above, for the strength to “LOVE”. Her cry eclipses Reason, which vanishes from a stage now in the possession of a mystical faith.[129] It would seem that the death of a parent, which “revolutionized” Freud’s soul, did indeed have a similarly overturning effect on Sewell’s creative and affective self.

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[127] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 91
[128] Sewell, Myth, *Propaganda and Disaster* 91.
[129] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 111.

By describing, however cursorily, how the affective and the cognitive are not accorded the same design or weight in *Myth, Propaganda and Disaster* as they are in *Gates of Egypt*, I have endeavoured to give a context to my perception that the primacy given to the heart in *Gates of Egypt* is a radical departure from Sewell's other work.

It is my contention that Sewell's protagonist in *Gates of Egypt* is denied the full power of the heart's rage. Clarice must contend not only the emptiness at the heart of her nation's stage and with the terrifying consequences of her trip to Egypt, but with the apparent need of the playwright to present his political message. To demonstrate how Sewell guides Clarice's heart to deliver a political message rather than allowing her experience – her feeling – to exist uncensored, in the way that Medea's feelings are given freedom in Enoch's *Black Medea*, I will, as mooted earlier, explore in detail the scene in *Gates of Egypt* where "The Cairo Souk" is the setting for the action that I interpret as the first rape of Clarice.[130] The second rape of Clarice which occurs at the end of the play, is a deadly one for her and will be discussed later in the section, "Landscape of annihilation".

In my reading of the first rape scene, the action veers between a structure responsive to Clarice's desire and one where the politically-driven head of the playwright usurps control. Such a control would appear to give the lie to Sewell's epigram, "Postmen are paid to deliver messages, not playwrights."[131] Alas, the pith of that statement is the political writer's dilemma: where is the credible metaphor able to deliver the message without the need to seal it with a glaring authorial stamp?

Freud kept a metaphor on his desk. As Janine Burke points out in *The Gods of Freud: Sigmund Freud's art collection*, Freud stood a bronze head of Osiris (1075-716 B.C.) in a prominent position on his desk. The scene is recorded in a 1914 etching by Max Pollak.[132] As Burke reminds us, "Osiris' most important role was to supervise the Weighing of the Heart."[133] Kate Gaul, who directed *Gates of Egypt*, describes in her programme notes the significance of the ceremony over which Osiris presided as judge:

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[130] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 33-36, sc. 10.
[131] Sewell, cited in Peter Fitzpatrick, *Stephen Sewell* 22.
[132] Janine Burke, *The Gods of Freud: Sigmund Freud's Art Collection*, (Sydney: Knopf, 2006) 226
[133] Burke, *The Gods of Freud* 231.

> The heart of the deceased, regarded as the seat of the intellect and emotions, was placed by Anubis on one of the pans of the scales. A feather, symbol of the goddess of truth and justice, was placed in the other pan. If the heart was balanced equally by the feather, the deceased was declared free from sin and was free to pass into the blessed afterlife.[134]

Those whose weighed hearts revealed the "purity of the soul" of those who had not committed any serious offences were promised "blessedness", while the hearts and bodies of those found guilty were thrown to a beast to be devoured and their soul condemned to "eternal negation."[135]

As seen by the clear eyes of the ancient Egyptians, the heart is a metaphor for the interconnectedness of the intellect and the emotions. So inseparable are thought and feeling that the weight of the heart after death determines whether the intellect and the emotions *in concert* merit bliss or oblivion. It is a metaphor that struggles to hold itself at the core of *Gates of Egypt.*

What happens to the heart when Clarice is raped in Cairo?[136] The ease with which the event and its consequences vanish from the script is strikingly odd. It is as if Clarice's heart is cut from empathy with her own body. Rather than appearing to affect Clarice's heart in its journey to knowing itself, the rape is presented as a transient dis-ease. Because the scene disrupts the connection between bodily experience and consequence, the heart becomes impossibly dis-embodied in its project to discover a life that is "a little more real."[137] With the thread between body and response snapped, Clarice's earlier declarations of her desire to follow her own destiny in Egypt and her later avowals of empathy for her kidnappers seem mere declarations, acts of cognitive control rather than whole-of-self experiences able to replenish the soul that had sought escape from the emptiness she felt in Australia.

The event I am calling rape takes place offstage and is reported by Clarice with the audience as her confidant, but she does not name what happened as rape.[138] She variously represents it as non-consensual sex ("he held me down")[139] and as an act

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[134] Kate Gaul, "The Weighing of the Heart," Programme, *The Gates of Egypt*, by Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul (Sydney: Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 7 Feb. 2007) n. pag.
[135] Gaul, "The Weighting of the Heart," n. pag.
[136] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35-6.
[137] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4.
[138] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35-6.
[139] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35.

of desire ("this is what I wanted").[140] The man is a carpet dealer, Mahmoud, who appears onstage earlier inviting Clarice to follow him into his shop. Clarice speaks of what happens in those unseen recesses as if she were simultaneously both instigator (the one who enters) and recipient (the one who feels embraced by the excitement):

> CLARICE. [. . .] and as I entered, he drew the curtain across the door, and I could feel him all around me, the rising excitement, that kind of tense, animal expectation [. . .].[141]

The literal, or understood, object of the verb "entered" is the interior of the carpet-seller's premises, a place Clarice has already named for the audience as "[. . .] a kind of store-room and it was quiet and dark, close, with carpets stacked all around". Her description endows the space with womb-like qualities, while the word "entered", which denotes her action of coming into that close dark space, resonates as a euphemism for male sexual penetration, with its contradictory connotations of a passage to both salvation and damnation.[142] Clarice speaks of the "animal" tension as if, by becoming the one who enters, she has assumed an active masculine role, transcending a lifetime of submission to a constraining gendered duality that designated her as female, passive and compliant within the world of her family and her nation.

In evoking the carpet-seller's inner room with its curtain drawn, Clarice accords both players a dual role: the diffuse/female ("I could feel him all around me") and the specific/phallic ("the rising excitement") which is simultaneously a physical attribute of the male and a quality that Clarice herself "could feel". In the next breath, however, her role flips to the passivity of a *papier-mâché* doll who describes the man's sexual approach as if it were a lover's inexpert, but not unkind or unwelcomed, fondling:

> CLARICE. [. . .] and he put his hand on my shoulder and then slid it down and over my breast and he lay me down on some rugs and lifted my skirt [. . .]".[143]

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[140] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 36.
[141] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35.
[142] As well as evoking the "dark" and "close" comfort of the womb-like room, Clarice's words resonate with the risk, fear and eternal condemnation that is the penalty for entering. "*Lasciate ogni speranza voi ch'entrate!*" [All hope abandon, ye who enter here.] Dante Alighieri, *Divine Comedy. Inferno,* i.I. Cited in *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd edition, London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1953 (1941) 168.15. No translator acknowledged.
[143] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35.

Her account then abandons its groping towards a feeling self – a sentient body – and focuses on her inability to make cognitive sense of what is happening: “I don't know what I thought.” Clarice’s shift from heart to head is significant. From having begun as an experience affecting her private self, her experience of sex morphs into the public act whose focus is the perceived race of the participants and of the witnesses whom Clarice now becomes aware of spying upon the copulating couple. The scene degenerates into an assertion and counter-assertion of race-based insults. Clarice describes “young Arab boys [. . .] giggling and pushing each other out of the way” as they peep through cracks in the walls, while the man whom she has moments earlier represented as having been solicitous with his provision of rugs for her to lie upon is reconstrued as a predator:

> CLARICE. [. . .] he held me down and thrust himself into me [. . .][144]

Clarice’s speech gathers pace and flame, but her rage is not initially fired at the man, but at another witness, a shadowy lurking woman whom Clarice surmises may have been the man’s mother and who now becomes, for Clarice, a peculiarly ineffectual but nasty antagonist. Clarice depicts the scene as if they are puppets in a showcased political role-play, where the Arabic woman fires anti-Semitic insults at the woman of European origin and where Clarice, as the one subjected to the abuse, accepts the slurs without demur:

> CLARICE. [. . .] and in the background, I could hear her snarling *Jew* . . . *Jew* . . . *American Jew* and I didn't care because this is what I wanted – To be here, with him, in this place; [. . .] [original emphasis][145]

Clarice’s monologue continues, but it is paused here, mid-breath, to focus on the shifts in her perspective within the above utterance before the next one sweeps her in another direction. Having accepted the depiction of herself as a Jew who deserves to be despised without protest, Clarice lets the jibes remain unchallenged, leaping instead to her closeness to the man who is giving her what she wanted: “To be here, with him, in this place”. Clarice represents her being, her existence, as if she and he were creatures in parity in a place she has chosen.

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[144] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35.
[145] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35-6.

Clarice's very next utterance, which continues from the previously quoted one without a break, spits from her mouth with such venom that it sloughs any idea of equality. Where Clarice's earlier target was the "snarling" Arabic woman who subjected her to racist insult, Clarice now heaps her own version of racist insults upon the Arabic man who is thrusting himself into her. She transfers to him the role she herself was playing a moment earlier – that of the one who deserves to be despised:

> CLARICE. [. . .] this place with some stinking Arab fucking me with his stupid little cock that was so small he had to stand on tippy-toes to reach me [. . .].[146]

Clarice's words contradict her earlier report that the man had lain her down on some rugs. The confusion might be understood as a symptom of emotional agitation and memory lapse following a harrowing experience, but there is no evidence that Clarice is suffering heart-pounding distress. Her next enunciation accelerates her abuse of the man, fuelled, it would seem, by rage at a humiliating failure to achieve existential, emotional and sexual satisfaction:

> CLARICE. [. . .] the fuck, the stupid fuck, the stupid dumb Arab fuck."[147]

The repetitive abuse evident in the last two quoted segments of her speech, connotes her shrinkage of the man's very being to the negative and irredeemable attributes she accords to him. Not content with casting him as an unsatisfactory sexual partner (i.e. feminised and therefore deserving of insult, like herself), Clarice uses her repetition of the words "Arab" and "fuck" both to conflate the man's race with an imposed sexual act emptied of both personal "being" and mutual connection, and to assign to the generic "Arab" a nature that is "stinking", "stupid" and "dumb".

Without doubt, brilliant drama may be generated by a character whose speech is flighty, discontinuous and contradictory, while skittering down a scree of jumbled motives, ill-suppressed furies, undigested prejudices, distorted face-saving memories and self-justifications. Yet, Clarice's speech bristles with contrivances that prevent Clarice from spinning words from the experience of her body. Instead, the script forces her to slip her own being behind the mask of political and religious prejudices that characterise terror and war. Clarice's politically weighted insults could perhaps

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[146] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 36.
[147] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 36.

be interpreted as drawing a connection, however confused, between her rape in the carpet seller's premises and the American-led invasion of Iraq, but if so, Clarice shows no trace of horror at the invasion of her body and no empathy for the Arabic people she has so closely encountered.

It may be that I am imposing the concept of rape upon the text. Despite her having been "held [. . .] down", it may be that Clarice experiences the sex not as rape, but as an act of choice that turns unexpectedly into something unwelcome. If so, no trace remains beyond the moment of her telling the audience the story. Her body's disappointment does not recur to haunt Clarice or her future actions. The felt experience is overwhelmed by such a confusion of sensation and political implications that Clarice's testimony to the event can only be made to a listener beyond the frame of the drama. Although Clarice tells her story to the audience, whose millennia of training keeps them docile in their seats, she does not take her story (or the audience's response) back with her into the frame of the drama. If she retains within her body any trace of the emotion of the event, or any fear of how she or her fellow characters might respond were she reveal within the drama what has happened outside it, she does not say so.

The next scene shows Clarice that very evening visiting the hotel room of two American tourists, Jack and Thelma, whom she has befriended. As tourists easily might, they chat about what they have seen and done during the day. Clarice makes no mention of the event at the carpet-seller's emporium. Her day is summarised in one utterance, rendered poignant for the audience by the irony of its being the only remnant of an event that has no further reverberations: "I bought a handkerchief."[148]

The monologue, "My Vagina was my Village," written and performed by Eve Ensler as part of *The Vagina Monologues*, was based on "one woman's story" from among the twenty to seventy thousand women raped in Bosnia in 1993 "as a systematic tactic of war".[149] This monologue depicts a very different connection between body, mind and place from that enacted by Sewell's Clarice. Ensler's piece begins:

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[148] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 36.
[149] Eve Ensler, introduction, "My Vagina Was My Village," *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Villard, 2001, 59-60.

> My vagina was green, water soft pink fields, cow mooing sun resting sweet boyfriend touching lightly with soft piece of blond straw.
>
> *There is something between my legs. I do not know what it is. I do not know where it is. I do not touch. Not now. Not anymore. Not since* [original emphasis].[150]

Having begun with the physicality and joy of life, expressed as the chatting and singing and swimming of the woman's body and its metonym, the village, the piece moves to the monstrous tearing, poisoning and death of joy that is rape and rape's metaphor and method – war. Here are the final lines:

> My vagina a live wet water village.
> They invaded it. Butchered it and burned it down.
> I do not touch now.
> Do not visit.
> I live someplace else now.
> I don't know where that is.[151]

In the language of love that connects her not only with her own self, her own experience – her own *heart* – but with her village, her place of living – her *earth* – the Bosnian woman remembers the joy of her body and its place, before the war-as-rapist made her and her community the territory of its destruction. Granted that the sexual event that Clarice reports in *Gates of Egypt* has nothing of the savagery of the rapes suffered by the women of Bosnia, but its lack of any personal trace upon her body and mind is odd. She makes no association between her ejection from the emporium where she wanted to "be" and the "spiritual journey" that has brought her to that place in search of something "real".[152] Clarice's experience in the carpet emporium of the shift from "being" to an object of insult reveals nothing of the disassociation from self and place forced upon the Bosnian woman whose account of having been invaded ends her speech at a point where she recognises that words cannot express suffering that is beyond horror. Her words name the absence of self, the theft of meaning from her, her body and her village: "I live someplace else now. / I don't know where that is."

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[150] Eve Ensler, "My Vagina Was My Village," *The Vagina Monologues* (New York: Villard, 2001) 61.
[151] Ensler, "My Vagina Was My Village," 63.
[152] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4-6.

Gloria Steinem celebrates *Vagina Monologues* for its "power of saying the unsayable".[153] The pain of the task of "saying the unsayable" is present in "My Vagina is my Village", I suggest, in the subtext and connotations of each metaphor, each contrast, each sound, each irony, each image, each silence.

In *Gates of Egypt*, Clarice's telling of her unsatisfactory sexual encounter gives no hint of her having undergone something that is difficult to put into words, or of something having been lost or destroyed or even changed. Nonetheless, rape or not, there is a sense in which the personhood of Clarice has been invaded and that she has retaliated with racist abuse.

It is important here to consider how the use of inter-racial rape as a metaphor for invasion may affect the representation of Clarice's female body onstage, even though the actions occur offstage. In *Body Politics*, a critical analysis of post-colonial drama, Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins attest that "women's bodies often function in post-colonial theatre as the spaces on and through which larger territorial or cultural battles are being fought."[154] Rape has been used in a number of post-colonial plays by native and non-native writers, particularly males, as a trope for invasions, annexations of land for settlement, and consequent disruptions of native cultures and livelihoods:[155]

> In some instances, women's bodies are not only exploited by the colonisers but also reappropriated by the colonised patriarchy as part of a political agenda which may not fully serve the interests of the women in question.[156]

In Sewell's play, the sexualised violence inflicted on the body of Clarice, particularly the violent and unmistakeable rape that closes the play, is interracial and performed in a context where her attacker conflates gender and race. Despite Clarice being a non-political, non-combatant individual, Abu Abbas blames her for the invasions carried out by her race, but his act of rape subsumes her race in the category of gender for it is an assault upon her female body. The vulnerability that Abu Abbas and his fellow Moslem people feel when they suffer invasion and annexation of their

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[153] Gloria Steinem, Foreword, *The Vagina Monologues*, by Eve Ensler (New York: Villard, 2011) xvi.
[154] Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial drama: theory, practice, politics* (London: Routledge, 1996) 215.
[155] Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-colonial drama: theory, practice, politics* (London: Routledge, 1996) 213.
[156] Gilbert and Tompkins 213.

territories plays onstage as a reversal of roles – a seizure of power for the rapist and a denigration of the woman he has seized as a trope for imperial invasion. He replicates that invasion, fighting upon her body what Tompkins and Gilbert refer to as "larger territorial or cultural battles." It is a battle that makes him, fleetingly, a winner.

It is important to note as well, that I was in the audience at *Gates of Egypt*, I experienced Lynette Curran giving a brilliant performance of Clarice that conveyed pain, rage, fear and bewilderment. Yet when I came to read the script later my response was reduced to bewilderment. Why has Clarice felt so little? Why has the unpleasant sexual encounter with the carpet seller made so little impact on her subjectivity? Why is she given no onstage opportunity to make palpable the effect upon her of having been raped offstage in the final scene?[157] Gilbert and Tompkins argue that when women's bodies are "anatomised by the imperial gaze" they are "denied all sense of subjectivity."[158] Where Ensler in *Vagina Monologues* entrusts her women characters with the powers of sentience and discourse, Sewell's script appears to curtail his raped character's opportunities to challenge the imposition upon her of a reduction of self to body.

A review of *Gates of Egypt* by Diana Simmonds corroborates my unease with the script.[159] Having referred to Sewell's programme notes in which he links his creation of the character of Clarice with qualities he admired in his recently deceased mother, such as compassion, courage and a sense of personal dignity, Simmonds writes:

> While Clarice displays those qualities, they actually emanate from the strength and intelligence of the actress - Lynette Curran - whose valour in struggling to bring her to coherent life is unquestioned.[160]

Where Enoch's Medea is free to curse and to crack her heart open as a result of the more than two centuries of pain she continues to endure, Sewell permits Clarice a noisy spittle that replicates (or parodies?) the nightmare prejudices of fundamentalist wars, but has no more effect on the action than dribble on a dungeon wall. When Clarice tells her audience of the sexual encounter that is, or is not, rape, the desire of her heart which carried her to Egypt is very nearly choked, not by the action of the

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[157] *Gates of Egypt* 98.
[158] Gilbert and Tompkins 216.
[159] Diana Simmonds. rev. of *The Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, 9 February 2007, StageNoise, accessed 20 March 2007, <http://www.stagenoise.com/reviewsdisplay.php?id=78>.
[160] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 2.

play, but by the flailing structure of the script that seeks to impose a political narrative upon her body's subjective experience. Nordstrom's assessment of the difficulties of rendering "ineffable events" in scholarly prose, may well apply to the scholarly playwright, whose immersion in the intensely rational world of political theory keeps pulling the focus of his characters away from the heart and back to the revered pillars of logic: "language, text and narrative". To reiterate Nordstrom, such reverence for purposeful text may carry "a possibly unintended pre-supposition that these arenas constitute the core of communication and understanding."[161]

When *Sydney Morning Herald* Green Room blogger Chris Dobney described his "heart slowly sinking" as he watched the Belvoir Street Theatre première of *The Gates of Egypt* and realised that the play was "a turkey" and "insufficiently developed", and "wasn't ready to be seen by an audience,"[162] Stephen Sewell was quick to respond online to the implied attack on his craft:

> Of course, everyone has their own ideas of what constitutes good theatre and what doesn't, but I think you could grant me the credit of knowing what I'm doing after writing for theatre for thirty years and being one of the most awarded theatre workers in the country.[163]

Repudiating any interest in "the well made play" or "in the notion that theatre is a convention driven art form where all the conventions were discovered centuries ago and which we only need now learn and apply," Sewell positions himself "as part of the new wave of writers who are exploring and expanding theatre's horizons" and doing so with deliberate skill: "You may not like my explorations, you might not like my use of theatrical time and space, but please give me the credit of understanding what I'm doing."[164]

It is unfair, perhaps, to be citing something as eruptive and ephemeral as blogging, but Sewell's posting lauds two contradictory, yet tangled approaches to creating

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[161] Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* 22.
[162] Chris Dobney, "What's Happened to New Australian Theatre?." rev. of *The Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 7 February 2007 21 March 2007, *Sydney Morning Herald* » Blog Central » Entertainment » The Green Room, accessed 20 June 2007, <http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/the_green_room/010463.html?page=fullpage#comments>.
[163] Sewell, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Blog Central / Entertainment / The Green Room, 21 March 2007, accessed 20 June 2007, <http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/the_green_room/010463.html?page=fullpage#comments>
[164] Sewell, *Sydney Morning Herald* , Blog Central, 21 March 2007.

theatre which go to the core of my investigation of how the heart uses the theatre in its struggle against annihilation. In one approach, Sewell stresses the cognitive, specifying that “knowing” and “understanding” one’s actions and purpose allows the playwright to deliver a success that demands recognition, definition, measurement and accreditation. Entangled with this certainty of “knowing”, Sewell opens another path to making theatre – one that cannot know where it is going, because it leads outside the frame. Sewell describes that second path as “exploring and expanding theatre’s horizons” and creating an “exploding art form” that challenges the conventions and presumably also the metaphors that sustain a known and therefore partial reality.

Sewell’s view of theatre as an “exploding art form” returns us to Heiner Müller and his appreciation of the image that engenders “the explosion”. A blogger named Lola countered Sewell’s defence of *Gates of Egypt* with an aphorism:

> ‘Exploding' doesn't always lead to 'explosive' in a dramatic sense.”[165]

The task now is to trace the journey in both *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea*, from image to explosion to see what “dramatic sense” may be made of the actions of the heart as it manifests onstage its landscape of annihilation and its explosive counter-image, its landscape of the heart.

[165] Posted by: Lola on March 22, 2007 11:46 AM, accessed 20 June 2007, <http://blogs.smh.com.au/entertainment/archives/the_green_room/010463.html?page=fullpage#comments>

Landscape of annihilation

In Enoch's *Black Medea* and in those scenes of Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* which are set in Australia, the landscape of annihilation is the suburban house. It is a seductive image, a home for the fantasy of putatively white, financially secure fulfilment – the "good" Australia identified by Rutherford.[166]

When Clarice in *Gates of Egypt* escapes from home, fleeing a sense of personal emptiness as well as the anti-Arabic jingoism and marital discord of her sons-in-law, the new landscape of annihilation that manifests for her in Egypt takes the more tangible form of mutilation and death. For Clarice's daughter Leanne back in Australia, there is escape from the abusive and sexist landscape of home through divorce.

For Medea, the threats are psychic and physical. To shut out the spirit wind, her heart pretends nothing has been lost by their abandonment of Indigenous perspectives, but the excluded otherness takes nightmare form in Jason's attacks upon her.[167]

The masquerade of suburban goodness relies upon the unspoken agreement of the inhabitants of the house to exclude outsiders and expel from within any qualities that threaten the fantasy of white, male, self-righteous prosperity. In neither *Black Medea* nor *Gates of Egypt* can the heart sustain the mind's pretence that by cleansing its own suburban dwelling of otherness, it cleanses cruelty from itself and its family, and subtextually the nation. When the protagonist recognises and acts upon the lie of her once sought-after fantasy of integration into a nation whose premise is deceit, there are fatal consequences for her.

It is not only the woman who suffers under the pressure of a dominating, uni-dimensional and insatiable fantasy. The "good" Australian culture becomes an unseen enemy against which the transgressive female protagonist *and* her violent male antagonist must defend themselves. Although the pain may manifest very differently in female and male characters, a white self-righteous and racist

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[166] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 15.
[167] For the wind that "haunts" Jason, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 62-64. For Medea's dream see 66-67. For Jason's first violent attack on Medea, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 64.

masculinity intent on promulgating its economy and freedom does not only turn women into objects of abuse. In *Gates of Egypt* the myth inflames the bigotry of Clarice's sons-in-law, while their nation's participation in the war on Iraq fuels the anti-Western zealotry of her Moslem kidnappers in Egypt. In *Black Medea* the myth of white freedom and progress invades and perturbs the livelihood and well-being of Medea's husband Jason. The political and social order's denigration of otherness pounds its own metaphoric death into the body of the male antagonist, twisting his life and dreams to a hell which he punches (Jason in *Black Medea*) or hacks, rapes and murders (Abu Abbas in *Gates of Egypt*) into the body and personhood of the female protagonist. .

Through its exclusion of others and otherness, the falsehood of the space of annihilation closes in on itself. The rationalising head fights to justify and fortify the exclusion, but the intelligence of the heart senses that what it is shutting the door against is its own self.

I shall look first at the action of the heart as it manifests its landscape of annihilation in *Black Medea* and then in *Gates of Egypt*.

***Black Medea* – Disintegration of order**

In Enoch's *Black Medea*, the Australian suburban landscape, with its allure of comfort, modernity, security and love, seduces the protagonist when she is a girl growing up in her Indigenous community in the desert, for she adopts for herself the image of riches from the white man's world that she encounters when she is sent to school at government expense "in a town with a uniform and French and unforgettable wealth". The otherness that Medea rejects is the Land, law and Indigenous community that she abandons to follow Jason, "a blackfella in a suit", to fulfil her dream "of living in a big house with a garden, in a place where the sand doesn't creep in under the door."[168]

Medea's proud Indigenous heart strives to assimilate the falsehood of white society's goodness. She flows with desire for Jason, both for his vigorous sexual body that meets hers and for the escape his money offers from the poverty suffered by her community and from traditional obligations that promise her in marriage to an old

[168] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66, 69.

man.[169] The sand-free house of the white society that she and Jason adopt represents a counterfeit landscape of the heart, a place where she convinces herself that she can keep out the spirit wind that would recognise the truth of a denied otherness that each tries to forget.[170]

The shape-shifting Chorus, now ironic, now needling, now compassionate, now infuriating, now released from the struggle, will not let unwanted truths stay ordered in their hiding place. The Chorus brings Medea's excluded past into the present, revealing, as if it is happening now, how Medea's "young love" and "ambition" drive her to betray herself, her people, her Land and the bones of her ancestors. *Then* becomes eternally *now* and the Chorus becomes the voice of Medea, pregnant with her son and betraying to her lover her people's traditional knowledge of the location of the mineral lode that is hankered after by the mining company:

> CHORUS. The spirits have led me to this place, Jason. Here I know our future is made. Under this mound is the largest vein of that which you mine, here the stories tell us the Great Spirit lay down leaving its breath in the rocks. Here where we bury our dead in the trees and in the earth. Here among the bones of the dead lay (sic) our future. This is what you must do… this is what you must do to plan our escape.[171]

At first Jason cannot consent to tear a wound in an earth whose substantive and philosophic texture is contiguous with his and Medea's own. The Chorus has a speech that begs the audience's attention to the sacrilege inherent in Medea's plan to acquire for herself and her family the apparent freedom of Western man:

> CHORUS. She screams madness to him …for what sane man would rape his mother?"[172]

When the "white world" promises the young lovers a share in its "riches", it makes them collaborators in the sacrilege and toxicity that is a condition of its acquisition of nature as a perpetual resource for its own unlimited growth. For Medea to remain in the desert would be to live in a community that the modern world has shrunk into a fringe settlement and an infringement of itself. When Medea induces Jason "in the name of their unborn child" to drive the bulldozer that makes an open wound of their

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[169] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65-66.
[170] Enoch, *Black Medea* 62-64 and 71, 75.
[171] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.
[172] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.

sacred Land so that they may escape into riches,[173] he cannot commit his act of desecration unless he adopts the mining company's dual task – the exploitation *and* the abjection of his and Medea's Indigenous otherness. By so doing he acquires the money that binds their joys and desires into a future laundered to suburban whiteness. Too late, they discover that the wind that used to creep the sand under Medea's now deserted door follows them to their new home on the coast.

Jason's violation of the Land that is their "mother" ruptures the natural knots but delivers him the magical power to break the natural limitations that have beset the mining company in their search for infinite prosperity. There is commonality with the fate of the riddle-solving Oedipus. Friedrich Nietzsche's reverential interpretation of Oedipus' suffering compares the vision of the poet Sophocles with "that light-image that healing nature holds up to us after we have glimpsed the abyss."[174]

There is a similarity in the action through which Sophocles' Oedipus and Enoch's Jason render the abyss visible. Both these men are violating their mother, although Jason's is a purely metaphoric relationship, albeit one that is deeply physical, psychological and spiritual. Drawing on an ancient Persian folk belief that "a wise magus can be born only from incest", Nietzsche contends that Oedipus would not have been able to break "the true magic of nature itself" and solve the riddle with which the Sphinx bound present and future, unless he acquired his "clairvoyant and magical powers" through "a monstrous crime against nature – incest in this case". So certain is Nietzsche of the source of Oedipus' power to solve "the riddle of nature," that his question is rhetorical: "for how could nature be forced to offer up her secrets if not by being triumphantly resisted – by unnatural acts?"[175] The consequences of acquiring the power to "transgress the sacred codes of nature" are dire:

> Indeed, what the myth seems to whisper to us is that wisdom, and Dionysiac wisdom in particular, is an abominable crime against nature; that anyone who, through his knowledge, casts nature into the abyss of destruction, must himself experience the dissolution of nature.[176]

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[173] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.
[174] Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, German original 1872, trans. Shaun Whiteside, ed. Michael Tanner, (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, U.K.: Penguin, 1993) 46-7.
[175] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 47.
[176] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 47.

In Enoch's play, Jason's and Medea's violation of the Land / their Mother so that they and the mining company that feeds them may garner nature's secret / sacred wealth for their own, dissolves their communion with themselves, their land, its art and its nature. In *Black Medea* neither man nor woman can resist the invitation to commit what Nietzsche, in his context, calls "an abominable crime against nature": the rape of the earth – the mother and, by extension, the self. In the contemporary world, shaped so strikingly by the internal combustion engine with its seemingly limitless ecstatic power, an Apolline manipulation of material form and beauty marries a Dionysiac intoxication with bubbles of wealth to demand ever more artful bulldozers. The grossness of Jason and Medea's crime against nature, like the crime of Oedipus, endows these characters with the power to answer riddles, but as we shall see, on the bulldozed ground that replaces the mother, Jason cannot retain his powers of insight. His adopted ground prefers the annihilation of alcohol to the daring, intense and devastating effort of truth.

Black Medea opens with a brief wordless scene where Medea walks with her child, transporting herself in imagination back to the desert, where she listens with concern to the wind, the spirit of the land whirling ragged around their new house.[177] In a soliloquy, called in didascalia "Medea's Battle Cry", she challenges the spirit wind:

> MEDEA. [. . .].
> This is not a fit place for our final battle. But here you have chosen and here it must be. Were it up to me I would choose the open desert where you could not hide amongst these scared strangers clutching to the coast like cowering children.
> I have not sacrificed everything to fail now. I have dreams.[178]

In contrast to the lack of courage Medea notices in the strangers among whom she is now living, she is formidable in her opposition to the spirit wind that she sees as malevolent for daring to challenge the love that her heart has chosen:

> MEDEA. [. . .].
> I am a daughter of this Land. I have the knowledge of my people. I have the power of my clan, I have the strength of my marriage, I have the love of my husband, I have the weapons of my wits. I am Medea.[179]

[177] Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.
[178] Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.
[179] Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.

Medea's courage, sagacity and creativity cannot save her family from the spurious ground they have entered so long as Jason drinks himself "crazy" to lessen the pain of knowing.[180]

Medea's initial reaction to the wind that whispers of her crime against her Land is, as we have seen, to assert the value of the life she is determined to create with her husband, her son and her courage. Jason's reaction is different. Although Jason's methods of violence and alcohol are very different from the blindly articulate rationalisations and deviations of Oedipus, Jason, like Oedipus must resist any cracks in his perception of himself as the solver of problems. When Jason loses the contract that would have earned him money to keep his son in shoes and school fees, he refuses to let Medea enquire about a scholarship for their boy: "No fuckin' handouts!" With scorn for her apparent undermining of his role as the head of the family, he blurts out:

> JASON. If you're that worried, go sell another painting.
>
> MEDEA. No.
>
> JASON. It puts food on the table, for fuck's sake."[181]

The irony is painful. The non-Indigenous world lauds Medea's art with dollars, but nothing she does can help Jason make money according to the codes of that world that both have breathed in with the bulldozer dust. Medea's "No" to the suggestion that she work on another painting to sell, reveals that despite her creative and spirited knowledge of herself as "a daughter of this Land" she and Jason have entered a landscape where money, like masculinity and whiteness, markets itself as the marker of the real. Medea's "No" indicates that she, like Jason, is drenched in the market's message that manhood means normality means provider. When Medea insists he ask his father for a loan, Jason retorts in a mimesis of the rebuke that they know would be slapped right back at him:

> JASON. 'You call yourself a man and can't provide for your family.'[182]

Medea has too much at risk to abandon her nagging. Jason's response is to reduce his father to the four-letter word for the female genitalia. The appropriation of the

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[180] Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.
[181] Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.
[182] Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.

word is an offence to Medea as well, for he turns an organ that gives mighty powers of pleasure and procreation to its natural possessor into a symptom of disgust and disgrace:

> MEDEA. Then tell me what we should do?
>
> JASON. I'm not talking to that cunt.
> Give a man a moment's peace to think.

Medea has nothing to say. In her silence lies a stultifying acquiescence in a world whose ideal is the sole white hero guiding his crew in combat against alternatives. Jason thinks he has stowed his family in a house as buoyant as a life-boat, now but he finds himself condemned to the white-dealt market economy's codes of winner-take-all combat. Back there in the desert, he fought and won. Now, he fights and fails. The punishment must go somewhere – unless a storm of insight comes.

In her discourse on how literary texts of white settler cultures have come to mark whiteness, Penelope Ingram cites Richard Dyer's argument that whiteness, with its unmarked or invisible sense of itself as translucent, transcendent and virtuous, accrues privilege by making itself the one that speaks for the rest:

> Because they are ostensibly without race, not simply one race among many, whites have come to represent the standard against which all else is defined.[183]

Enoch's play creates blackness as its own real and human self. Jason and Medea are the markers of their own success or failure, but the paradigmatic status of whitefella riches – as dream, as history, as conquest, as provider of sustenance, and as keeper of the gaol – has landed these black characters in a liminal zone. They may well have neighbours with varied histories who are having a similar struggle to pay their debts to the white economy, but we do not meet them. The specific detail of Medea and Jason offers a universal understanding of suffering. There do not have to be any human characters painted white on the stage for the culture of invisible whiteness to stir the air with its memes of bulldozers and beer, chlorine and school fees, indigenous-art-awe and limited liability for deals that just happen to fail.

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[183] Penelope Ingram, "Racializing Babylon: Settler Whiteness and the 'New Racism'," *New Literary History*. 32 (2001): 158. Ingram cites Richard Dyer, *White* (London: 1997) 72.

While the unseen white-world with its pressures of unpaid “bills and shit” hounds Jason and his family, the spirit wind “haunts” him.[184] Nothing can keep out the wind, not the sealing of the doors and windows, nor Medea’s assurances that it is all in his head. Jason hears it, “Blowing like in the sails of a ship. Pushing me around.”[185] Despite Medea’s insistence that they must have “No regrets” for what they have done, she knows that the spirit wind is the howl of the heritage that they have betrayed to the mining company.[186] She knows too that the howl of their otherness frightens the “white” society they now move amongst, making it impossible for Jason to keep a job or for her to feel at home in the city.[187] Jason raises his hand and strikes his wife.[188]

The desert wind takes sentient form as the Chorus who presents herself to Jason when he is alone as the “madness” that he brought upon himself from mining the Land.[189] Intimate, caressing his hair and kissing him, the wind howls a strange sanity, for Jason lives in a world rendered mad by its own precept that severance from spirit, Land and heart is prerequisite and perquisite of progress. Blaming Medea for the loss of his youth and spirit, the Chorus blows in Jason’s ear that he must leave Medea and return to his own country on the edge of the ocean before her guilt in breaking her community’s law brings payback to him and he wrecks the peace of his wife and son and his father wrecked his childhood and the lives of his mother and younger siblings whom he was powerless to protect from his father’s fists:

> CHORUS. Leave her and you won't become your father and he [*your son*] won't become you.[190]

Jason fails in his effort to persuade Medea to return to her people, beg forgiveness and “marry the other bloke”. Medea fails in her effort to remind him of their love. In a paper on *Black Medea*, Rachel Fensham posits that Enoch gives a feminist rewriting of Euripides and that the play represents the extreme damage to masculinity in Australia by the incursion of “white civilization” that perceives itself as superior.[191]

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[184] Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.
[185] Enoch, *Black Medea* 62.
[186] Enoch, *Black Medea* 62-63.
[187] Enoch, *Black Medea* 70, 73.
[188] Enoch, *Black Medea* 64.
[189] Enoch, *Black Medea* 70.
[190] Enoch, *Black Medea* 71. The parenthetical didascalia is in the original.
[191] Rachel Fensham, "What Would a Non-White Aesthetic Look Like in Australian Theatre?," Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies, Annual Conference 2005:

When Medea first meets Jason in the desert, he is, like his father before him, already partly whitened: “a city black with his hair wavy, bleached with saltwater air.”[192] Fensham suggests that when Jason makes himself become “more white” and enters white society, the Aboriginality that he and his family represent challenges white civilization’s perception of itself as superior. In *Black Medea*, Fensham valuably reminds us, the damage that Jason suffers as a boy and perpetuates as a man is a function of his adopted ‘whiteness’ and of the culture that surrounds him rather than being inherent in his Aboriginality, or an innate quality of his masculinity.

Fensham’s hypothesis suggests that Jason, who pulled himself out of a violent childhood and into the responsibilities of status, highly paid work and the suit that drew Medea to him, reverts to the alcohol and violence that he knew from his father for complex reasons. Not only does he find that he can't close a deal in a heart-scarce city that sees in his otherness a threat to its purpose, but the effort to blot out the wind of memory and the guilt of raping the Land is drowning him, just as his father almost drowned him long ago, by throwing him in the deep end of the chlorinated pool at the age of five.[193] In the light of Fensham’s insights, I suggest that this action of Jason’s father appears as an effort to “whiten” and toughen his son. Chlorine, as is well known, attacks unwanted ‘germs’ as well as colour; it leaves its stink in the clothes and hair of those who would bleach themselves, their hide and their home. The Chorus’ speech concludes with Jason thinking “how simple it would be to live on the beach” and eat fresh seafood as his father did when he was a boy, “but he stinks of chlorine.” The society for which he tried to make himself white has failed him. For a moment he clings to possibility: “He’s thinking he should teach his son to swim.”[194] It is a short-lived hope. Following further clashes with Medea, Jason recounts a dream whose images portray him trapped in a diminished history where the present is an alley “only wide enough for one”:

> JASON. [. . .]. I'm following my father and I can see we're in a line of men all walking in the same direction down this thin alley. Then we stop like we reached the end.[195]

Journeys to the Interior, School of Visual and Performing Arts, Wagga Wagga Campus, Charles Sturt University, N.S.W., Australia, 5 July, 2005. Personal notes.

[192] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66.

[193] Enoch, *Black Medea* 70.

[194] Enoch, *Black Medea* 70.

[195] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.

He hears the sounds of a place of belonging, sounds of people and the ocean, but they are “somewhere outside” the high walls that blot his view, and the wind is howling. His father turns to look back at him but all he sees is his eyes is anger. He turns in the other direction and sees his son in the empty alley that stretches to the horizon. But his son is crying. He has no-one to lead him:[196]

> JASON. [. . .]. I want to take him by the hand… I want to show him a way out… but I can't show him anything… so I put my hands on his shoulders and shove him to start walking.[197]

Jason’s dreaming heart is a sensitive and subtle observer. He gives us pictures that invite us to imagine his fear. In his dream he has lost every detail of his belonging except the anger in his father’s eyes, his own inadequacy imbibed from that anger, his thwarted, flailing love for his son, and his shame that he can do nothing except shove the boy forward. He is utterly alone.

Like Jason, Medea sees how out of place she is in the urban society whose life she longed for when she fell in love with him. She perceives how her presence makes other people feel, whether white or black, afraid:

> MEDEA. When I go down the street people stare at me. Whitefellas, blackfellas. They know I'm from somewhere they've never been…and they're scared. I remind them of what they don't have. They walk around like they're scared to put a foot wrong, apologising with every step – too scared to admit it, admit they don't belong here.”[198]

Without a place of belonging, the heart of others is perceived to flounder with guilt and fear when it encounters someone whose presence evinces the trust of her landscape of belonging. Medea sees the people who encounter her as a person “from somewhere they have never been”, a person who “remind[s] them of what they don't have”, twisting themselves to resist reaching into an emptiness inside themselves that may well be out of reach of their own words or conscious formulation, an emptiness they fill with fear and apology in order not the recognise that they have no landscape of the heart where they themselves are whole. Instead, they make their way around her, tentative and scared – polite, even, in their apology – each footfall a pretence on a path to their dream of belonging in a society premised

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[196] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.
[197] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75.

on a division of itself from its place of belonging, its earth, its heart. They dare not admit what Medea's heart understands, that she and they are trying to find their way in a landscape of annihilation.

Medea addresses the above speech to Jason at a time when he is trying to repel and expel her from his life. Her heart tries to communicate with him in an effort to get him to remember who she is – the person whose heritage connects her with the numinous, the person who has known the spirits coming up through her feet and dancing with her, the person he fell in love with: "All the dances and songs my granny taught me, that was my dowry. I bought your love, Jason."[199] The negativity of Jason's ripostes to each of her offerings of love prompts Medea to blame him for her betrayal of her people and for the sacrifices she has made to be with him.[200] Her words strike at the core of their lives. Jason's response as the scene builds to its climax is to throw Medea to the ground with a ferocity that he rationalises by mocking her connection with the spirits of her country:

> JASON. Are the spirits talking to you now? Can you hear them? Are they telling you anything? What are they saying? They're telling you it's over… They're telling you to stay the fuck away from me![201]

Held within a house in a network of streets in an unnamed city or town, "amongst these scared strangers clutching to the coast like cowering children,"[202] Medea's heart seeks salvation by repeatedly offering itself and its love to Jason only to have that love redound in pain. Each assault makes visible the hell her heart is complicit in creating. As young lovers seeking to escape from obligations to Land, culture and people that they found untenable, Medea and Jason struggle to conceal their culpability as they nest inside a long history whose premise is annihilation: a settler culture that dangles material reward for the betrayal of the people and land it overwhelms.

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[198] Enoch, *Black Medea* 73.
[199] Enoch, *Black Medea* 72
[200] Enoch, *Black Medea* 72- 73.
[201] Enoch, *Black Medea* 73-74.
[202] Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.

It is important to note that while Enoch's writing and direction make each assault that Jason enacts against Medea dramatically powerful, each of these actions is brief and its performance does not invite a voyeurism of violence.[203]

The disintegration of order in Medea's counterfeit landscape of the heart – her domestic space – is made vivid without words through collages of non-chronological fragments of action that Enoch calls "Blackout Poems".[204] Each "Blackout Poem" (there are three) is a scripted sequence of simple non-verbal actions, interrupted and separated from one another by the profundity of darkness. Lust, fear, violence, love, isolation, tenderness, ferocity, fragility and pain inhabit the space, as Medea's and Jason's hearts rip themselves apart through the effort to keep at bay the ever more dreadful consequences of imperial time and place. The actions grow more intense as Medea, Jason and their son move closer to the abyss. Successive images in the third and final "Blackout Poem", show the Child being trained by his father in practices of supposed Australian manhood: Jason holds out to the Child a box containing a toy bulldozer, a metonym for the one with which Jason disinterred the bones of Medea's ancestors to open the way to the mineral wealth beneath; the Child clutches the toy bulldozer; the Child arm-wrestles his father; the Child pulls a beer out of the fridge; the father teaches the Child how to box. Each tick of darkness that separates each image isolates Jason and his son into fragments of "now", where time forgets what came before and takes no heed of what comes next, even while each moment of darkness when one cannot see beckons the inner eye to find a link. The images of man and boy are intercut with another image, one that repeats and repeats in a landscape that is contiguous with theirs and yet lost to their sight. It is a landscape where time has nowhere to go but entropy. Order, time and being signal over and over again their self-destruction: *Medea is banging her head up against the leg of the table*.[205] A metronome of death.

Throughout *Black Medea* dramatic elements interact to strip the falsehood of fantasy from the suburban house and expose it as a landscape of annihilation. There is the lacerating tongue of the Chorus, in the role of the haunting female presence of the Land and spirits that Medea and Jason despoiled and deserted but have not

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[203] For Jason's assaults on Medea, see *Black Medea* 64, 73 and 77.
[204] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag. *Black Medea* 64, 69, 76.
[205] Stage direction. Enoch, *Black Medea* 76.

destroyed. There is the violence that settles in Jason, as it did in his father before him – a poison drunk from an intruder society whose desire to stay possessed of power and wealth leads it to paint with its own fear other people's stories and other people's skin, even as it snags and dumps them in its circle, lured and soused. And, there is Medea's heart. Her love, her fury and the depth of her belonging will not let her and her son succumb.

The Gates of Egypt – Confinement to "Nowhere"

In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt,* Clarice experiences two landscapes of annihilation. The catalytic landscape is her family home in Australia, where the danger is a psychic one of inauthenticity. Clarice's own gender is a derided otherness and so are the refused and despised Arabic people, who are constructed as plotters of terror, whether in their place of origin in the Middle East or lurking among Australia's own citizenry. Like the people that Enoch's Medea describes as "scared strangers clutching to the coast like cowering children,"[206] Clarice's daughters, Leanne and Cynthia, and their husbands, Ralph and Frank, are obsessed by fears. The borders of their psychic territory are patrolled by Clarice's two sons-in-law and particularly by Ralph who could be read as a self-appointed cartoon-like avatar of their nation's Prime Minister in his need to prove the rightness of his resistance to those he considers a threat to the nation. Clarice's daughter Leanne is on duty as well, for as we have seen, she presents a self-absorbed parroting of the Australian Government's rationalisation for participation in the war on Iraq.[207] It is Leanne who voices onstage the description that the Department of Foreign Affairs assigns to the men who have taken her mother hostage: "Islamic terrorists".[208] Yet Leanne herself suffers acutely from her husband Ralph's scourging of women. For example, he uses her as his audience for a witticism he has been composing:

> RALPH. Listen to this - Wives are just like your kids. After awhile you just wish they'd grow up and move out.
>
> *SHE looks at him...*
>
> RALPH (CONT'D). It's for the business calendar.[209]

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[206] Enoch, *Black Medea* 61.
[207] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 63.
[208] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 59.
[209] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 50.

In Sewell's fierce lampooning of the masculine sense of humour and its quintessential Australian backyard, Clarice's grown up, xenophobic and discordant family extol the cheery values of the "good" white Australia", while they snap at one another over who took the last beer.[210] In that "good" men's world, a woman is not held in high esteem, especially if, like Clarice, she professes an interest in a country that young Frank describes as "full of bloody Arabs".[211] Ralph's first line in the play is abuse of his mother-in-law for her predilection for exploring the ancient culture of Egypt: "Yer fucking nuts...".[212] Later, after news comes of Clarice's kidnapping, Frank suggests to Ralph that he go and talk to an Imam in Sydney's Moslem community, with a view to securing help to advocate for her release. Ralph rejects any notion that he might talk with "Towel Heads".[213] Ralph's equating of the Moslem religion with terrorism is not stated directly, but the elision is there in the subtext as he garnishes his insults with an appeal to a higher authority:

> RALPH. The Prime Minister says we've got to stand up to the terrorists and that's bloody well what we're going to do.[214]

Before Clarice leaves for Egypt, Ralph warns his mother-in-law that she is going "to get [her] head chopped off."[215] It is almost as if he is enjoying the prospect, but Clarice can afford to leave his banter behind and go. She is a widow and she has the money.[216] Ralph cannot understand why anyone would want to travel to Egypt with "the bloody Middle East in the middle of a bloody international shit fight".[217] In response to Clarice's plaint that she wants her life to be "a little more real", Ralph struts his prowess as the patriotic outdoor cook in control of the material world:

> RALPH. More real? Well, you can't get much more real than a good old Aussie Barbecue – Snags on!"[218]

By travelling outside her existence as a protected white woman in her Australian suburban house, Clarice follows her dream of spiritual discovery to Egypt's Valley of the Kings only to find that the ancient tomb she visits morphs into an "other" place,

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[210] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 1; 21-26.
[211] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 1.
[212] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 1.
[213] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 77.
[214] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 78.
[215] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4.
[216] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4.
[217] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 2.
[218] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 4. In the Australian vernacular, "snags" are sausages.

where her kidnappers make her white skin, her woman's body and her uninformed mind their target.[219] Sewell's script, which uses screenplay conventions for its didascalia, gives this scene heading for the site for Clarice's ordeal: "INT. NOWHERE". In that non-place the first spoken word comes from Clarice – emitted from within a shroud-like darkness. It is a cry that appears helpless in its negation of the reality that is now hers:[220]

> *A bare electric light is lit, and a man is seen sitting silently on a chair as another figure walks about the shadows. Grabbing something, he drags it forward, and a voice cries a muffled...*
>
> CLARICE. No!
>
> She has a bag over her head, and her arms tied behind her back...[221]

This second landscape of annihilation appears as a hyperbolic, vengeful mirror of the un-seeing, spiritually empty, ignorant and jingoistic household Clarice has fled.[222] Abu Abbas, who butchers Clarice as if she were meat, turns the otherness abjected from the "good" Australia into self-fulfilling nightmare.

Even Clarice's arrival in Egypt as a tourist is uneasy. Fellow tourists Jack and Thelma, an American couple desperate for a taxi to get them safely off the streets of Cairo and into their hotel, sweep Clarice up into their fears of becoming terror targets. Perhaps against her will, her proximity to their vacuity casts Clarice as an invader. No sooner has she entered the landscape that is not hers, than money presses upon her its imperative – and its power – to put distance between herself and whatever it is she has come to discover.[223]

Once Clarice is kidnapped, the transient sexual encounter she had with the carpet-seller that may or may not have been rape, and the abuse hurled at her by the old woman appear as rehearsals for her forced engagement with her torturer.[224] Abu Abbas not only attacks the boundaries of her body, but his abuse strikes at Clarice's image of herself and her world. Interspersed confusedly with his demands for a million dollars in ransom, the terrorist locates the guilty geography of his enemy in the

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[219] For Clarice's kidnapping at gun-point, during which her kidnappers shoot her Egyptian guide, see Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 66.
[220] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 72.
[221] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 72.
[222] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 72-76.
[223] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 8-10.

body of the captive tourist. He accuses her of being an American or Israeli spy whose intention is “to steal Egypt’s nuclear secrets”.[225] He insists that she is guilty of atrocities against Arabic peoples: the killing of Iraqi civilians by Australian soldiers, the torture of captives by American forces in the prison at Abu Ghraib, the attacks by Israelis on Palestinian people, the destruction of olive trees in Gaza and the deaths of children from cluster bombs.[226] His words unroll at Clarice’s feet a landscape of suffering whose reality challenges the smug cocoon she left behind in Australia, where her family felt so secure in their support for the war that they scoffed at her wish for peace and claimed that the West’s use of military force in their 2003 invasion of Iraq promulgated their own virtue.

Clarice fails to find out what Abu Abbas wants from her. Neither grasps what the other means. Perversely, he and his accomplice reproduce upon her body the invasion and torture he perceives being committed by Western forces in the Middle East.[227] They knock out one of her teeth and hack off one of her fingers.[228] Abu Abbas makes a clear connection between the rape he intends to inflict on her and the deaths in Iraq at the hands of Western soldiers: “They rape the daughters and then kill the family they forced to watch; is this the truth inside your heart and your country?”[229] For Clarice, his question cannot be answered. Her response is that of her body, her self: “Leave me alone.”

The rape is not represented onstage, but is prefigured through Abu Abbas’ threats and its horror marked by a scream from Clarice designated in the stage direction as “blood-curdling”. To borrow from Nordstrom (1992), the torturer makes his victim the “template” upon whose body he writes his “power-loaded” script:[230]

> ABU ABBAS. Strip her! We'll show them what we think of their great civilisation![231]

By eliding the boundaries of body and body politic and boasting of his will to tear both apart, the extra-judicial torturer enacts the annihilation that Nordstrom names

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[224] For analysis of the encounter with the carpet-seller, see the section “Detour” above.
[225] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 84.
[226] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 74-76; 83-86; 90-91.
[227] See, for example, Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 75-6; 83-85; 90-91.
[228] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 74; 84.
[229] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 98.
[230] Carolyn Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front," *The Paths to Domination, Resistance, and Terror*, eds. Nordstrom and JoAnn Martin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) 266.

"disembodiment".[232] Nordstrom explains her choice of the term "disembodiment" through reference to Bourdieu's concept of "embodiment", according to which the body creates its identity, its ways of feeling and thinking, seeing and being, in fusion with society's cultural and ideological ways of knowing, which themselves find expression through the body.[233] By tearing apart that embodiment, Nordstrom argues, a "dirty war" directs its message not toward contending militaries, but to the population at large. The cutting off of body parts is aimed at "conceptual as well as sociopolitical control" of the population.[234] Such conceptual control and assault on the "embodiment" of victim and society, I would suggest, is also a function of rape. Nordstrom's description of the horrific social and cultural as well as personal impact of disembodiment could aptly serve to describe Abu Abbas' attempt to reduce to an absurdity Clarice and the political West that, in his mind, she embodies:

> Severing the actual boundaries of human bodies through maiming and torture can simultaneously serve to portray an assault on the boundaries of the body politic. Both a human body and a state without boundaries are inherent paradoxes – each a conceptual as well as geopolitical absurdity.[235]

A similar project to cut the enemy down to an absurdity is undertaken by Clarice's son-in-law Ralph, He carries out a metaphoric annihilation of the identity of the Imam by subsuming him and his cultural and religious fellows under the category of the comic book ("Towel Heads"). Ralph also effects a literal destruction of the Imam's identity (at a safe distance) by supporting war against a country (Iraq) he associates with the Imam's religion. Clarice's Moslem attacker similarly sees her as a political and religious criminal to be obliterated. Her image of herself and her nation is subjected to scorn, pieces are cut from her body and she is to be raped and killed. In both these landscapes of annihilation, the perpetrator of violence (whether verbal or physical) perceives the bodily integrity of his victim as an attack upon himself, his ideology and his world.

Like Medea in *Black Medea*, Clarice in *Gates of Egypt* responds to the "non-place", the "Nowhere", that is the landscape of annihilation, by refusing to be bound and

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[231] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 99.
[232] Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front" 266.
[233] Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front" 266. Nordstrom cites Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).
[234] Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front" 266-7.
[235] Nordstrom, "The Backyard Front" 267.

bounded by the hegemony of revenge. Both protagonists enter the conceptual and geopolitical absurdity of boundlessness. Both desire to undo the knots that tie identity to hatred and bind to violence the government of life. When she finds herself caught in a landscape where the one who claims the right to draw the map, enshrine its logic and write its narrative demands the annihilation of the other, Clarice, like Medea, re-members the ground beneath – she remembers her earth, her heart.

Landscape of the heart

In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* and Enoch's *Black Medea*, the protagonist's heart responds to impending annihilation by creating onstage a pre-modern landscape that rationality has rendered mythic. It is a landscape of wholeness and healing from which the heart has severed itself, a landscape to which it longs to return. Each woman transforms stage space into an image of what she feels has been taken from her: a suppressed or abandoned landscape of the heart beyond the conventional logic of "language, text and narrative".[236] Both Medea and Clarice reject the landscape of annihilation and its conceptual imposition of disembodiment. Held within a hegemony where life has become dis-spirited and dis-heartened, each woman creates a landscape where it is not her battered otherness that is rendered visible as the absurdity, but the hegemony itself. Her actions make visible the violence and fear that are rooted in the hierarchical power the denigration of difference.

When her heart directs her tread upon the stage, the protagonist in both *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt* makes stage-ground her own ground, her own earth. By her performance, she makes that earth a common ground, a ground of the heart for which she is prepared to sacrifice what once she deemed sacrosanct. In both plays, coincidentally, that ground is a desert, a land that some may deem boundless and bare, but that each protagonist knows to be teeming with spirits. On that heart-land, that ancient trodden earth, each protagonist opens herself to a prohibited experience that transgresses norms of "good" behaviour. In each play the protagonist's transgression leads to her death in a desert where she creates a symbolic transformation of the landscape from violence and hatred to the possibility of love. Each death represents the death of the hatred of the heart, a hatred that threatens the woman, her family, her nation and her earth to the core.

[236] Nordstrom, *A Different Kind of War Story* 20-21.

Like Enoch's Medea, Sewell's Clarice travels from her family's suburban home, where life has become dispirited, to her landscape of the heart in a desert that teems with spirits. The chosen desert for each of these women has, however, its own specific location and story. Where Clarice's gaze turns outwards and away, to an antique land on the other side of the earth, Medea's gaze turns inwards, to her dream of the centre as the place of healing. Her action gives the lie to the harrowing moniker, "The dead heart," which European Australians adopted for the arid interior of their country from G. W. Gregory's early twentieth century inland journey to the ancient, frequently waterless Lake Eyre.[237] Given the violence and fear rooted in the dominant Australian of otherness that forces its brutal torment upon Medea and its sense of emptiness and war upon Clarice while each is living on the putatively settled brittle edge of the Australian continent, the epithet "dead heart" would seem to be suited, not for the inland desert, but for the centres of power and influence that quiver with rage or guilt against otherness on the nation's blinkered and fearful periphery.

In *Black Medea*, the image of Medea's heart is her and her people's Land. The capitalisation throughout the script appears as a statutory acknowledgement that this Indigenous "Land" has the force and dignity of a proper noun, worthy of the heritage, law, community and dance that embody that Land and are embodied by it. In performance, the word "Land" carries the awe and significance of Somewhere, a place with the power of being there, a place with the power to act through time and chaos and renewal. This "Land" cannot be "nowhere", cannot be *terra nullius*, even while the Chorus recognises the ravages of white invasion, including the mining, the grog and the bulldozer with which Jason displaces the bones of Medea's ancestors for the promise of white man's riches.[238] Jason has his Indigenous heritage too, a coastal one, but, as has been discussed, his practice of his law, like that of his father before him, has been marred by Australia's white history and its forcible uprooting of the living and their bones.

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[237] The "dead heart" is defined as "the arid interior of Australia", ed. W.S. Ransom, *The Australian National Dictionary: A Dictionary of Australianisms on Historical Principles* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1988. The expression is sourced from: J.W. Gregory, *The dead heart of Australia : a journey around Lake Eyre in the summer of 1901-1902, with some account of the Lake Eyre basin and the flowing wells of central Australia* (London: J. Murray, 1906).
[238] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65, 75.

Into the terror and unreality of Medea's present, when the grog and the violence that Jason learned from his father are flooring her and will soon see her son flawed beyond her help, the Chorus invites Medea's Land to the stage, un-ravaged and deeply knowing:

> CHORUS. She's got her language, she knows her dances …[239]

The yearning of Medea's heart transforms an apparently rational, refined and exclusive space – a staged and fenced suburban home and, indeed, the confinement of the western stage itself – into a heartfelt landscape of infinite expanse and healing:

> MEDEA. I dreamt I was staring into the desert and could never be alone.[240]

In direct address to the audience, Medea describes her dream of her mother and grandmother – a "woman of law and language" – and the many other woman like her, who are her foremothers:

> MEDEA. Behind her another woman, looking at me, I can see my reflection in her eyes. She looks familiar. Her skin's dark and weathered. Beside her another woman, and another, and another, and then I can see an ocean of women stretching back out into the desert, stretching out to the horizon making the sand dark … standing facing me, looking to me.[241]

As the bare feet of the women colour the sand, Medea's image has the power to colour the stage. In the opening and closing images of the play the audience see Medea walking in the desert.[242] Her evocation of her dream walks the ground of her life into existence, creating a methektic and uncanny landscape where memory and foreshadowing, action and consequence, emotion and cognition are no longer severed, but able to touch each other and become each other's act of recognition.[243] To borrow from Tompkins, the generation of that imagined landscape may encourage an audience to contemplate the gap between that staged world and what they know to be there outside.[244]

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[239] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66.
[240] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66.
[241] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66-67.
[242] Stage direction, Enoch, *Black Medea* 61 and 80-81.
[243] The concept of methexis, as discussed earlier, is informed by Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 10-13.
[244] Tompkins 12.

In Enoch's premier production in 2005, the landscape of heart that Margaret Harvey, playing Medea, created through her voice, language and body in performance found visual resonance in Christina Smith's equally brilliant set design.[245] A seemingly boundless backdrop made of corrugated iron created the waves of the dunes in a design that was inspired by *Salt on Mina Mina*, a painting of desert country by Dorothy Napangardi, 2001.[246] The "waves" of curving iron gave the stage a height and depth that could hold the unsteady confinement of the house, or open itself to infinity and transparency. Rachel Burke's lighting revealed the rich desert colours or changed to let the night-time heavens twinkle through holes in the backdrop like stars, so that an audience might feel itself walking with Medea, in the immeasurable presence of the numinous. Designer Christina Smith describes the process with which she shaped the set to created that effect:

> The holes [in the corrugated iron] were made with an oxy torch...there were tens of thousands of them. I drew them all up as a grid work following Dorothy [Napangardi]'s painting as reference, and then the welder made the holes at all the intersections of the lines.[247]

This presence of the desert landscape of the heart held sway over the playing surface. A base of slag was overlaid in the centre by a timber floor evoking the interior of Medea and Jason's house – Medea's landscape of annihilation – for which the mined Land had paid. Smith explains why the slag was substituted for sand, the material that is specified in the script:[248]

> The surface around the boards was intended to be black sand, but due to EHS [Environment, Health and Safety] concerns (sand sometimes produces an unacceptable level of particles) and aesthetic reasons (I needed it to be as black as possible), we went with slag.[249]

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[245] "Set Design by Christina Smith. Inspired by the Painting *Salt on Mina Mina* by Dorothy Napangardi," Programme, *Black Medea*, by Enoch after Euripides, dir. Enoch (Sydney: Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, 13 April 2005) n. pag. Napangardi, *Salt on Mina Mina*, 2001, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin.

[246] Dorothy Napangardi, *Salt on Mina Mina*, 2001, synthetic polymer paint on linen, 244 x 168 cm, Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin.

[247] Christina Smith, designer, *Black Medea,* personal email, 1 January 2013. In her response to my asking what materials she had used for the set, Smith volunteered that the corrugated iron had been sourced second-hand. It must have mattered to her, for her to consider that an important part of work she had done almost eight years earlier. It touches my heart, for using second-hand iron means, of course, that no additional Land was harmed through the mining of ore for the making of the play.

[248] In one of the stage directions, for example, "The Child plays with the boat in the sand." *Black Medea* 64.

[249] Smith, designer, *Black Medea,* personal email, 1 January 2013. Asked whether the base material was mining slag, Smith wrote that she was not sure which process made it as a by-product.

Medea's image of her landscape of the heart, made present through her story of her dream, through the set design and through Medea's body as she walks that landscape at the opening and closing of the play, opens the stage to awe and sorrow: awe for Medea's people whose Land remembers their feet and whose feet remember the Land they touch; sorrow for the immensity of Medea's loss (and perhaps for the measure of one's own); and, anguish for what is to come.

Early in Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, Clarice's heart takes her search for spiritual richness and peace to the desert lands of the Nile. There are several scenes where Sewell's device of enabling Clarice and her late husband Frank to converse as if his mortality were inconsequential, gives her a confidant with whom she can share what is in her heart, and to whom she can communicate her joy in the landscape she has chosen, such as her discovery that the ancients named the Nile the "river of life".[250] Apart from her not-so-happy visit to the carpet-seller in Cairo which she does not mention, life in Egypt has become such a welcome experience, she exclaims to Frank, "The world is good."[251]

Like a well-fed child with eyes new to seeing, Clarice writes to her daughter from Luxor, flowing with superlatives for its archaeological heritage, the life of its streets and the beauty of its people. When Leanne reads the letter to her husband, his ripostes are predictably scarifying:

> LEANNE. *I am currently in Luxor, staying in a small hotel -*
>
> RALPH. Trust her - You can just see it, can't you, crawling alive with kids and lice -
>
> LEANNE. *The Luxor Museum is incredible and the markets amazing -*
>
> RALPH. I bet - Pickpockets on every corner.
>
> LEANNE. *The people here are truly beautiful.*
>
> RALPH. She's a hippy, isn't she; she's just a mad old fucking hippy.[252]

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[250] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 55.
[251] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 56.
[252] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 52. Sewell's script uses italics for the extracts which Leanne reads from Clarice's letter.

But Clarice is no longer there to hear Ralph's insults. They must be borne by her daughter until she learns to shuck her shell. Nothing Ralph says can affect Clarice's pursuit of a distant mythology that privileges the actions of love over scorn. In a scene where she farewells fellow tourists Jack and Thelma whose travels will take them in a different and safer direction, Clarice acknowledges that her lone journey to the desert Valley of the Kings will put her at greater risk of terror attack.[253] Clarice accepts the danger, for she is re-membering love. In the story of Isis and her quest to bring her "dismembered" husband Osiris "back to life", Clarice finds a figure whose passion makes sense of her own. Isis' unstoppable task of re-membering Osiris has parallels with Clarice's urgent need to re-vitalise her late husband Frank so that she has someone able to reciprocate her heart's acts of love. In the active heart of Isis, Clarice discerns a purpose significant for herself and all humanity. She puts that purpose to Jack as a question that trembles from the depth of its need:

> CLARICE. To look for a love that transcends death?"[254]

Jack responds with a rewording in which he asserts his own view of the landscape as a battleground – a certainty made emphatic in the script with italics and repetition

> JACK. A love that *conquers* death, Clarice; a love that *conquers* death."[255]

Clarice's heart, however, has not come to conquer, or to proselytise, but to ponder a mystery that is beyond the explanation of logic, divine declaration, or obedience to the habit of centuries:

> CLARICE. [. . .]. I hope you don't misunderstand: I don't believe in God; I honestly don't; not that God, anyhow. I suppose I believe in the ineffable, in the mysterious - I guess that's what I believe in: that thing that lies just beyond the senses and the mind, that thing we stare at when we're not staring at anything; but as for the other stuff, you know, the incense and all the rest of it, no.[256]

The above extract comes from a long speech where Clarice gives a fuller and more articulate picture of her landscape of the heart than she was able to do when hectored at home by a son-in-law keen to prove her stupid. Clarice links her "belief in the ineffable" with a moral conscience, sourced not in an ordained text but in Hannah

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[253] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* sc. 11, 36-45.
[254] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 37.
[255] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 38.

Arendt. To pre-empt any surprise on the holiday faces of Jack and Thelma at the increasingly erudite and politically challenging turn of her conversation, Clarice offers the quick explanation that she had read Arendt to keep up with her daughter's university studies. In the light of Arendt's understanding that the Nazi death camps were manned, not by "maniacs and perverts taking a personal pleasure in the killing" but by ordinary, sober people, "who loved their children and tried to teach them to be kind and truthful and not be cruel to animals", Clarice discerns her own guilt:

> CLARICE. [. . .]. and I thought Yes, that's me; I could do that. Quietly getting on with things while this great lumbering machine we're all part of devours the world and just a little bit further, just beyond, on the edge almost, or in the shadows of it all - of all the madness and the murder and the mayhem - somewhere almost within reach, but not quite, lay a completely different world where things had a chance of making sense, but I didn't know how to get there, because I was too cowardly or conformist to actually try, and too frightened for my own eternal soul not to care.[257]

It is a surprising speech. Clarice presents a complex political concept as if it had entered deep into her heart, thought and soul in time long past when her daughter Leanne was a young student who cared to talk to her mother about things that mattered. That image creates a different Leanne from the harassed woman we met at home in Australia, reduced almost to vapour by a husband whose novelty barbeque apron features "a saucy picture of a girl in her undies", a belief that the government must be right when it says we have to go to war, and the prospect of a ten-year wedding anniversary.[258] Clarice appears different too, with a sophistication of thought far removed from the Clarice who derided as lowly (of stature and status) the Arab with whom she had sex, whether willingly or unwillingly.[259] The Clarice who depicts the hegemony of contemporary fascism through the metaphor of the participatory devouring of the world by a "great lumbering machine" seems unconnected to the Clarice whose letter to her daughter is written with a vague, child-like vocabulary of wonder that feeds only the visible surface of Luxor ("amazing" and "truly beautiful").[260] Perhaps the playwright thought that clever use of his craft could meld a tutorial on Arendt's understanding of the dangerous ordinariness of

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[256] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 41-2.
[257] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 42.
[258] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 1.
[259] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 35-6.
[260] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 50-2.

totalitarianism with the climax of Clarice's speech, her confession of her own naivety, inadequacy, fear and longing for the reassurance of an "eternal soul". Certainly, Lynette Curran's skilled performance of that speech conveyed the ragged, heart-searching, forgiveness-yearning emotions of the character and by so doing helped the mismatched threads of her character to blend.[261]

Jack's response to the speech is to ignore Clarice's exposé of the persistence of fascism and take up the thread of the "eternal soul" – Jack's cue to assume the role of temporary guide, informing Clarice of the Egyptian mythology of death:

> JACK. The Egyptians believed that when you died, your heart was weighed against the feather of truth, and if it was heavier than the feather of truth, then it was thrown to the jackals to be devoured, but if it was a truthful heart, its owner was allowed to pass to eternal life.[262]

For Clarice, the ancient journey of the soul to resurrection becomes not only a mission that finds parallels in the myth of Isis, as the goddess who re-members love, but a journey to reconnect herself and her spirit. When she enters the ancient tomb of Rameses the Sixth, in the Valley of the Kings, Clarice encounters a scholarly, secular and multi-cultural guide, a member of a French team of archaeologist-conservators who introduces herself with the Arabic surname, Dr. Hawass, and the very Christian name, Marie.[263] Mingled with her dire warnings to Clarice not to be there on her own ("Do you know how much you're worth to some half starved Bedouin?") Marie gives Clarice vital snippets of mythology that answer her breathless desire to know what might be foretold in the stars depicted in the tomb:

> MARIE. It's the night, Madame, the soul's journey through the night. This one here is Nuit, the goddess of the Night."[264]

When Clarice probes for a specific link between Egyptian and Christian theology by successively renaming Nuit as "The goddess of the stars", "Mary, star of the sea" and finally "Our Lady of the Stars...", Marie is non-committal, making such remarks as

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[261] *Gates of Egypt*, by Stephen Sewell, dir. Kate Gaul, perf. by Lynette Curran, first perf. 3 February 2007, Company B, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney.
[262] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 43.
[263] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 48, 46. The tomb is not named as that of "Rameses the Sixth" until a later scene when Clarice returns to the site the following day in her fatal attempt to visit that tomb again. *Gates of Egypt* 61.
[264] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 48.

"Perhaps" and "If you like", but she does make it clear to Clarice that she has arrived at the source of "The soul's awakening to its eternal life":[265]

> MARIE. This was the place where it all began - The well-spring - so many things here will seem familiar - The soul awoke and stood where you're standing now -

If the soul failed to meet the test of truth, Marie explains, it would not move to the place of eternal life, "beyond the dunes of the Sahara, in a land of water and plenty", but would be "thrown into darkness and lost forever."[266] Given the tension in Clarice's heart between *now* and *eternity*, she cannot be satisfied, however, with casting the metaphysical in words. Given the power of Fascism to halt and to hold the ordinary life inside its own controlling text, Clarice's heart has to perform its love and truth outside all ordinary text. Given Derrida's famous injunction that "There is nothing outside of the text", Clarice's heart can only play its counterpoint to the text if it imagines a landscape that permits the unanswerable prayer (Barker). Without that landscape, heart and world would be "thrown into darkness and lost forever."[267]

Having adopted the tomb with its stars as her place of awakening, Clarice discards Marie's advice that it is not safe to be there, and returns the following day to reach again for the stars. There, in her adopted desert, whose vast monuments are abraded by time and peopled by a fund of foreign archaeologists and a galaxy of near-forgotten spirits, and whose boundless sands are home to the contusive poverty endured by the Bedouins, Clarice's heart is to be tested and weighed. Gifted with the desert's clear sight – its literal and mythic breadth of horizon – Clarice seeks to engage the lumbering and devouring cruelty of her kidnapper in a mutual negotiation with otherness that might augur peace.

There is a difference between the famous desert of the poet Shelley's fallen Ozymandias and the ones where Clarice and Black Medea go to end their lives.[268] Despite the burdens of aridity and contemporary impoverishment, the deserts in *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea* are not "lone and level" sands, but are the heart-warmed home of someone's culture – in Medea's case, her own. For Clarice, the

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[265] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 49.
[266] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 49-50.
[267] See Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1967, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, N. Y.: Norton, 2001) 1825.

desert in Egypt is named by the archaeologist Marie as her "well-spring", a metaphor that gives the culture that arose in the desert a thirst-quenching significance.[269] The oases of Egypt are indeed a precious metaphor of survival and of home and heart for Clarice and her late husband. When the pair chat on the night-wrapped rooftop of the Nubian Oasis Hotel, they speak with love of their "oasis earth" in the blackness of space.[270]

In the Australian desert that is Medea's Land, the waterholes are kin to her and her son. Far from being flat and inert, the sand forms dunes alive to the feet of the people, the spirits and the wind.[271] In the opening and closing scenes of *Black Medea*, where Medea is walking in the desert, the dunes are like her heart, at once palpable and mysterious. As she crests each dune, she "winks in and out of sight".[272] In *Gates of Egypt*, the dunes of the Sahara have a different association. After death, the soul that has found its well-spring and its truth, has earned the right to travel beyond the dunes to "a land of water and plenty."[273]

In Shelley's poem, the desert has severed the effigy of Ozymandias' head from his trunk and tumbled "these lifeless things", shattered, onto its sands. The winds of the passing millennia have not, however, uprooted the pedestal where Ozymandias' statue once posed rampant, nor erased the inscription where he flatters himself as "king of kings", nor made redundant his injunction to look on his achievements and despair. Nor has the "sneer of cold command" that the sculptor had "stamped" on Ozymandias' face been whirled out of fashion. In the staged contemporary worlds of *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea*, contempt moves and breathes, not on the visage of a king, but in the lowly fabric of a bewildered, trapped and ravaged antagonist who makes personal war on a victim he perceives as paradoxically more contemptible and more dangerous than himself.[274] That the protagonist in each of these two plays

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[268] Percy Bysshe Shelley, "Ozymandias," *The Penguin Book of English Verse*, 1818, ed. John Hayward (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1956, 1964) 290.
[269] *Gates of Egypt* 48.
[270] *Gates of Egypt*, 53-55.
[271] *Black Medea* 78.
[272] *Black Medea* 61, 81.
[273] *Gates of Egypt* 49.
[274] For examples of the contempt that is directed at Clarice by her son-in-law Ralph in Australia, and in verbal and physical violence by her main antagonist – her kidnapper-destroyer in Egypt, see, for example, *Gates of Egypt* 2, 36, 86. In *Gates of Egypt*, there are also traces of Ozymandias' cold sneer in Clarice's own slanging of the carpet-seller with whom she has sex and in the abuse with which the witnessing Arabic woman stings Clarice, but as we have seen there do not appear to be any dramatic consequences of that scene.

counters that contempt and its confinement by positing the desert as her landscape of her heart is not surprising. Stripped of dross by the wind, her desert appears as a place in which to take a deeper, wider breath.

Playwright Heiner Müller, as noted earlier, idealises the desired climactic explosion in his plays as a revolutionary crossing of boundaries – his choice of a trope of transgression is born of his experience within the riven German nation and its bordering of his life. In the next section, I examine how, by bringing onstage the landscape of her heart, the protagonist in *Black Medea* and in *Gates of Egypt* takes action to create the dramatic climax. Despite the polar difference in the methods by which each imagines a different world, neither Enoch's Medea nor Sewell's Clarice appears deterred by Derrida's unassailable logic that the text has no outside.[275] We shall look at how each of these women uses the transgressive power of her performing breath to blow away her antagonist's contempt *and* his landscape of annihilation – the metaphoric footing that supports his violent power and its ethos of derision for the commanded other from whom it seeks tribute. Whether "this insubstantial pageant" has the power in its breath to re-bubble a hegemonic text and change its future, rather than merely prophesy the demise of "the great globe itself" is a question we can only ask like a Barker prayer.[276] I suggest that the two playwrights studied here and their fellow artists who bring their transgressions to life on stage, perform their tasks in the belief that the commanding boundaries of the Western tablets may yet yield to a crossing.

In the tighter structure of Black Medea, contempt and its spawned violence sling like shot from the dominant white society to Jason and Medea, and back and forth between the pair. See, for example, 76-77. For Jason's compassionate understanding of the effect on his father of the white society's contempt, see 75.

[275] Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, ed. Leitch, 1825.

[276] The allusions to "this insubstantial pageant" and "the great globe itself" are, of course, to Prospero, William Shakespeare *The Tempest* 4.1.146-63.

Explosion

In Enoch's *Black Medea* and in Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, the action begins with the protagonist's separation from her place of belonging, a place of love, community and peace. Each play ends with a cataclysm whose action brings about the protagonist's death, while restoring her heart to her chosen earth. Explosion is inevitable because the remembering heart must fight against a world that denies the significance of its loss. Through shaping a landscape of annihilation that brings it face to face with a cruel antagonist who himself is captive to denial, the heart of the protagonist frees itself – *forces* itself – to tear itself open and release the explosion that is its pain.

As the action intensifies, words fail to reconcile. The woman's protestations of love fail to reconcile. The man's anger grows at her refusal to meet his demands. He feels her spirited defence of her heart's desire to love or belong as an invasion of the shrunken landscape that he has adopted as his. His physical response – an assault on her body – sends shock waves from the stage as if he were assaulting the self, its heart, its landscape and its memories of love.

With the climactic sundering of the heart, its intelligence comes to view. The protagonist sees who she is and why she matters to herself. What has been suppressed is magnified to such clarity in her open heart that when her antagonist, in his terror, sees who she is, he eliminates every option but her death.

In *Black Medea* there is a clear and direct sense of inevitability. Each contention pulls Jason and Medea closer to the horrifying "explosion" of the heart that is Medea's murder of her Child. Having made her catalytic departure from her Land for the apparent freedom of a "whitefella" life with Jason, she finds herself in a society where her husband cannot keep a job and they are cut from succour and community.[277] Medea feels the fear of the urbanites she encounters, whitefellas and blackfellas both, because her sense of belonging draws their eyes to stare but renders them unable to connect with her because they fear their own loss of history and place.[278] The house where Medea lives with her family has a footing, a phylogenesis, that

[277] See, for example, Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.
[278] As discussed earlier, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 73.

mines, codifies, romanticises or supplants her and her family's Indigenous being. Medea struggles to subvert that paradigm through love, but her heart cannot persuade Jason to make anywhere a place of belonging while ever he pours his libation to broken ground, broken love, that is his own chaotic footing.

In a scene captioned "Medea Prays", the protagonist sits with a sober cup of tea and makes a direct address to the spirit wind, during which she frames decisions that step directly to the climax.[279] The sound of the wind that whips through her house recalls her loss of family, community and country when she turned her back to let Jason and his fellow miners dig up the earth: "I have sinned against all that was sacred." Medea's relationship with the spirit wind is complex and her argument skitters with its gusts throughout the play, now longing for the wind to recognise her connection with the Land, now resentful of the incompatibility of her cultural obligations with the drunken white world whose wealth she and Jason have both tasted and in whose promises her man now drowns. In the following passage Medea does not blame the hollowing of Jason's love on the white world and its mining of her Land, but on the spirit wind she has earlier accused of making him "crazy".[280]

> MEDEA. A loveless bed, the madness, a man – a shell of everything he was capable of, that's what you've left me. You have taken any peace I dreamed possible. You have driven me away from him, I have known the riches of the whiteman's world but you have shown me poverty of the spirit.[281]

When Medea chides the spirit wind for taking away her peace, she speaks with intimacy and passion as if she were chiding a part of herself. The wind of her culture gives Medea what she loves, but neither she nor the wind can restore to Jason a ground where he can stand unashamed. Repeated failure does not stop Medea trying once more to offer Jason her cultural and spiritual belonging as spark and reminder of their love:

> MEDEA. I've known the spirits to come up through my feet and take my body when I'm dancing. That's who you fell in love with.[282]

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[279] Enoch, *Black Medea* 74.
[280] Enoch, *Black Medea* 63.
[281] Enoch, *Black Medea* 74.
[282] Enoch, *Black Medea* 73.

Love fails. Threats do not work. When she tells him he must honour his promise to love her or the spirits will come for him, he perceives her behaviour as madness: "There are no spirits. You're talking to your fucking self."[283] Medea will not be deterred from her conversation with the spirits who "have witnessed everything in this Land" and now witness her decision to act:

> MEDEA. I have no choice. In crime I have gained my home, in crime I must leave it.
>
> [. . .]
>
> Do not judge me, for tonight I'm coming home, an outcast.[284]

The crime that Medea is naming here as the inevitable consequence of her own treachery is not the murder of her Child (not yet), but a direct punishment of Jason for blasting her love. She takes up an iron pipe and steadies herself to strike him where he sleeps upon the table with his bottle of beer. She hesitates. The Child is there, holding the toy boat that is his patrimony, a synecdoche for his father's ancient namesake, the heroic captain of the Argo.[285] The boat is a reminder too of the journey (albeit by land) that his parents made, mad with love, from his mother's inland home to the coast, a journey that it were better had never been made, for it has torn the boy's future.[286]

While Medea whispers to the reluctant Child to go and pack his things for she will be taking him to the desert that he has never seen, Jason wakes.[287] In the presence of Medea's weapon and Jason's superior physical strength, the fight begins with words. Each presses the body's claim to the Child and, thereby, her or his claim to the self, the past and the future:

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[283] Enoch, *Black Medea* 73.
[284] Enoch, *Black Medea* 74.
[285] Euripides opens his *Medea* with the Nurse's use of the image of the Argo to recount the history of Jason and Medea. The Nurse laments that the pines had ever been felled for the oars, for without the boat Jason would not have fetched the golden fleece for Pelias, nor would Medea, mad with love for Jason, have persuaded Pelias' daughters to kill their father, so that she could sail with Jason and her children to live in exile in Corinth, but the Nurse cannot turn back the boat of time. *Medea* 17, lines 1-11.
[286] See, for example, Blackout Poem 1 where, among the fragments of action that express his parents' desire and despair, the Child receives a birthday present – the boat, Enoch, *Black Medea* 64.
[287] Enoch, *Black Medea* 76.

> MEDEA. I'm taking the boy home. Back to his people, so he can grow up with dignity.
>
> JASON. He's my flesh and blood. I'll teach him everything he needs to know.
>
> MEDEA. I carried him. I gave birth to him. I nursed him when he was sick. He suckled milk from my breast.[288]

The fight for the Child is a fight for the heart. To Medea's determination to take the boy, Jason responds, "Better for you to take my life, to rip out my heart." Medea begs Jason to restore their love: "Then give it to me … give me your heart."[289]

The Child interposes with a single syllable: "Mum." With that one-word adjudication, Jason has lost the argument. He uses his weightier body to disarm Medea, wrestle her to the table and force her to relinquish the boy to him. In the intensity of Jason's speech, the ellipses in the script become in performance, cavities into which Medea, speechless, heart-less, falls:

> JASON. I want you gone, do you understand…? You will not be taking the boy… Promise me… on everything you hold sacred, the boy will not leave this house…Promise me…promise me… If you take that fuckin' boy, I'll track you to the ends of the earth and beat your fuckin' brains out…Go to bed.[290]

In the rhythm of a boxing round, Jason's voice pounds his vernacular profanity into Medea, promising the death of all that she holds sacred. The triumph of his coda ("Go to bed") drains Medea of any power to reply, let alone renew her pleas for love. He wants her gone in the morning – without her Child. Her betrayal of her Land has returned in uncanny form. Jason has mined her sacred self of mettle and heart, integrity and continuity, fecundity and love, as his bulldozer, at her insistence, once mined her Land.

Left alone in the abyss, the nowhere, the slag heap, that she and her house have become, Medea spits curses Jason in his absence. She calls on the spirits to haunt him, tenfold and for eternity. It is a nihilistic, unrelenting curse for it turns Jason's own

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[288] Enoch, *Black Medea* 77.
[289] Enoch, *Black Medea* 77.
[290] Enoch, *Black Medea* 77.

love – his own heart – into his enemy. Everything he loves will hurt him and wherever love is inside him, whether for a woman or a son, that love will hurt him most of all:[291]

> MEDEA. [. . .].
> I want you alive, I want you to feel an emptiness for as long as you live. I want you to carry the torment to your deathbed, alone and unloved. I want you to regret your life and when you die I will separate your bones and speak your name, and force your spirit to wander aimless without a home.[292]

In a fiendish reversal of Isis' task as gleaner of Osiris' far-strewn body parts, Medea projects herself as the scatterer. As Medea herself feels strewn by her husband in a place of no belonging, so she will strew her husband's bones.[293] With her next utterance she names her task of annihilation of his belonging as "revenge", but her words burn with the ambiguous fire of hatred and love:

> MEDEA. My revenge is born, already born, for I have given birth.[294]

Medea's vengeance is procreated from the same place as her Child – from the self, the Land, the mother, the place of belonging. She has been birthed on the dreaming ground of her foremothers, ground that is self and otherness, Land and community, law and dance, song and spirit, life and death, now and the recurrence of now. Having joined whiteness in its mission of tearing that ground, Medea stands, complicit, on the ground of Jason's dream of his own annihilation, where the sounds of life and ocean and people are somewhere out of sight and out of reach. The anger in his father's eyes blocks the way back, but when Jason turns to face in the new direction, he can see his son looking for guidance, but can offer him nothing.[295]

The contrast with Medea's dream of her foremothers stuns.[296] As we have seen, Medea's women stretch to the horizon and colour the sand "dark". Medea's "dark" is a colour of love and smiling, law and language, a colour whose hair plays in the wind, a colour that reflects in Medea's own eyes, a colour as familiar and respected as her great grandmother's weathered skin, a colour that is not alone. In Jason's dream there is neither red of the desert sand, nor living colour of skin. Blackness has

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[291] Enoch, *Black Medea* 77-8.
[292] Enoch, *Black Medea* 78.
[293] For Medea's expression of her having given up her belonging to be with Jason, see Enoch, *Black Medea* 72.
[294] Enoch, *Black Medea* 78.
[295] For "Medea's Dream" see *Black Medea* 66-7. For "Jason's Dream" see 75.

become blankness, a thin and emptied space between high walls, without a view, where the horizon stretches colourless, absent of anything except the crying Child.

The design decision to make stage ground black slag builds into the space the dramatic tension of conflicted interpretations of blackness: warmth in Medea's dream, and loss in Jason's. On the Australian Aboriginal Flag, black is marked as life – the colour of people who walk on earth that is red and who paint their skin with ochre in the round yellow warmth of the sun.[297] In Jason's dream, black has been remade by the project of whiteness into an unwanted colour, a colour of the outsider, a colour that deems emptiness within.

Medea will have none of it. Medea is the colour of belonging, whose face people stare at in the street, but shy from knowing. Medea is the colour of art, whose paintings some will bring money to buy to own her belonging to hang on their wall. Medea is the colour of life, "gone mad with living in two worlds".[298] Medea is the colour of generation, whose journey from her Land took her Child from "his songs and dances".[299] Medea is the colour of desire, that a culture of chlorine and beer shrinks to a genital of abuse. Medea is the colour of Jason's jetsam, thrown from contact with her Child and then ordered to bed.

Jason's and Medea's rival landscapes collide like drifted continents. Medea, who has known joy and who has given birth to love is giving birth to revenge. Her passion cracks the heart and births the metamorphosis that will free their son from becoming his father.

Acts of love presage Medea's murder of her Child and her own consequent death. The Chorus visits Medea and the boy and tells of the funeral rites by which the Land reclaims the dead. Gently, the Chorus tells the silent boy that although his mother thought she could leave the Land behind as one leaves a footprint, that Land is always the place where he and his mother belong:

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[296] Enoch, *Black Medea* 66-7.
[297] "Australian Aboriginal Flag", designer Harold Thomas, proclaimed 14 July 1995, *Australian Government: Australia Celebrating Australians,* accessed 10 December 2012, <http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/symbols/otherflag.cfm>.
[298] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.
[299] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.

> CHORUS. [. . .] every time she walks on foreign soil that foot speaks to her telling her it has a memory of where it belonged. You're related to the sand dunes and the waterholes. You belong in your Land. The Land will always reclaim you.[300]

The Chorus then becomes the voice of Medea's own threnody, in which her heart sees the paradox of its response to annihilation: a wrath so great the heart must learn to stone its love to act upon the wrath, and a love so great and so threatened, only a great wrath can save it. William Blake is more succinct in his antithetical and passionate "Proverbs of Hell":

> The tygers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction.[301]

The mourning for Medea's impending death shifts the play's already much varied cadences from prose to verse, whose well-chosen words ordinary words paint in images Medea's pain:

> CHORUS. When my time comes burn me
> Take my bones and colour them red
> Wrap them in the bark of a tree
> And hang me where I can curse.
>
> When my time comes watch for me
> For I have learnt to stone my heart,
> Learnt to put aside my joy
> For some other life.[302]
>
> [. . .].
>
> When my time comes let it be known
> That I have loved.
> That I acted
> With the only strength I had.
>
> [. . .].

On the page the scene that follows is headed "Sacrifice." On stage, in un-rushed time that has no need of words, each tender touch with which Medea washes her Child and lays him down to sleep touches our skin. In the stillness of the Child falling asleep we know what will happen when time is woken up again. We watch the boy's

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[300] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.
[301] William Blake, "The Marriage of Heaven and Hell: Proverbs of Hell," *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York: Random House, 1953) 126.
[302] Enoch, *Black Medea* 79.

death, on stage, as it happens, not as a deed of bloody spectacle, but as a dreadful tearing of the heart, the boy's, Medea's, Jason's and our own.

Euripides, in the discipline of his time, does not bring Medea's murder of her children on stage. The words of the Chorus allow us to picture for ourselves the horror inside Medea's house, while on stage the Chorus makes visible and audible our own horrified, pathetic stasis:

> CHORUS. Shall we go in?
> I am sure we ought to save the children's lives.[303]

We hear the Children's screams for our help to escape their mother's sword and we imagine the tearing of their hearts, while in the voices of the Chorus we hear our own hearts banging at our inability to stop the cries or rally to the Children's aid. When the Children's voices are gone we know it is over. We are dumb with shock, but finding words where we cannot, the Euripidean Chorus castigates Medea for having taken lives born of her own body:

> CHORUS. Stone and iron you are, as you resolved to be.[304]

The Chorus reminds the audience of another killer of her own children, Ino, a precedent that spurs the Chorus to lament not just Medea's cruelty, but the transgressions of women as if the earth could witness no greater jeopardy, no greater cruelty, no greater sorrow than the crimes of women:

> CHORUS. What can be strange or terrible after this?
> O bed of women, full of passion and pain,
> What wickedness, what sorrow you have caused on the earth![305]

The rhetoric that Euripides scripts for his Chorus invites the audience to concur in a generalised condemnation of womankind for a wickedness that the Chorus hints is native to women's lust and labour – her "passion and pain". There is a caveat here regarding the lust: I do not know whether the salacious collective noun, "the *bed* of women [emphasis added]," accurately transposes the Euripidean source, or whether the "bed" has been sauced from the fever of the translator. It may be my own fever that sees "bed" as a euphemism for "wantonness". The ancient dramatist may be merely giving a chaste reminder to his audience of women's prone and peculiar

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[303] Euripides, *Medea* 56, lines 1274-5.
[304] Euripides, *Medea* 56, lines 1271-80.

powers of procreation. If so, that would explain Euripides' use of "pain" to delineate the nature of childbirth, but would not account for why women's "passion" has precedence as the strange and terrible cause of earthly "wickedness" and "sorrow".

In Enoch's *Black Medea*, the Chorus makes a different decision. As noted earlier, at the beginning of the play Enoch's Chorus invites the audience to be "witness, judge and jury".[306] By ceding the power of moral guardianship to audience the Chorus frees herself from the obligation to be provoked, as "good" neighbourly citizens ought, into a parade of self-righteous indignation. Unlike the ancient model, Enoch's Chorus neither passes judgement upon Medea, nor invites the audience to generalise from her trespass to an inherent iniquity of woman and her lasciviousness. Instead of pausing for the lesson in moral outrage, Enoch's script calls us to witness the intensity of Medea when Jason demands to know what she has done. Her reply, that leaves Jason speechless, curses the man and presents him with the body of their Child whom she has saved from becoming his father and whom she has revered with rites that culminate in her honouring him by burning down the house.[307] The landscape of annihilation has gone to ash.

In re-imagining the structure, content and import of Euripides' *Medea*, Enoch renews for our time the theme of woman's rebellion against man's betrayal by making a shift in the interpretation of that theme. Medea's utter sabotage of Jason's path to dominion over his family, which would have destroyed them all, shifts from being an act that Euripides' Chorus decodes as the literal "wickedness" of woman to one where the audience is invited to consider how "honour", that traditional virtue in the canon and fiat of man, might be differently viewed by a woman. As renowned theatre director Peter Hall attests, all art forms renew themselves both by questioning and challenging form, and by unnerving those who uphold accepted moral, ethical and political taboos:

> Theatre cannot help shocking because it is part of its need to challenge an audience to investigate the extremes of life. So Gloucester is blinded on stage. And Titus Andronicus cuts his hand off.[308]

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[305] Euripides, *Medea* 56-7, lines 1281-90 (story of Ino) and lines 1291-93 (the lines quoted).
[306] Enoch, *Black Medea* 65.
[307] Enoch, *Black Medea* 80.
[308] Peter Hall, *Exposed by the Mask: Form and Language in Drama*, (New York, N.Y.: Theatre Communications Group, 2000) 27.

With delight, Hall reminds us that the essence of theatre is "play":

> It is of course a pretence. We would not be moved if Titus really cut his hand off [original emphasis]. We would be horrified and the theatre would speedily be closed. We all know that we are playing a game of make believe. But the play has to be true. And the form has to encourage our objectivity.[309]

Delighting Hall for its gift of objectivity is the mask, a form which has been used in Greek theatre throughout its history and in all ancient drama "whether it be the American Indian rain dances or the epic story-tellings of the East that try to define the gods." Given ubiquity, longevity and flexibility of the mask, Hall refuses to concur with the modern world's argument that the mask is the recourse of primitive people too undeveloped or too emotionally naïve to create any drama other than a caricature of humanity. The mask, Hall writes, is a deliberate choice:

> I think it is in every case an attempt to know the unknowable, to experience the unspeakable and to enact the repulsive. The mask enables the audience to contemplate a passion at an intensity which goes beyond the moment of rejection.[310]

Through his study of language and form in the dramas of Shakespeare, Beckett and Pinter, with a significant nod in praise of Ibsen and Chekhov whose genius "pushed naturalism to such poetic extremes that it became almost as metaphorical as the classical theatre that preceded them", Hall argues that the mask in performance does not have to be literal. Only the imagination limits the metaphoric form the mask could take. It could be created through the dramatist's means of expression, from visual action to patterns of spoken text such as cadences, formal poetry, tropes, wit, silences and subtext. In opera, the form of the music creates the mask, with Mozart's work Hall's shining example.[311] Whatever its form, literal or metaphoric, the actor or singer needs the mask to transmit an emotion to the audience.[312] By giving the actors a restraint, the mask does not inhibit theatre, but curtails indulgence in feelings, thus freeing the actors to expose a specific rather than a generalised emotion. The mask allows the actor to bring the audience to an experience of an act so horrific, repulsive or unspeakable that we otherwise could not bear to look upon. Whether through a

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[309] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 27.
[310] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 25.
[311] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 39-136. For the passage quoted and Hall's discussion of Ibsen and Chekhov, see 88-89.
[312] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 25.

literal mask or its poetic form, the constraint allows the actor to conduct the emotion to the audience and open for their contemplation the unknowable depth and consequences of that emotion.[313]

Enoch's *Black Medea* advances Hall's fine tradition in which theatre needs to be a work of poetry if it is to be worth our attention. Hall does not confine poetry to its literary sense, but considers a play to be poetic when it uses theatre's vocabulary of "word, action, visual image and subtext" to craft metaphors rich enough to provoke the audience's imagination.[314] Enoch uses theatre's power "to encourage a metaphorical interpretation" (Hall) to create from the predicament of Medea and Jason a tense unpredictable clash between two unique individuals that resonates as a collision between two coeval landscapes, one of annihilation and the other of heart. Given Enoch's skill at playing with theatre's power to juxtapose past, present and future, his metaphor transposes with ease from space to time and becomes simultaneously the struggle for the ground beneath the feet and for the vision that shapes destiny. The philosophical, political and cultural struggle that is given metaphoric life in the actions of Medea and Jason is so compelling actors and audience are granted neither the time nor the need to wallow in sentiment or certitude.

A series of short scenes, each with a unique structure, takes the audience to the climax. The spirited intelligence of the Chorus expresses the action of memory through sharp specific details that make vividly present the betrayal of the Land.[315] The iteration of its ever-present rape slaps against the silent visual metaphor of the third "Blackout Poem" where the action of the performing bodies forms images of need, love, gift, cruelty and ruin. Remembered time will not allow itself to be lost. Its history comes awake in simple rituals that connect Medea to the ground. In one such ritual she lets the sand (the slag) run through her fingers while she offers Jason her silence in which to remember the body and the spirit that he fell in love with. In another, she creates a Sand Painting while the Chorus recites the lament for her looming death.[316] Medea's dream finds Land, time and heart again, only to see them lost in the contrapuntal shame of Jason's dream. Sand and slag become a field of

[313] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 15-27.
[314] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 110.
[315] Enoch, *Black Medea* 75-76.
[316] Enoch, *Black Medea* 73, 79.

war whose battles between belonging and nothingness burst into dialogue that fires in the forthright language of an unforgiving, unforgiveable, present. All voices are stilled by foreboding when Medea takes her Child by the hand to give him his solemn gentle goodbye bath.

This fluid structure conveys to the audience the haunting sensation that every desire and every action, every love and every loss that ever was, is simultaneously present and simultaneously a vortex that pulls the players to their explosive end. The play's poetic mask, inhabited by Indigenous' subtlety and spirit infused with Classical borrowings of portent and the freedom to curse, allows the actor playing Medea to fix our eyes on the murder that would otherwise repel. We experience what Hall imagines being generated at the ancient theatre at Epidaurus through "the governance of the mask", an "intense emotional heat [. . .] that tells us about grief" (original emphasis).[317] In Enoch's play, our contemplation of Medea's murder of her Child connects us with the experience of someone who suffers, someone whose heart and whose earth, is worthy of recognition, like our own.

In *Black Medea*, Enoch keeps his protagonist's collision with death in the land of terror whose history and present generates her pain, a land once unknown to Europeans who imagined it as *terra australis*.[318] In *Gates of Egypt,* as I shall argue, the thread of the drama is attenuated because although the origin of the protagonist's unease is the landscape of falsehood that is contemporary Australia, Sewell dispatches his protagonist's pain out of the country to a different hemisphere and a different landscape of falsehood. When Clarice's kidnappers drag her from the tomb of a star-gazing pharaoh and into a torture chamber modelled on modernity, the stage is set for an explosive encounter between the landscapes of heart and

[317] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 29.

[318] Forgive the terrible pun, but I could not let go of it once it arrived, for I saw relevance in the European map-makers' notions that the as yet unknown Great South Land would be a source not only of limitless wealth, but of territory upon which their own terror could be projected and alleviated. Manning Clark puts the origins of *terra australis* as early as Pythagoras. In his discussion of the motivations of the 16th century Spanish search for *terra australis*, Clark makes the same terrible pun, imputing to the Catholic Spaniards a "terror" lest they be beaten by a Calvinist power in their double quest for a land of riches and for souls they could save from heresy. C. M. H. Clark, *A History of Australia*, vol. 1, (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1962) 10, 13.
Projected terror, of course, has a way of falling heavily upon the subjugated. The bulldozer that drives Jason to disaster in *Black Medea* is heir to the ruthless and hungry daring of the European invaders.

annihilation, but the dramatic action has to accommodate the play's geographical and geopolitical looping between cause and consequence. The foundational cause of Clarice's pain is the "unreality" of her life in a sexist, racist and belligerent Australia that is participating in the war on Iraq, but the consequence of her action to leave that pain behind her, is her torture of Clarice by a self appointed Egyptian avenger.

Here is how that looping works. Clarice flees the racism, sexism and warmongering displayed by her sons-in-law in her own backyard, but she cannot flee the landscape of falsehood that took Australia to war on Iraq. In Egypt, a fanatical male Moslem and his handful of followers put into practice their own version of racism, sexism, and war's tripartite apotheosis – torture, rape and murder. Abu Abbas' speeches make clear to Clarice that he fashions his actions from crimes he perceives being carried out by the West against "the Arab world", such as the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib, the rape of Iraqi women, the bombing of Moslem wedding parties and the burning of children by phosphorous bombs.[319] His aggressive stance towards Clarice recalls the pugilism of her sons-in-law back in Australia. Clarice's kidnappers close the play's circle of cause and effect by performing upon her cruelties that appear as a nightmarish fulfilment of her family's and her nation's greatest dread – Islamic terrorism.

In short, the *foundational* causes of Clarice's pain are a long history of Australian aggression and falsehood, set in a wider tradition of its inherited Western values of empire, hooded in falsity. When Clarice arrives in Egypt, the pain suffered in the Middle East as a consequence of Western invasion morphs into the retributive shadow of Abu Abbas. It is Abu Abbas himself and not the West that becomes the *proximate* cause of Clarice's suffering. This separation of cause and consequence and the explanations that Abu Abbas has to keep giving for his behaviour delays the explosion and weakens its power. There is a further weakening of the chain of cause and consequence as a result of the complexity of Abu Abbas' double motive – as brigand, demanding of Clarice that she arrange a million dollars in ransom, and as political ideologue seeking to punish the Western infidel. Very soon into his first meeting with his hostage, Abu Abbas demands the money and when Clarice hesitates, has his henchman punch her face, who covers her in blood and forces her

[319] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 75, 83, 85.

to spit out her dislodged tooth.[320] When the (subtextual) tooth fairy does not immediately approach with the million dollars, Abu Abbas shifts his role to political avenger.

There are salient political reasons for Sewell to take Clarice to a death cave the Middle East to dispel her ignorance of injustice and inhumanity being committed in a war being fought in her name and in the name of the West's values of democracy and human rights. In the first scene between Abu Abbas and Clarice, the dramatic structure has the rhythm of a cricket match: Abu Abbas bowls his vivid accusations of atrocities at Clarice who bats each one away by asserting the exceptional goodness of Australian soldiers: "We don't do that!"[321] Clarice's indignant exclamations, whose subtext could be read as a belief that Australian soldiers are as unfailingly "good" at war as they would be at a game of cricket, would appear to contradict her earlier characterisation as having pacifist leanings.[322] Clarice has no specific knowledge that would enable her to engage with the substance of Abu Abbas' accusations, for her character has been created in what she herself earlier described as "blissful ignorance of what is happening in the real world."[323] Although Sewell creates the brief cricket match with skilful pace, there is still a sense that the dramatic explosion is being delayed while Abu Abbas bowls his political message at Clarice and the audience.

The drama tries to keep alive the crucial connection between the viciousness with which Abu Abbas treats Clarice and the root *cause* of his cruelty, the crimes of the West. Clarice does not, however, come face to face with any personal and specific experience of the crimes of which she is accused, but must be told them by her kidnapper Abu Abbas who himself is reporting remote experiences as if the only images he has are stolen from the shadows that fleet across his television screen. Onstage, the more vivid actions are Abu Abbas' mimetic cruelties. The unseen crimes are less vivid because the script confines him to a projection of them, as

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[320] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 72.
[321] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 76. The rhythm of this scene brings to mind the British Empire's veneration of warfare as cricket, as extolled in schoolboy rhyme by Sir Henry Newbolt (1862-1938). Newbolt writes a veneration, not of poetry, but of falsehood, in which he offers an English prototype of the "good Australia" that Rutherford exposes in *Gauche Intruder* as a concealment of aggression. It is a falsehood that Clarice is upholding in her responses to Abu Abbas. See Henry Newbolt, *Vitai Lampada* ("They Pass On The Torch of Life"), Brigham Young University, Harold B. Lee Library, accessed 12 December 2012 <http://lib.byu.edu/exhibits/wwi/influences/vitai.html>
[322] See, for example, Leanne's portrait of her mother Clarice, Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 63.

second-hand experiences, that must travel from voiced report to receptive mind. This is a technique used to extraordinary effect by the Chorus in Enoch's *Black Medea*, and, of course, by the Greeks and the Bard, but they transmit the experiences as if they were first-hand. Nothing Abu Abbas says in his truncated snaps of atrocities comes close to transmitting the anguish, the humility and the grief that Macduff conveys when told of the carnage inflicted on his family on the orders of Macbeth:

> MACDUFF. [. . .]. All my pretty ones?
> Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?
> What! All my pretty chickens and their dam
> At one fell swoop?
>
> MALCOLM. Dispute it like a man.
>
> MACDUFF. I shall do so:
> But I must also feel it as a man:
> I cannot but remember such things were,
> That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,
> And would not take their part? Sinful Macduff!
> They were all struck for thee. [. . .][324]

If Abu Abbas is wounded emotionally by his discovery of carnage inflicted on his people, his wounds do not speak. There is no doubt he uses his rage to turn himself into a mirror of his enemy by destroying the defenceless Clarice, a cowardice far removed from the action Malcolm urges upon Macduff when he says, "Dispute it like a man." In Abu Abbas' telling of the suffering of Arabic people of which he has been made cognizant, there is no poetic transformation, no metaphoric mask, in Peter Hall's sense, able to endow the character with the power to "feel it as a man". Without the metaphor, Abu Abbas can only transmit his hatred in *literal* form to his interlocutor on stage and, through her, to his audience. Without a metaphorical mask, the actor is required to pour the *feeling* into the words rather than allowing the metaphor to transmit the *emotion* to the imagination of the audience. Hall writes of the power given to an actor by the objectivity and distance that are gifts of the mask:

> The paradox is that drama deals with huge emotions; but if it displays them in a hugely emotional way, in indulgent terms, the audience is liable to reject them. they are unpleasant, unbelievable, even repulsive. To be acceptable on the stage, they must be <u>stage</u>-real – which means transformed, shaped and contained [original emphasis].[325]

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[323] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 30.
[324] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 4.3.216-24.
[325] Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 23-4.

Abu Abbas' words are as lurid and unmasked as Hollywood in their detail of the torture, but as vague as the generic shelf of the supermarket in their absence of any detail that could be felt as specific or personal:

> ABU ABBAS. That's why you hang men from hooks
> till their arms rip off -[326]

With her opponent thundering down the pitch at her with this truncated image of horror aimed at her, Clarice is repelled. She bats his gruesome attack away with a single word, "No!" In the light of Hall's understanding of the paradoxical power of the containment of emotion, I speculate that some in the audience may feel just like Clarice and want to bat Abu Abbas' aggression away. In such an act of apparent self-preservation, the spectators, like Clarice, may bat away any responsibility of themselves or their nation for the literal images being hurled at them and, moreover, be very irritated that they were expected to care. Simmonds cites a comment she overheard in the foyer after seeing the play:

> My daughter won't go to the theatre, just to be on the safe side.[327]

Simmonds is adamant that uncontained attack is the dominant mode in Sewell's work:

> *The Gates of Egypt* has all the Sewell hallmarks: sound, fury, hate, characters so one-dimensional they might have been run over by a steamroller; characters who shout mindlessly at one another yet are oblivious to the shouting.[328]

Although the shouting persists in other scenes, the cricket match between Abu Abbas and Clarice is a short one. As an experienced dramatist Sewell would know not to extend for too long a pattern where, each time the antagonist bowls his attack, the protagonist is too traumatised to do more than stiffen her bat against it, and remain in the safety of the crease without attempting to score any runs. For their next scene the dramatic structure changes to a rhythm that resembles the more deadly sport of boxing, where each character becomes active in battering the other, a structure that brings other problems, because the characters' disparate hefts, like their disparate ideals, create images that fix the character of Abu Abbas as a

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[326] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 76.
[327] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 1.
[328] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 2.

stereotype of Moslem aggression and Clarice as the martyred voice of goodness. Clarice has only the weapon of her heart, while Abu Abbas hits Clarice with the weight of his body, the steel of his knife and the brutality of his revenge.

Abu Abbas' brutal treatment of Clarice makes dramatic sense, if drama's basic rhythm is the body blow that produces a return attack. His first blow in his metaphoric boxing ring severs her finger and throws it, "bloody", to the floor, a metonym for the West's acts of torture which incited his fury.[329] This time, the attack on her body forces Clarice to take the offensive by reclaiming the space as her landscape of the heart. Galvanised by his own ferocity, which has brought Clarice to attend to him more closely, Abu Abbas matches her claims of the heart by asserting the virtue of vengeance: "The dead demand hate!"[330] The boxing match between heart and annihilation mounts the action to the explosion, which takes the form of Clarice's epiphanic realisation that the true release from hatred is not vengeance, but forgiveness.

The unarmed woman alone in her resistance to a tyranny that has the power to kill her and will do so has such honoured predecessors as Sophocles' Antigone, Griselda Gambaro's Girl, Ratna Sarumpaet's Marsinah and Liz Lochhead's Mary Queen of Scots.[331] Each of these women is the prisoner of a powerful, yet vulnerable state whose ruler or representative sees her as a danger to its core – the rationality and continuity of the law that upholds its power. Each of these women is held captive because she challenges a law or a principle that she sees as abhorrent, unjust, heretical or a distortion of the truth.

Unlike these women, Sewell's Clarice is not a prisoner of the state but of a man who has cast himself in the role of the state without its authority. He is a brigand, a hostage taker demanding a ransom, a person adrift, beyond the reach of the law. In the micro-state he creates in the cave, or ancient tomb, as Clarice perceives it, Abu Abbas is the law, for himself, his men and his hostage. Since whatever the man says

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[329] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 84.
[330] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 85.
[331] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Robert Fagles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1982). Griselda Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners*, trans. Marguerite Feitlowitz, *Information for Foreigners: Three Plays by Griselda Gambaro*, ed. Feitlowitz (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern UP, 1992) 72-4, 89-91. Ratna Sarumpaet, *Marsinah: A Song from the Underworld*, trans. Robyn Fallick, eds. Jacqueline Caddy and Kate McNamara, (Ainslie,

and does constitutes the voice and arm of the state, for it, and it alone, is him, there can be no gap between duty and self, tension between ideal and practice, no shadow of irony to fall between the person and his office. Within the cave created by his law of vengeance, Abu Abbas may do what he pleases because his men obey him without demur and the cave has no outside, except in Clarice's imagination, for Abu Abbas frames his hatred, the principle tenet of his law, as essential and universal. Within the cave, the hate-racked man behaves as if his terrorist actions are righteous and necessary, but at the same time that man speaks and commands as if he were himself Islam outraged, the embodiment of its principles, the carrier of its pain, the teacher of its lessons, the custodian of its prisoner and the executor of its sentence.

Because Abu Abbas' actions identify the cave of the terrorist with the civilisation of Islam, there is serious risk that the viciousness, racism and sexism that he demonstrates onstage could impute to an audience that the Islam with which the terrorist identifies is inherently vicious and vengeful. Abu Abbas makes clear that he is punishing Clarice for Western acts of terror, acts that are far worse in many cases than those he inflicts on her, but those unseen crimes of the West lack the onstage immediacy of the torture and insult inflicted on Clarice. Abu Abbas creates an image of an Arabic man and his cohort verbally and physically belting their pain into a middle-aged unarmed white woman, an image that risks reinstating the deplorable Western stereotyping of the Moslem as a terrorist at war with our civilisation, and his religion as a tool for the denigration, rape and murder of our women.

The stereotyping slows the path of the drama to its climax. One of the difficulties of a stereotype is that it lacks the light and shade of a multiplicity of emotions and motives inherent in a human being. There is a subtlety and inherent, for example, in Socrates' Creon, who despairs at the anarchy and feminism he sees promulgated by Antigone.[332] The Guide in Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners* takes his peripatetic audience to the experience of irony, performed by him as embarrassment and concern, when he brings them to the chamber where they discover the Girl, seated alone, drenched and thirsty from her unseen torture at the hands of the authoritarian state which employs the Guide.[333]

A.C.T.: Aberrant Genotype Press, 1998). Liz Lochhead, *Mary Queen of Scots Got Her Head Chopped Off*, Earlier version, Penguin, 1987, (London: Nick Hern, 2009).

[332] Sophocles, *Antigone* 94, lines 751-761.

[333] Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners* 89.

In *Gates of Egypt*, if Abu Abbas has been wounded by his suffering, or is being wounded by the magnitude and horror of the task that he (as the state within its cave) has set himself (the man beholden only to the law he has devised) the only scar is his aggression, devoid of dilemmas. To compensate for the lack of subtlety or irony in Abu Abbas' actions, Sewell has apparently decided, consciously or unconsciously, to keep exaggerating the man's cruelties, for if the excesses did not grow ever more excessive, the drama that is short on subtlety and irony would die too soon.

It is hard to see how the following tirade, where Abu Abbas reiterates his evident loathing of women, could contribute to the dramatic action, because it comes at the end of a scene where no space is given for Clarice to react or reply:

> ABU ABBAS. I hate you; I hate looking on you; I hate the smell of you; I hate your sick, womanly figure and your clothes and your manners; for me, you are not even a human being, you are a disease, a sickness I have been given the honour and the opportunity to wipe out; I hate the thought of you; I hate you.[334]

Abu Abbas is already at risk of being received as a portrait of imputed Islamic viciousness. His punishing of Clarice as a body of vileness compounds not only the character's viciousness, but the folly and cruelty of the stereotype, for Abu Abbas' words proclaim viciousness to be an obligatory and honourable response to the diseased nature of woman. Simmonds expresses serious concern that *Gates of Egypt* with its simplistic racist and sexist portrayals is being promoted for study in schools, with Belvoir Street Theatre providing teachers' notes, from which Simmonds quotes the following extract:

> On occasion, some characters speak racist slurs against American Jews and some characters speak racist slurs against Arabs. You may wish to explore with your students the reason why unsavoury attitudes are sometimes represented on stage. These are not gratuitous slurs, but rather a conscious choice by the playwright in the characterisation of certain characters. Such choices play a part in the communication of the central ideas of the play. For example: the futility of hate and the need to learn to love.[335]

After wryly noting that the guide for teachers fails to mention the play's slurs against women, Simmonds writes of the potentially dangerous impact of Sewell's staging of

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[334] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 86.
[335] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 2.

images that foster racist and sexist stereotypes, particularly in a work where the complex context is ill-explored:

> Abu Abbas, the Arab terrorist who captures Clarice, knocks out a tooth, cuts off a finger and finally kills her, would be a cartoon comedy character if not so well played by Hazem Shammas. His blazing-eyed conviction and strength in portraying a man whose very genes are angry at the West are so powerful that it would take a very mature school student to understand he represents the complexity, history, personal and political conflict, the millions of dead and the impossibility of reconciliation that is the current state of Islam v West.[336]

Sewell presents the character of Clarice as a messenger of love with the power to triumph over hatred. Yet his play represents Abu Abbas as a hate-filled worshipper of his own cruelty. In *The Great War for Civilisation*, Robert Fisk presents an example of the mirroring by which hatred and its pain are multiplied and their ricocheting horror projected to infinity. Here is Fisk's description of America's treatment of its captives from the Arabic world in response to the terror attacks upon its body politic on 11 September 2001:

> Prisoners shackled, hooded, sedated. Taken to a remote corner of the world where they may be executed, where the laws of human rights are suspended. It took time to realise that Guantanamo was a mirror of the treatment that every Middle East dictatorship meted out to its opponents. Shackled, hooded, threatened with death by 'courts' that would give no leeway to defence or innocence: this was how every Arab secret police force dealt with enemies of the regime. This was [. . .] the 'justice' that Iran's hanging judges bestowed upon their enemies, what Iraq's insurgents would do with their captives.[337]

In the (non-literal) boxing ring that Sewell creates on stage in *Gates of Egypt* as the climax approaches, the drama, like that of the literal boxing ring, demands of its fighters and their onlookers a polarity of purpose, an inseparable division between ourselves, the good clean and loving West, being pressed to the ropes with only our love to defend us, and the other, the Moslem who fights with dirty methods steeped in hatred. The spoken text in the play tries urgently and desperately to subvert the visual polarity it creates of good Clarice and bad Abu Abbas by calling upon Abu Abbas to use the truth of the tortures the West commits as one of his weapons. An

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[336] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 3.
[337] Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilisation: The Conquest of the Middle East*, (London: Fourth Estate, 2005) 1100.

informed audience would not doubt the truth of the tortures that Abu Abbas represents to Clarice.

In “Lost in the Forever War”, for example, a compendium of investigative and analytic articles on the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, written between 2001 and 2009, Mark Danner exposes to scrutiny the U.S. Army’s use of torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay.[338] In an extended essay, “Abu Ghraib: Hidden in Plain Sight,” 2004, Danner describes how President George W. Bush facilitated the coming of these abuses by his controversial decision of February 7, 2002 to withhold from prisoners who were al Qaeda or Taliban fighters from Afghanistan the limitations on torture enshrined in the Geneva Convention of 1949. Legal justification for this withdrawal of human rights was provided by White House Counsel Alberto Gonzales who argued that “the war against terrorism is a new kind of war.”[339] Bush overrode objections from his own military and civilian personnel who were “arguing, prophetically, that giving legal validation to torture ‘would undermine the United States military culture, which is based on a strict adherence to the law of war.”[340] Writing in January, 2005, on the eve of the U.S. Senate’s confirmation of Alberto Gonzales as attorney-general, Danner argues that the appointment, (which was indeed to take place), would give legitimacy to the path upon which the Bush administration set the country:

> [It is] a path that has transformed the United States from a country that condemned torture and forbade its use to one that practices torture routinely. Through a process of definition largely overseen by Mr. Gonzales himself, a practice that was once a clear and abhorrent violation of the law has become in effect the law of the land.[341]

I realise like a thunderclap that Sewell’s creation of Abu Abbas as his own law of self-righteousness, which leaves the character free to torture a random captive weaker than himself within a cave which seals itself from any protections of human

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[338] Mark Danner, "Lost in the Forever War," 2001-2009, *Stripping Bare the Body: Politics Violence War* (Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc., an imprint of Schwartz Media Pty Ltd, 2009) 363-544.

[339] Danner, “Abu Ghraib: Hidden in Plain Sight,” in "Lost in the Forever War," 405-7. Original publication, *New York Review of Books*, October 7, 2004. Danner cites Alberto R. Gonzales, Memorandum for the President, January 25, 2002, included in Danner, *Torture and Truth: America Abu Ghraib and the War on Terror.* New York: New York Review Books, 2004, 83-87.

[340] Danner, “Abu Ghraib: Hidden in Plain Sight,” in "Lost in the Forever War" 406. Danner cites James R. Schlesinger, Harold Brown, Tillie K. Fowler and General Charles A. Horner (USAF-Ret.), *Final Report of the Independent Panel in Review DoD Detention Operations (The Schlesinger Report)*, August 2004, 34.

rights that might descend from outside to threaten its command, is a mirroring of the actions of then U.S. President George W. Bush. At Sewell's time of writing Bush was presiding over his own law of self-righteousness that buried humanity at Abu Ghraib. Sewell put on paper in his programme notes, his condemnations of the West's use of torture and its war on Iraq.[342]

In *Gates of Egypt*, which is of course a play, no one is actually hurt, but it is the character Clarice who suffers. The image most readily remembered by an audience is likely to be the one that is most vivid in performance – after having been raped offstage, an event marked onstage by the sound of "a blood-curdling scream", Clarice reappears, "suddenly standing there covered in blood".[343] Perhaps because Clarice is a woman, her suffering more readily becomes a weapon in a righteous war than the suffering of a man. If that is so, perhaps Sewell saw her female vulnerability to rape, a terrifying and seemingly atavistic symbol of the denigration of one human being by another, as the perfect choice for the expression of the greatest possible suffering. Although the Biblical Christ is not raped, his body is invaded by the phallic spear to the side and the nails that pin him to the cross. The penetrated suffering of Christ and his lack of masculine retaliation, make him a feminised figure. The greater the suffering of the feminised figure, the greater the power of the sacrifice. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the power of its author, who can put into the mouth of the sacrificial victim the resounding expression of longed for redemption in the form of a millennium of love beyond the earthly frame of the drama. I have fallen out of love with Sewell's play.

Simmonds points to the irony of the misogyny evident in the action in Sewell's work:

> Female characters in Sewell plays are often denigrated, shouted at, abused and generally treated in ways that reasonable people might think misogynist - thus demonstrating the urgent need to understand the futility of hate and the need to learn to love.[344]

The message of love Clarice delivers in her dialogue has no effect on her torturers whose message of hatred is accorded greater dramatic power than hers.

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[341] Danner, "We Are All Torturers Now," in "Lost in the Forever War" 416. Original publication, *New York Review of Books*, January 6, 2005.
[342] See Sewell, "Writer's Note" n. pag.
[343] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 103.
[344] Simmonds, rev. of *Gates of Egypt* 3.

Gates of Egypt, it would seem, is condemned by its own hand on political and dramatic grounds. Politically, the verbal message it conveys of the West's outrages against Islam morphs onstage into the performing body of an anti-Semitic, anti-Western, women-hating Islamic terrorist, whose portrait is so hyperbolic and provocative it risks contributing to the atmosphere of racist and sexist hatred that the play purports to challenge. Dramatically, the script flounders. It tries to convey verbally two moral messages – one, in the voice of Clarice, that the answer is love, and the other, in the voice of Abu Abbas, that the West directs war, terror and atrocity at the people of the Middle East. That message has to fight against the play's generation of the image of a vicious Islamic terrorist's effort to destroy an ignorant Western civilian, while the Western atrocities directed at Islam remain unseen. Lest the action and the audience grow weary from the repetition of Abu Abbas' accusations and Clarice's insistence on love, the script exacerbates the problem of the stereotype by relying upon Abu Abbas' onstage violence to advance the action.

With the play condemned, and its haunting of me gone, I now try to understand precisely what it was that has been haunting me so powerfully since I saw the *Gates of Egypt* in 2007. I began this investigation by seeking to understand how Clarice's heart uses love as the power with which it fights to wrest control of the drama away from a paradigm of war. When Lynette Curran performed the role on stage I felt her heart tear itself open to reveal its desire to cross the boundary between self and other. Now, when I have come to the end of this investigation, I see in my original notes on the play that I had been projecting upon it my own desire for a contemporary political theatre that would not express the rationalised perfectibility of one paradigm or one human over another, but would use the fire I saw in Sewell's writing to illuminate possibilities for uncovering truths hidden by paradigms of certainty, including paradigms where power conceals its nakedness behind a righteousness of its own race, gender, class or belief.

Let me show you some of the notes I made early in this project, where I thought I was investigating how, as *Gates of Egypt* moves to its climax, the heart of Clarice crosses the boundary between self and other and in so doing replaces hatred's landscape of annihilation with the possibility of negotiation with love:

> The alienation of Clarice's heart from the warmongering, sexism and racism evident in her own home is a choice she makes, a choice

> performed as a soul-deep disquiet with life in Australia. Only through her encounter with the world of the other and his magnified mirror of the hatred she thought she had left behind does Clarice realise that her life-long embrace of that familiar "good" landscape of Australia makes her complicit in its insular "vanity" and "conceit".[345]

[continued]

> As her kidnappers determine to kill her, Clarice changes their torture chamber to mythological space: the "Nowhere" to which they have brought her becomes "a place where they bury kings."[346] For the men it is a cave, but for Clarice it is "a place of trial" where the heart is weighed in the presence of "ancient gods".[347] On Clarice's ground of the heart, shadow and reality conjoin in the impossible task of convincing her torturer and rapist to relinquish revenge:
>
> CLARICE. I know who you are, and what I want to tell you is I love you.
>
> [. . .]
>
> ABU ABBAS. You don't love me; I stole your love; I pissed on your love.
>
> CLARICE. And that I forgive you.
>
> [. . .]
>
> ABU ABBAS. What gives you the right to forgive me?[348]

The belief in Clarice's heart, evident in the above dialogue, that love transcends cruelty may, through the very impossibility of its challenge to hatred, haunt the imagination of its audience as it haunted mine. The notes that I made earlier seem naïve now. My study of the script has yielded no evidence, whether in dialogue, action and image, or in any performed irony arising from paradigmatic elements in performance, that there is a crossing of the boundary between hatred and love, self and other, or that there is any permeability in the boundary within which Abu Abbas nurtures his revenge. In my desire for the play to continue to haunt me, I kept wanting to find in Clarice's task and mirror of that of Sophocles' Antigone. Antigone's death, unlike that of Sewell's Clarice, does not free her murderer from responsibility for the cruelty he has done to her, as evinced by Creon's cry of self-abhorrent misery:

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[345] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 107.
[346] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 103.
[347] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 103.
[348] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 105.

CREON. And the guilt is all mine
[. . .].
Take me away [. . .].
[. . .] I'm no-one. Nothing."[349]

Antigone's speeches convince Creon of nothing, but her *act* of love, her refusal to let Creon's threat of a death sentence deter her from honouring in burial the body of her brother Polynices, forces Creon to recognise that he stands upon the landscape of annihilation he has created. Creon's heart explodes. Its tatters create another image – that of the pain and the emptiness he has made of heart and self ("I'm no-one. Nothing"). The great endurance of *Antigone* through millennia may be because stage space is haunted not only by the great love that tyranny thwarts, but by the pain of the tyrant when love forces him to recognise the self and the other he has destroyed.

I realise now that in focusing on what I had experienced as the haunting action of Clarice's heart, I had not seen that there is no outcome for her torturer. It is easy to overlook what one does not want to see.

Take, for example, the question which Abu Abbas puts to Clarice in the dialogue quoted above: "What gives you the right to forgive me?" In reply, Clarice evokes the ancient power of love, enshrined in the pharaoh's tomb with its depiction of stars and its mythology of transformation through death. What concerns me now, however, is that I did not take sufficient account either of the manner in which Abu Abbas responds to Clarice or of the images created onstage by his performing body and the belligerence of his scripted dialogue.

In asking Clarice by what "right" she is forgiving him, Abu Abbas implies that forgiveness is not an unconditional gift, but a relationship codified by authority, whether that of a deity, statute, or custom. His question, which in the context of his other physical and verbal cruelties, is delivered with aggression, is a demand rather than a search for understanding. He needs to know whether her gift of forgiveness comes encumbered with a reciprocal obligation which might thwart his desire to carve into her body his vengeance for the West's carving of the boundaries of his world. Clarice's warning that his heart will be judged makes no impression, for he,

[349] Sophocles, *Antigone*, 126-7, lines 1441-46.

like the President of the United States, has made certain, within the cave of his law, that he will not be brought to justice. As Bush put it, “We'll never go on trial.”[350]

Not long before her kidnapping, when she was educating her fellow tourists in Arendt’s finding “that the Nazi death camps weren't manned by maniacs and perverts taking a personal pleasure in the killing,” Clarice was not being prescient. There is nothing in the script that hints she knew she would encounter Abu Abbas and his version of a fascist death camp.[351] Abu Abbas’ behaviour appears to reveal the opposite of Arendt’s message that Clarice cited, for his anger at Westerners for their torture of their Arabic prisoners unleashes an avenging pleasure that thrives on causing the maximum possible pain to Clarice, as is evident in the following exchange, where he scoffs at her denial of Western atrocities:

> ABU ABBAS. That's why you hold men's heads under water till they -
>
> CLARICE. What are you doing to me?!
>
> ABU ABBAS. To you? To you??!! We haven't even started doing things to you!

If, like the “ordinary” men who lived a “sober” life with their family before going to work at the Nazi death camp, Abu Abbas lives as an ordinary man beyond the walls of his cave, the audience is not brought to witness whatever disjunction between perversion and normality such ordinariness (in Arendt’s sense) might express. We only see the actions of someone caught in a hegemony of rival exclusions where the imperative that drives his action is perverse. To prove his merit, his righteousness, he must hold fast to whatever fragment of emotion he can snatch from his enemy, for the enemy is the canvas upon which he proves his own victimhood:

> ABU ABBAS. [. . .] you will lose your life surely and slowly because I have the time and I have the patience and yes, you're right, I hate you [. . .].[352]

In the audience at Sewell’s play in 2007, I wanted the world to be different. I wanted everybody to be haunted by Clarice’s message, because in delivering that message she comes to throw a light on her own self and see herself as a complex mixture of love and hatred:

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[350] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 106.
[351] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 42.
[352] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 86.

> CLARICE. We don't have to be one another's killers locked here in this place despising one another – We can make one another whole again – Look there behind you – can't you see the light?[353]

In this speech, Clarice does not lock her vision of "light" in the cave of an exclusive deity or political system, but grounds it in an ancient morality that allows her to weigh her own heart and recognise within herself her own potential to be the killer of Abu Abbas. She consciously counters that potential by recognising the humanity of the man who is going to kill her, and offering him a negotiation of forgiveness and trust.

In *Gates of Egypt* Abu Abbas rejects Clarice's plea that mutual forgiveness would "release" them both. Where she sees "light", he insists "there's only darkness". The script as a whole takes a different path from the forgiveness Clarice proclaims. By concentrating light in one character and darkness in another, the script makes polar opposite images of good and evil, even as its protagonist seeks a verbal negotiation across the boundaries between the two. It is a tension between the head-driven script and the heart-driven protagonist that persists until Clarice's final moment.

Abu Abbas' response to Clarice's act of forgiveness is to declare, "You're mad."[354] These are his final words to her, indeed his final words of the play. His choice of insult to throw at her reinforces his certainty that his victim is beyond the reach of reason, beyond the reach even of his hatred and must therefore, like the "American Jew" for which she is his symbol, be made to die.

Didascalia direct the figures of the gods that Clarice has been seeing flickering in the shadows to come into clearer view, "revealed to be the people of the play, watching as the drama reaches its climax…"[355] Geography, politics, time and mortality are set aside. All are there to hear Clarice's epiphany:

> CLARICE. I love you.[356]

The lights change. Clarice's kidnapper and his gang disappear without another word, though the sound of their blade being sharpened to kill her grows louder. In a state described in didascalia as "radiant and ethereal", as if boundaries between life and death have vanished, Clarice delivers her final monologue. She offers herself for

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[353] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 106.
[354] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 107.
[355] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 107.
[356] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 107.

judgment and reveals that her torture has led her to an understanding of her guilt, "for being in this world and doing nothing".[357]

Her torture elicited from her a flood of apologies to Abu Abbas for the sins of the West which he laid open to her by imagining himself as the one who suffers:

> ABU ABBAS. I'm the slum dweller in La Paz, the child prostitute in Lebanon; I'm the Palestinian mother watching her olive trees being pulled out in Gaza; I'm the naked Iraqui cowering in front of a barking, slavering dog –
>
> CLARICE. I'm sorry.[358]

Now, alone with herself and eternity, she names her sins as indifference to the suffering of others and silence in the face of injustice, but her "gravest crime", the one that caused the greatest hurt to herself and those around her, was her failure to shake herself free of the mundane:

> CLARICE. [. . .] I was stuck in my chrysalis half in and half out, pinned there, neither butterfly nor grub, struggling, struggling toward the light; struggling toward a name I would never know till I abandoned my fear and opened myself to its terror and there in the temple and tomb of the world find all that was true as it came flooding in, flooding through me in all its beauty and majesty, flooding through me in all its squalor and horror, the world and the storm of the world tumbling through me, boiling inside me, dissolving me in its torrent and its fury - Love, love for all things, love! - PLEASE GOD GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO LOVE [original emphasis]![359]

Clarice's confession, which in performance offered an experience of the heart's flux in a world of "beauty" and "horror", now seems on the cold, hard page to have lost immediacy, for its evocation of the world relies on abstractions and generalisations, couched in the past tense. In Clarice's closing utterance, her ground of discovery shifts away from polytheism and the negotiation with otherness required if Isis is to re-member self and other. She appeals instead to a personal God from whom rescue to sought, not in the form of heart, or of forgiveness, but of *will*: "[. . .] GIVE ME THE STRENGTH TO LOVE [original emphasis]!" Clarice's seemingly self-absorbed speech and its plea to an almighty power conveys a different conception of strength from the understanding of forgiveness as a mutual exchange that Mandela carries

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[357] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 108.
[358] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 91.
[359] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 108.

with himself out of his prison, a release that can only be real if it is shared with others.

In the scene I have described as a metaphoric boxing match, where Clarice tests the strength of love against hatred, there is one exchange of verbal blows between Abu Abbas and Clarice to which I originally paid scant attention. I return to that exchange now, because Clarice's words reveal her perception (at least in her moment of utterance) that the horrors perpetrated upon Abu Abbas' people by the West are not her fault, or the fault of her people, but the fault of people like him:

> ABU ABBAS. [. . .]. Why are these things happening? Why are infant children being burnt alive by phosphorous bombs? You tell me why.
>
> CLARICE. Because people like you won't give up their hate.[360]

Although Clarice's outsourcing of blame for terror and war from West to East is clearly negated by the apologies and confessions and professions of love that, as has been noted, will later pour from her in response to Abu Abbas' blows and the transformation that comes to her, my reading of the play as a metaphor for the heart's ability to bring a landscape of peace to supplant a landscape of annihilation begins to crumble in disarray. Clarice's assertion that terror and war are being committed by the West "Because people like you won't give up their hate," reinforces the landscape of annihilation. It shifts the blame from itself and its own pure landscape to the other. In the context of the exchange of dialogue between her and Abu Abbas, Clarice's remark begs to be performed as a sting – a dart to slice at her opponent. At the same time, her riposte denies the images of pain that Abu Abbas' has been hurling at her. Her subtext is a desire to exonerate the self and to wound and enrage the other.

In Clarice's subsequent action, after her torture, the blows bring her to ask forgiveness for her ignorance, but I can find no evidence of the inner torment that Medea suffers in Enoch's play when she wounds her Child, her husband and herself. I turn now to my closing assessment of *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea*.

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[360] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 85.

Question mark

In both Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, an act of sacrificial death breaks the bounds of ordinary sense.

When Enoch's Black Medea kills the beloved Child of her own and Jason's desire she performs a ritual of refusal and transformation. She withdraws consent from the worsening violence and destruction of identity that is wrecking Jason and she transforms the stage from white Australia's abjected and isolated domestic space into the sacred space of the Land. Her action frees her son from the annihilation of the heart that has been inflicted on his father and his father before him in the wake of the invasion of his community and his own skin by the mores of whiteness and its eschewal of otherness.[361]

In the play's brief resolution, Medea's betrayal faces her in the form of a self-destructive violent Jason. Her heart honours her son, curses Jason, accepts her grief and welcomes the knowledge that she has his grief as company. She returns to the desert, to her home, where the Chorus describes her walking across the sand alone, in a poetic language whose rhythm and attention to detail rivet the heart:

> CHORUS. [. . .] She walks, her feet are stained red. She's barely alive, one breast hangs out abandoned. She holds a package close to her … a broken boat. She doesn't cry, she's cried enough. Her lips are cracked, her dark skin blistered. [. . .].
>
> She whispers as she walks, singing up the desert. The sand stretches out in all directions. . . She sings up the wind . . . and she is no more."[362]

Medea's sacrifice of her Child has nothing in common with Agamemnon's bargain with the gods that makes the murder of his daughter into a ransom for the wind that will take his fleet to Troy, "To help a war fought for a faithless wife".[363] Medea does bargain her son's life with anything or anyone. Nor does Medea raise her hand to kill her Child as Abraham is ready to do to Isaac in Rembrandt's painting, *Abraham's*

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[361] Enoch, *Black Medea* 78-81.
[362] Enoch, *Black Medea* 80-1.
[363] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, trans. Philip Vellacott, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, eds. Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1969 [1956]) 218-9, line 31.

Sacrifice.[364] Medea is not obeying an order from the God who tests Abraham by asking him to take his only son Isaac and make him into “a burnt offering”.[365] Fortunately, as Rembrandt depicts, at the moment when Abraham pressed his hand upon Isaac’s face and mouth, and raised the knife with the other, “the angel of the Lord called to him from heaven” and told him to forebear.[366] The obedient Abraham and his son, who must have been terrified by his father’s transformation of love into its opposite message of hatred in the form of the approaching knife, is duly rewarded by God.[367] I am indebted to Alice Miller’s study of the silencing of the truth of the child’s experience. Her book, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware*, has as its cover the detail of the smothering hand of Abraham over the boy’s face.

In Enoch’s play, Medea’s sacrifice of her Child has nothing to do with the Western canon of the sacrifice (or mock-sacrifice) of children as a pay-back to a god or gods who will reward the punitive father with power, obedience and the denial of truth. In her final speech whose cadences, with great irony, echo those of *Genesis*, Enoch’s Medea tells the gob-smacked Jason that she has done what she has done because her experience and the experience of her child is her and his own truth, and perhaps, were he to listen, it could be Jason’s too:

> MEDEA. Whatever my hell, I will sleep pleased in the knowledge that my grief has yours as company. Wherever you go, bear witness that there are no gods.

There is no *deus ex machina*, no Apollonian chariot to land on the roof, as there is for Euripides’ Medea.[368] *Black Medea* ends in a movement from dis-order to re-membering. The grief-stricken protagonist *disappears and becomes the wind*.[369] Medea and the earth, her Land, re-member each other.

The sacrifice that Enoch’s Medea carries out is not that of the army general calling young men to die in war, but a refusal of conquest and its debt. Medea’s sacrifice is a

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[364] Rembrandt painted more than one version of the Abraham and Isaac story, including *Abraham’s Sacrifice*, 1636, Alte Pinakothek, Munich, accessed 20 December 2012, <http://www.hermitagemuseum.org/html_En/04/2004/hm4_1_80.html>.
[365] *Genesis* 22.2. *The Holy Bible*, Revised Standard Version. (New York, N. Y.: Collins, 1952).
[366] *Genesis* 22.10-12.
[367] *Genesis* 22.15-18. I am indebted to Alice Miller’s study of the silencing of the truth of the child’s experience, Alice Miller, *Thou Shalt Not Be Aware: Society's Betrayal of the Child*, 1981, trans. Hildegarde Hannum and Hunter Hannum, (London: Pluto Press, 1985).
[368] Euripides, *Medea* 58, lines 1317-8, 61.
[369] Stage direction, Enoch, *Black Medea* 81.

refusal to pay her son as ransom for the right to live in the conqueror's landscape of annihilation. Her sacrifice of her son and herself is an act of vengeance against Jason, but it is not an act of punishment and silencing of her son, as is Abraham's lifting of the knife against his son. On a personal level, Medea's sacrifice of their son is indeed punishment for Jason for his complicity in his own conquest, but on a mythic level the sacrifice is not punishment, or ransom, or reward to the gods for their favour, but rupture. Medea's sacrifice is a refusal to live herself, or to allow her boy to life in obligatory peonage in a state of war within her home, and a state of conquest when she or her family walk out into the street. The heart breaks itself to allow the pattern of annihilation to be seen. The breaking of Medea's heart ruptures the suburban geography and changes what is reflected in its mirror. Instead of empty stage, instead of *terra nullius*, Medea's sacrifice allows the heart to become visible again. Its truth is made present again. It occupies the forcibly emptied stage with its own unacknowledged curse: a bulldozed earth upon which satisfaction is feigned through perpetual re-enactments of the banishment of otherness. The howling curse repopulates the empty stage with a truth that has not been allowed to speak. The new landscape allows Enoch to write in his programme notes that "the death of Medea's child is the metaphoric death of the 'boy' I was and marks the moment I time that I chose to become the man I strive to be."[370]

I have spent much time discussing the images of annihilation created in Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* and I have confessed that the play's creation of the heart no longer haunts me. I cannot let the condemnation stand, however, without recalling other scenes from the play, ones set in Australia, where Clarice's message of love finds resonance for her daughter. While Clarice pleads with her kidnapper to enter a world of love, Leanne rails at the far away kidnapper and, close at hand, at her husband, her brother-in-law, herself and the "bloody country for being so bloody complacent while the whole bloody world goes to the shit around us and all we can bloody well ask is what's on the other bloody channel; yes, I'm angry.[371]

When Ralph's response is to recommend minding ones own business, followed by asserting his right to the house if she leaves him, Leanne repudiates the material world ("it's just stuff"):

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[370] Enoch, "Hell Hath No Fury" n. pag.
[371] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 80.

> LEANNE. But love brings everything to life, and not just love, Ralph; love of another human being – Love, Ralph - [372]

When Leanne suggests to her uncomprehending sister Cynthia that their mother was right when she behaved as if her life and her family in Australia were not real:

> [. . .] and we're not real; [. . .] we're all sort of *replaceable* to one another because none of us even knows who the other ones are because we never cared enough to ask, and if we did ask, we'd know how much pain there was in the world.[373] (88)

Leanne's understanding of the irreplaceability of the individual self has a depth that I wish had been enacted by the drama, rather than told to us as a lesson. Leanne makes it clear that Clarice is driven by her heart:

> LEANNE. [. . .] she *felt* things, Cynthia, felt them deep inside her, where it hurts; hard inside her where I never wanted to go, but now – This – I'm suddenly there, and it aches, Cynthia, it aches, this world and I don't know what to make of it: who I am or what I want; I just know the floor's been ripped out of my soul and I'm falling and I don't know what to do anymore. (89)[374]

For Leanne, it is not an explosion, but a void, left by her mother's disappearance and death. Something sent me to unearth a half-remembered poem by Judith Wright. How did I let such a treasure grow musty on a forgotten shelf? Where Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* opens for scrutiny a twenty-first century Australia whose soldiers have been at war in Iraq since 2003, the first part of Wright's poem "Australia 1970" is a rhetorical imperative to the "wild country" on which "we" live. Wright commands that country to die "cursing your captor through a raging eye."[375]

Who are "we"? "We" are synonymous with Thanatos:

> For we are conquerors and self-poisoners
> more than scorpion or snake
> and dying of the venoms that we make
> even while you die of us.[376]

Clarice's sacrifice in *Gates of Egypt* may attempt to express onstage how acts of destruction towards others are acts of destruction of the self.

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[372] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 81.
[373] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 86.
[374] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 89.
[375] Judith Wright, "Australia 1970," *Collected Poems, 1942-1970* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1971).

In Wright's poem the closing stanza is saved for an exaltation to fury, and an exultation in the persistence of the heart's fury:

> I praise the scoring drought, the flying dust,
> the drying creek, the furious animal,
> that they oppose us still;
> that we are ruined by the thing we kill.[377]

But Clarice has not died confronting and cursing her captor. She has fled her captor – if her captor is that country whose "phoney unreality". She is there in the desert confronting the phoney Australia that she and her family have been part of. She takes upon herself the role of ambassador of the heart. Instead of taking on the A-rab that Simmonds perceives as a cartoon-like stereotype Clarice could have made her pilgrimage, instead, to Canberra, and there, either cursed the Prime Minister for his corruption of her (of her nation), or begged him, as she begs the Arab for a change of heart. Neither of those things happen.

I would suggest that the most compelling character-shift in the play is that undergone by Clarice's daughter who, prompted by her mother's wild eschewal of 'normal' behaviour, must discover and respond to her own furious heart.

Wright speaks to the persistence of a land that refuses to be corrupted:

> Though we corrupt you with our torturing mind,
> stay obstinate; stay blind.[378]

Both Medea and Clarice die in a desert. Where Medea at home, "singing up" her own Land, Clarice dies in The Sahara.[379] She perceives it as a place of ancient force.[380] But it is not a place that offers her solace or understanding:

> CLARICE. [. . .] I thought the elements smoothed things, rubbed them back to what they really are, but out here I see they only dry them out and break them up; this place feels like what it is : a cemetery, far far away from life, far far away from the things that matter.[381]

There is character in Abu Abbas' group whom I have not so far mentioned. He is called the Silent Man and his dialogue with Clarice reveals that he is an Australian, a

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[376] Wright, "Australia 1970" 292.
[377] Wright, "Australia 1970" 292.
[378] Wright, "Australia 1970" 292.
[379] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 97.
[380] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 20.

Moslem, but he has no effect on the dramatic action. His role in the drama is apparently to allow a discussion about the difference between Clarice's world view and his. Clarice wants to know whether the prophets who spent time in the desert learned a truth of shared responsibility: "Is this the truth? That I am as guilty or as innocent as all?" The Silent Man responds: "Islam is surrender."[382] Clarice's reply shows that she begins to understand a unity of life, but, perhaps as an identification with the kidnapper she uses the male gender to describe her paraphrase of the meaning of surrender: "That it doesn't matter who I am because in the end I am all men."[383] Her vision of life as a unity flowing through all is interrupted by Abu Abbas bursting in determined to strip her clothes off in response to news of rape and killing that day in Iraq. The scene ends with Clarice's scream, that we are given to understand is the beginning of rape.[384]

At the end of Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, Clarice's daughter speaks a phrase or two at her mother's funeral in Australia, describing her as "a restless heart". A feather falls from the sky. Leanne closes the play with the words "I love you", and bends to pick up the feather.[385] There is no rupture in *Gates of Egypt*, as there is in *Black Medea*. Leanne is divorcing the "mental dwarf" Ralph, but his transformation to docility at the funeral, where he even puts in a good word for his former punching-bag, Clarice, neither challenge him nor his audience. It is a "good" ending, in Rutherford's sense of the literary re-instatement of a feminist, hopeful, multi-cultural, non-aggressive Australia. The "multicultural" message comes in the form of a little black boy. He appeared once before, earlier in Clarice's sojourn in Egypt when she talked with her dead husband Frank on the rooftop of the Nubian Oasis Hotel. The cue for the black boy to appear is Clarice's line to Frank, "I love you." Here is the text, beginning with the stage direction which I have . Maybe you can make sense of it, because I cannot:

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[381] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 97.
[382] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 98.
[383] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 98.
[384] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 98.
[385] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 108.

> And just then, the most angelic sound is heard, and a small black boy in a white cotton tunic appears in the opening doorway, singing an indescribably beautiful song. It is absolutely unexpected and totally hypnotic, and as she looks at the boy, FRANK disappears and CLARICE blinks, saying...
>
> CLARICE. Hello...Who are you...? Hello...?[386]

The lights change and the scene travels to Australia where a phone call comes announcing to Leanne that her mother has been kidnapped.

The appearance of the little black boy at the funeral I can only explain as an adoption by Clarice's daughter and her husband Ralph, who no longer seem to be getting divorced. Here is the stage direction that marks the transition from Clarice's speech beyond the grave to the gathering of her family in Australia for the funeral:

> The little black boy is once again discovered singing, and as RALPH and LEANNE come on, and RALPH picks the boy up and holds him, we see they're a family.[387]

Australia is healed, but I, who have been released from my defense of a play that I now see as having thwarted its own desire to find its heart, can no longer see a transformation of hope in this ending. Rather, I see *Gates of Egypt* as its own unfulfilled promise. The play sets out to expose Australia's "unreality" but because it takes its protagonist out of the place where reality might be found for her, it creates a perverse unreality of its own where the stereotyped characters can only find an ending through the adoption of a new romantic stereotype, a happy multicultural every-is-all-right-now family.

In earlier drafts, I thought that I had written a conclusion that would apply to both *Gates of Egypt* and *Black Medea*. Now I know that my hypothesis which was that these two plays create a haunting transformation from emptiness to fullness, is flawed, but perhaps only in part, for despite the inadequacies of Sewell's script Clarice's insistence upon love is not wasted. I shall stay with my original conclusion, for it is my experience of what happens in *Black Medea*:

In the stillness that follows the explosion everything has changed. The heart has made visible the hell it is complicit in creating. The terror of the explosion is the terror

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[386] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 56.
[387] Sewell, *Gates of Egypt* 108.

the heart feels for the death it must suffer, if it is to re-conceive and re-member itself. The re-membering of the body offers a metonymic performance of a dream: the re-membering of the torn body of community and, beyond the community, the body politic. The transgressive force of the heart's staged action may lie in its power to touch the desire of the audience for that transformation. Each transforms her place of entrapment into a sacred space of possibility, and her death into an act of healing – of herself and, by implication, others.

Second Movement:
Hurricane Eye: A Masque for the 21st Century

– *furioso e scherzando* [raging and playful] –

Characters

ATTERCOP, President, Republic of Stygia and uncle of Cassandra.

BEE, a dancer. Doubles with Galateo.

CASSANDRA, niece to Attercop. A possible double with PRINCE.

CHARLOTTE CORDAY, 24, Waxworks Figure; transforms into PETAL, Attercop's mistress.

CRONE, Waxworks Figure.

FRANK, Waxworks Figure. Plays other Chorus roles as needed.

GALATEO, a Bee and the lover of Cassandra.

JERRY, a young man. Manager / Executioner, Waxworks Museum of Horrors. After his death he plays HEINRICH, dead suitor to Cassandra.

NEMESIS, a female Waxworks Figure; transforms into JUSTITIA, also female, and thence into BISHOP, designated male.

PRINCE of Occupied Naphthastan. A possible double with Cassandra.

SIMPLE, male Waxworks Figure. Also plays DOCTOR, WIMPLE and other Chorus roles as needed.

TUNGSTEN, Stygia's General, brother of Attercop and father of Cassandra.

Chorus – Generic Waxworks Figures, playing various roles:

BEAUTICIANS

CLOCK

CAPTAIN

CROWD

HAULERS

RETINUE of Prince

RIOT SQUAD / SNIPERS

SERVANTS

SOLDIERS

WAITER

Young Chorus – preferably children, but could be played by adults:

BOY

GIRL

CHOIR BOYS, could be played by girls as well as boys.

ORPHANS.

Setting

The Waxworks Museum of Horrors in the Republic of Stygia, an overheating police state, bankrupt from war and profligacy.

Production Possibilities

Drawing on the tradition of poor theatre, the set is minimalist. Rather than seeking to reproduce the surface of something, costumes and props could play with the character's intention, exposing, intensifying, or subverting its truths. Have fun with the design. Use found or second-hand objects or create props with recycled materials. Ring-pulls could decorate the Bishop's crosier and beer bottle tops the contested crown. Boxes could create height and become furniture: – plinth, banquet table and thrones. The golf cart / tumbrel could be painted cardboard panels shouldered by the Haulers.

Lighting effects, such as camera flashes and night sky stars, are an optional luxury, whose effect could be evoked through the actions of the performers or simple props such as a depiction of the sky and stars on a cardboard sign.

The executioner's "shark" mask is designed as a head-piece that leaves the face clear for speech and expression.

Hurricane Eye is scripted for a large number of characters. If there are constraints on space or cast size, the playwright would be open to possibilities for reducing cast size through further use of doubling, judicious cutting and rewriting.

For preference, music and sound effects are created by the Chorus and live musicians without amplification, using acoustic musical instruments, mechanical sound-making devices, body percussion and vocable sounds.

Scene 1. Water-boarding of Cassandra.

Dawn. The Dungeon, Waxworks Museum of Horrors. Scorching hot. Barefoot and motionless, the CHORUS form a tableau, as if a Caravaggio painting were sculpted in wax. Beneath the menacing presence of the guillotine, NEMESIS hauls the dripping blade back up to the top without taking her eyes off her latest victim, CHARLOTTE CORDAY whose recently severed head rests in the lap of Crone who sews the head back on the body with thick, bright coloured wool whose jagged, criss-crossed stitches are visible round Charlotte's neck, lit by the glow from a lantern held high by SIMPLE. The CROWD of fellow Waxworks Figures gape, guarded by an effigy of a child soldier who nurses a cartoon-like AK47.

Hold the stillness till you can bear it no longer.

The voices of the motionless Chorus seem to come from everywhere and nowhere, overlapping and repeating.

CHORUS Water

Give us water

Water

(Barefoot Waxworks CHILDREN run in, playing blind man's bluff. the "blindfold" that BOY wears is an adult-sized mask – think shark meets medieval executioner. GIRL wears a too-big Roman-style skirt that she struggles to hold up. The tableau figures remain still.)

BOY I'll get you now
You stink of cow

GIRL I saw you peek
I'll see you rot

BOY I'm the executioner
Chip-chop

GIRL You think I'm here
but now I'm not.

BOY You're good as dead
I'll snap your head

GIRL Just pretend I've got a knife that's really
real and when you try to make me dead
it really truly is my turn to win
I'll do you in.

BOY 'Snot. I don't play with girls who cheat.
You're dead-y-bones

GIRL Gotcha.

JERRY *(Off:)* My costume …? Who's got my costume?

BOY *(Whispers:)* It's Jerry coming!

JERRY *(Off:)* Who nicked my executioner costume?

GIRL Quick. Hide in the frame with them. Come on.
He won't dare step inside. He's scared of waxworks
people on his own.

(GIRL and BOY hide among the Chorus. JERRY enters, fresh from the shower, wearing a towel.)

JERRY Give back my shark, you little rats.

BOY Give us a drink, give us a drink

GIRL We're thirsty.

CHORUS Water

Give us water

JERRY I can't give what I haven't got. Play fair –
Give me my mask … You know who gave me that?
Attercop. He's coming in to watch
the show – the President! All Stygia
will see me on Tee-Vee. You make me cut
off heads without my mask, you'll see who gets
the chop.

GIRL Give's a drink, Jerry,

GIRL I'm thirsty, give's a drink, give's a drink …
I'll rip your Roman skirt…

JERRY Stop… Please. You're wrecking my career.

CHORUS Water

Give us water

GIRL Jump on his mask. Splickety-splack.
Smackety crackety, whackety whack …
Ker-chack…

BOY Ready, steady…

GIRL Jump!

JERRY Wait. You there with the lantern…

SIMPLE Simple, Sir.

JERRY Get the cook to give the kids some cola.

BOY Cola

GIRL Pepsi

BOY Coca … Cola

SIMPLE Product placement. No escape-ment

GIRL Drink it
Don't think it
Just sink it

(Boy and Girl pull Simple towards exit. Jerry tries to grab his mask and skirt, but they dodge him.)

JERRY I'll get the cook to roast your guts.

BOY I'll get the cook to toast your nuts.

(Boy and Girl grab Jerry's towel and run off with it, pulling Simple with them. His hands over his groin, Jerry gives orders to the child soldier effigy.)

JERRY Sit up, Soldier Boy, keep better watch.
If any cretin laughs at me again,
you won't get fed.

(Jerry exits.)

CHORUS Water.

Give us water

(Simple returns with the lantern.)

SIMPLE They've bottled all the water for the war
in Naphthastan.

(The Chorus stir. Crone knots the last stitch in Charlotte's neck. With a pair of scissors, she snips the thread.[1] Nemesis hoists the guillotine blade and secures the halyard.)

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[1] Crone's wielding of the scissors evokes the gesture made by the third of the three Fates, Atropos, as she raises her hand to cut the thread of life. See Francisco de Goya y Lucientes, *Las Parcas [The Fates]*, or Átropos, 1820 – 1823, Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, Spain, <http://www.museodelprado.es/coleccion/galeria-on-line/galeria-on-line/obra/las-parcas-o-atropos/> accessed 15 July 2011. Daily, Crone stitches Charlotte's head back on, supposedly to give her a renewal of life, but for Crone, Charlotte's acquiescence in the cruelty of the pantomime required of her reveals that what she is daily enacting is not life, but death.

CHARLOTTE There‘s water here, I know it, running water.

CRONE In the chamber – through the wall … Listen.
Can’t you hear the turtle dove drowning?

CHARLOTTE No-one drowns here. We’re only a museum
of horrors – a waxworks museum
of horrors. People queue across the square
to see me guillotined – Charlotte Corday,
Terroriste extraordinaire. I'm
this nation’s prize example to the rest –
Don't knife a nasty bastard in his bath;
Or bigger bastards come and chop your neck.
They’ll pay an artist hack to mould your life
like wax; each day they chop you off; each night
you’re stitched back on. Perpetual head loss.
It makes you thirsty. Help me shift the stones
and get the water …

CRONE Get away from there,
You want to drink the water from a drowning?

CHARLOTTE Your brain’s too old to know what’s going on.

CHORUS 1 She can feel it.

CHORUS 2 She does fear it.

CRONE Can't you hear it?
Soldier, save the turtle dove from drowning.

CHARLOTTE It’s a cool sweet spring
that burbles through a cavern in the moss.
Where a green frog sighs for her demon prince
And her thighs grow warm with the wish he’ll return:
De-dup, de-dup, de-dup, de-dup, burr-rrr-up

Come back, stupid prince,
Come back from the war,
Come fuck with me
And I’ll give you more
on my mossy bank
in my warm wet stream…
Bub-bup, bub-bup, bub-bup
Dee-dip, dee-dip, dee-dip
Hu-hu-hu huh, huh, huh, huhh

Fizzled. Useless… War fed him on rations
and ate his <u>cojones</u> [*balls*]…

CRONE Please, drop this game – They're drowning peace in there.

CHARLOTTE You're playing in the wrong script, mad old lady.

NEMESIS To your places, guys; rehearsing now…

CHARLOTTE "The Water-boarding of Cassandra, as performed by the inmates of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors under the direction of me, Charlotte Corday."[2]

NEMESIS Hold it there, you're under the direction
of the one and only me, Nemesis,
Goddess of glory – if glory's your fate.

CHARLOTTE No way are you the boss of this. I play
Cassandra – she foresees all things to come.
She picks the winning colours every time
before the product's even hit the stores.
Cassandra goes too far of course – she claims
the crashes will get worse: we'll all be ruined.
She's wrong – that's why the soldiers took her in …

NEMESIS Do what you want; the dead still come to me.

(Nemesis mounts plinth and signals musicians.)

CHARLOTTE Drum-roll!

(Drum-roll.)

NEMESIS "The water-boarding of Cassandra as performed by the inmates of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors under the direction of Nemesis."

(Chorus assume roles of CAPTAIN, SOLDIERS. Charlotte plays Cassandra.)

CHARLOTTE I'm Cassandra
You'll all be ruined
I told you so
Learn to dance
Take a chance
Move your hips
Wield your whips
Stomp on your grave
Eat what you crave
I'm gonna be the last one standing.[3]

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[2] Charlotte parodies the title of the renowned play in which her namesake stars: Peter Weiss (1964), *Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade*, English version by Geoffrey Skelton; verse adaptation by Adrian Mitchell, London: J. Calder, 1969, 5th edition.

[3] "I'm gonna be the last one standing," the final line of Charlotte's speech is taken from "Last One Standing", Mercyme Lyrics, http://www.azlyrics.com/lyrics/mercyme/lastonestanding.html, accessed 2 January, 2011.

CAPTAIN I'll play Captain. Soldiers, bring the board
that tilts – We work it like a see-saw. You there,
bring the water-jug. Remember that
it's death to any man who drinks the props.

Wake up, Simple, you play Doctor. Get the
coat on - lose that lost look … It's your job
to watch the terror-suspect doesn't die.

DOCTOR If she gets hurt, I'll help her make a claim.

CAPTAIN Not on your nelly, no, they're paying you
you simpleton.

DOCTOR But, but, b …but if she's hurt…

CAPTAIN Your white coat covers you from all mistakes, mishaps, insanities or oversights, occasioned by a state emergency,
when full and proper safeguards govern the rendition
– of suspects with an alien and terrorist ambition –
to our special-purpose dungeon, where our special-talent agents – that's including me and you – can enjoy the state's permission, to employ whatever methods suit our mission, and elicit from said suspects any data, facts or fiction, that President Attercop has had to requisition, to safeguard lives of innocents, keep supply of credit flowing, keep inflation rates from growing, in fair pursuit of freedom and protection of our peace.[4]

CAPTAIN Soldiers, seize the terror-suspect, seize
Cassandra.

(Soldiers seize Charlotte-playing-Cassandra and strap her to the board.)

CHARLOTTE Aahh. Assassins. Let me go. Back off,
that's strap too tight. It's not supposed to hurt.

CAPTAIN Get the cloth and shut her sweet face up.

(He covers Charlotte's mouth and nose with gauze.)

[4] Inspired by the flexibility and invention of patter songs of composer Arthur Sullivan and librettist W. S. Gilbert, such as "I am the very model of a modern Major-General," *Pirates of Penzance*, 1879, and "A more humane Mikado" and Ko Ko's song, "As some day it may happen that a victim must be found", *The Mikado*, 1885.

CRONE Gods of Mount Parnassus, come down here.
Artemis, Hephaestus, Apollo?
Don't hide there in the ancient mists of time.
Your wild theatre isn't just for you.
Lend us your hounds and nettles, bees and wasps.
Teach us to howl and sting and play the fool,
until our antics prick the tyrant's heart
and he can see the torment he has done.
Bring fire to burn his torture chamber down;
a chariot to fly Cassandra home.

(Pause.)

Forgotten are we, gods? Why can't you dig
out of all time a genial good god –
a god whose wit could stop the stage machine
that churns our hands and feet to endless war?
Good god, come down and change the action now.

SOLDIER 1 You'd have to know whose side her god is on.

SOLDIER 2 You've got a point, there's gods that do you in.

CAPTAIN Hand me the water-jug. Starters in place.

CRONE Captain, what is truth that you are hiding
it from us?

CAPTAIN Chill out, old ducky-wuck, or do you want
another public ducking – in the weedy
river for a witch.

*(Thunder. Lights change.
Captain, Soldiers, Doctor and Charlotte freeze in darkness.
Only Crone is lit as she feels the wall that separates her from the "real" Cassandra.)*

CRONE Cassandra, I can hear you through the wall,
Can you hear me?
Can you hear my heart?
I feel the hurt, as if you were my child.

(Pause.)

The wings of peace beat useless like the night.
Her captors throw her down and strap her tight
as if they crave a carcass for their pie …
as if their water torture makes them clean.

Rough soldiers' fingers scorch her like cigars,
Yank back her head and pluck her helpless neck.
They block her mouth and nose with stinking rag –
Her wild eyes see the gushing water fall.

She gasps with open mouth. She gasps for air,
but water fights her breath through choking cloth.
Fathoms deep, her heart leaps against death.[5]

The hollow doctor orders time for breath.
The captain says, Save this one for a kiss.
The soldiers' hands roll cigarettes.

(Lights change.
Captain, Soldiers and Doctor finish a smoke – the cigarettes are mimed. Charlotte is still strapped to the board.)

CAPTAIN Forty days and forty nights we order pain.

SOLDIER 1 The routine makes inhaling bliss.

SOLDIER 2 She won't fess up. I'll give her a kiss.

CAPTAIN We'll have to go again
Tip her back down –
Now from the top.

(Captain and Soldiers parody a waterboarding, using a seesawing board and a kitchen jug that disgorges blue ribbons over Charlotte's face to simulate water.)

DOCTOR Forty days and forty nights we order rain

[5] "Fathoms deep" comes from Benjamin Britten, composer, E. M. Forster and Eric Crozier, librettists, *Billy Budd*, first performed, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London, 1 December 1951, based on Herman Melville's novel *Billy Budd*.

CAPTAIN Flood

Breath

Flood

DOCTOR Breath

CAPTAIN Flood

DOCTOR Breath …Breath

CAPTAIN Flood …

And … Flood again

DOCTOR Enough.

CAPTAIN Enough?

DOCTOR Enough!

CAPTAIN Breath

I think she'll open up for you this time.
Whose turn was it to buy the beer, Soldier?

SOLDIER 1 You're in a museum,
you're not supposed to do anything real.

(Soldiers release Charlotte and resume their roles as generic Waxworks figures. Doctor removes his coat and becomes Simple again.)

CHARLOTTE It's not working. You force me to rehearse
a stupid show like that. Where is the blood?
There is nothing to see. No bruises.
No bang. No build up to a big ka-pow.
Nothing to get the numbers through the door.
No-one's elbowed in to take my picture
like they do when it's the guillotine.
People want to see some shock and awe
Let's give it to them and they'll pay us more.
Can somebody get me a drink?

NEMESIS We two should talk – I'm planning to get rich –
This month the moon has fixed her silver eye
on Mars, which means that you can buy from me
a civil war for half my normal fee.
You'll get your shock and awe at bargain price,
and you can top the man who's there on top;
use your own war to top the President.
You're the one can topple Attercop –
Then you can drink pure mountain water too,
and bathe with liquid pleasure in champagne.

CHARLOTTE He'll send the guards with masks on their heads
They'll beat us all when we're already dead.

CHORUS Water.

Give us water.

(End of scene.)

Scene 2. Cassandra washes the world.

CHORUS slump exhausted. NEMESIS watches from her plinth. CASSANDRA enters, sleepwalking in shackles, barefoot, her head wet, her simple garment ripped. Catatonic, she carries a bucket and mop.

CHORUS Water

Give us water

CRONE Don't wake Cassandra.

CHARLOTTE Who let that ghost in here?

CHORUS Her eyes are open but she stays asleep

CHARLOTTE She's got no right to think she's real.

CHORUS She looks, but does not see

She acts, but does not feel

She knows, but cannot tell

CRONE Don't wake Cassandra.
The shackles keep her ankles warm,
She dreams a baby's bath of balm;
Sleep on Cassandra,
Somnambulist in shackles,
Asleep to grief.

CHARLOTTE *(Aside:)*
So young and cute and overwhelming tragic.[6]
Her cheek-bones aren't a patch on mine. I'll lure
her with my pretty rock that looks like bread…
and grab her pail of water; sell it for
a kitchen knife and stab my way to hell
and out of here. To think when I was three
I had quite good intentions.

(Charlotte holds out the stone for Cassandra.)

[6] A borrowing in my own translation from Harlekin's description of the desolate Ariadne: "*Wie jung und schön und maßlos traurig* [So young and beautiful and measurelessly sad]," Hugo von Hofmannsthal, libretto, Richard Strauss, composer, *Ariadne auf Naxos*, (1912) <http://www.zeno.org/Literatur/M/Hofmannsthal,+Hugo+von/Libretti/Ariadne+auf+Naxos/Oper> accessed 25 September 2012, n.pag.

Hello, you pretty Mop-and-Bucket Girl,
You mustn't waste the water on their floor:
We walk on muck all day and no-one cares.
You must be hungry after your ordeal …
I'll take the bucket – you can sit down here
and eat – this is for you, it's fresh-baked bread…

Would you prefer cake?

I didn't think so.
That bucket must be heavy for you, Cass,
you'd better let me help.

(Charlotte seizes the bucket. Liquid splashes onto Charlotte's clothes. It is not water, but blood.)

CHARLOTTE Bitch. You're s'posed to bring us water, not
stolen from their abattoir.

(Cassandra dips the mop in the bucket and washes with blood the floor, walls or other surface.)

Make her stop.

CRONE Let her wash the world clean.

CHARLOTTE That's the trouble with the living. They pretend
not to know when they've had enough.

(Charlotte snatches the mop from Cassandra. Cassandra picks up the discarded water-boarding cloth and uses it instead. Charlotte snatches the cloth. Cassandra picks up the child-soldier effigy, dips its head in the bucket and uses its hair as a mop.)

Don't do that. You don't want to see me mad.

(Crone takes out a flask and offers it to Charlotte.)

CRONE Here… moonshine.

(Charlotte snatches her booty.)

CHARLOTTE Surprise… Somehow I could give you a kiss.

CRONE You could save me a swig or two or three.
It's my four hundredth birthday soon, I think.

CHARLOTTE I'll let you have what's left, if you can make
her stop.

(Crone begins singing the refrain of her lullaby.)

CRONE *(Sings:)* Come sleep …
Let the forest
grow over your anguish
Come sleep while the tall trees
grow over your pain

(Cassandra pauses and cradles the child-soldier effigy. Crone's lullaby segues to the next scene.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 3. Crone's lullaby.

The Dungeon disappears. The night sky opens, rich with stars. CRONE sings her lullaby during which she cradles CASSANDRA to sleep.)

CRONE *(Sings:)* Where is the cradle
to rock you to sleep?
Where is your mother
who loved you too deep?

Where is your father
who went to make war?
He looks for the lantern
to light him ashore.

Come sleep …
Let the forest
grow over your anguish
Come sleep while the tall trees
grow over your pain

Don't look for a window
The noon sky turns crimson
Don't water the dungeon
Its profits are doom

Welcome the dark night
velvet and deep
Come let earth's cradle
rock you to sleep

Come sleep …
Let the forest
grow over your anguish
Come sleep while the tall trees
grow over your pain

Sleep till the war-zone
grow flowers for the bumble-bee
Sleep till the mine-fields
are safe to grow pumpkins
Sleep till the treetops
shall send down the rain

Sleep till the morning,
whose promise you make
comes like a lover
to kiss you awake.

(*End of scene.)*

Scene 4. Cassandra wakes.

The night sky vanishes. The Dungeon returns. Protected by CRONE, CASSANDRA, shackled, remains asleep. CHARLOTTE drinks. BEE enters and dances an unfathomable message of love for Cassandra.

CHORUS Something's buzzing.

CHARLOTTE I hear nothing.

CHORUS Zigzag buzzing

Busy buzzing

Baleful buzzing

NEMESIS Baleful bee, set retribution free
Come sting awake the one who claims to see

CRONE Don't wake Cassandra.

(Bee hesitates, watchful.)

NEMESIS Wake up, Cassandra!
Your throat is hurt your river dries your forest
falls your land grows salt your ocean broils
Wake up, Cassandra.

CHORUS Wake up cursing.

NEMESIS Come here, Simple, take the key, undo the irons.

(Simple takes the key and gently undoes Cassandra's shackles without waking her.)

CRONE Let her sleep unfettered.
Don't make her heart remember. Silence is bitter, but never so bitter as speech that rides the whirlpool of remembered drowning, too horrible for words.

NEMESIS You beat your fists
on shrunken tits.
You think that kind of milk
will turn the tyrant mild?
You think a glob of cream will churn
his warring empire into butter?

CHARLOTTE Crone is right for once she's right.
Don't wake Cassandra.
We don't need her ugly tongue
When what's done's already done.

NEMESIS Come, Bee, and make proud vengeance wake.

CHARLOTTE Cool it, Nemesis …I'm cool.
You think I don't remember you –
Seventeen ninety-three, I was alive…
The hopeful, youthful, eager Charlotte Corday.
You promised if I killed Jean-Paul Marat,
you'd make the Terror end, and Justice rule
and all of France would jump for joy, but no.
Those bastards gave you all the Bordeaux
you could drink. They promised you a statue;
their wine and adulation sucked you in –
the French Revolution's doctor of spin.

NEMESIS I don't have time for blather.
Wake the sleeping princess up. She'll shine
the light of Reason in the tyrant's face.

CHARLOTTE Reason! You had me dazzled with that light;
you call it Reason – pure and shiny white.
You claimed your light would rescue me from hell;
you sold your clever words to clever men,
who took your text to whet their guillotine
and build their power on other people's gore.
Before I got a whiff of freedom's breath.
you turned the reign of kings to rain of death.
When all I did was turn bath water red,
you gave the Revolution my sweet head.

NEMESIS Regrettable.
Wake up, Cassandra. Wake up and call the guard
Demand he call the top man to your cell.
Demand he stand and face you here in hell.
Demand an audience with Attercop.

CHARLOTTE He won't believe a thing she says, they never do

NEMESIS She'll bring him punishment. I'll see to that.

CRONE Leave her in peace.

NEMESIS Come, furious bee,
Prepare your sting

(Nemesis makes the reluctant Bee dance.)

CHORUS Dizzy does it …

Brazen buzzing

Baleful buzzing

NEMESIS Dance the murdered dead awake
Drag assassins to their fate

CHORUS Make her dance, poor tortured beast,
Drum the earth with frenzied feet

CRONE Touch the earth with naked feet
Sing the murdered dead to sleep

CHORUS Drum the earth with frenzied feet
Trample all who stop to weep

CRONE Feel the earth beneath your feet
Sing the murdered dead to sleep

CHARLOTTE Hips rock, belly shake
Dance till you lose
what your mind can't take
'I'm gonna be the last one standing'[7]

CHORUS Dance the murdered dead awake

NEMESIS Sting Cassandra, make or break.

(Bee stings Cassandra and gifts to her the power of the dance. As they dance the Bee grows weaker and Cassandra helps him to the ground.

Out of the stillness, taking the space, Cassandra finds her body, her voice, her feet, her dance.)

CASSANDRA Shimmer skin
Feel the air sing the light
Feel the feet tug the ground
Drum the heart
till the breath
learns the beat
learns the sound …

I shatter glass
yi, yi, yi, yi yeeeeeeeee
yi, yi, yi, meeeeeeeee
Eye, eye, eye
I crack the crystal sleep
of the pillowed assassin
in his villa up top
I crack the dreams of Attercop

Wrack and crack
Make him feel the shock
make him hear the pain
no draught can block

[7] Reprise from "Last One Standing", Mercyme Lyrics.

NEMESIS Spit your curse, from the earth, in the culprit's face
Make the rocks quake open and eat this place.

CHORUS Rattle and crackle and shiver and shock
Wracked with pain no draught can block

CHARLOTTE Beg the doctor for the dreams to stop.

CHORUS Beg the doctor for the dreams to stop.

CHARLOTTE Beg the doctor for the dreams to stop.

(Stillness.)

CASSANDRA The war is lost. The men are stealing bread.
My father General Tungsten's coming home.

To prove himself a man who hasn't lost
he'll fight to death his brother Attercop,
but Attercop fights back with vicious craft -
he bakes a dish to break my father's heart.
War promised them they'd win by killing others,
now Attercop tells cook to roast my brothers.

CHARLOTTE I warned you not to wake her up.

NEMESIS My offer still stands – you want to join my team?

(Aside:) Cassandra sees too much. She's good as lost.

(End of scene.)

Scene 5. Nemesis converts herself to Justitia.

The Dungeon. Focus on NEMESIS on her plinth. CRONE knits.

NEMESIS When War gives a feast
The guests take a seat
The kids get served
In a sauce too sweet…

But
Their father must eat
And they taste of meat …

But
Who gets the rebuke
And his bucket of puke?

But
It's not my fault
War goes over the top –
Reason's my voice
And Reason won't stop…

But
You can't talk Reason
To an Attercop.

CHORUS Give us justice

NEMESIS I need to move beyond Enlightenment;
I need a sinecure with greater pay,
more praise, and less responsibility.
From now on I'll make honest justice rule.

CHORUS Give us justice

NEMESIS Impartial justice

CHARLOTTE You want to get ahead, you need to ditch
that tired old name of yours, Nemesis.

NEMESIS Call me Justitia.

CHARLOTTE Justitia?

CHORUS Unstoppable justice.

(Chorus help transform Nemesis into Justitia.[8])

[8] Nemesis' new costume is inspired by Hans Gieng, sculptor, "Iustitia, Göttin der Gerechtigkeit, auf dem Gerechtigkeitsbrunnen [Justitia, Goddess of Justice, mounted on the Well of Justice), Bern,

JUSTITIA Bring me my breastplate – burning gold.
Bring me my sword…my power unfold.[9]

This sword has weight: it will preserve the state.

Bring me my set of golden scales.

I'll weigh what's what and give the world its measure –
Justice will earn a balanced share of treasure.

Bring me my blindfold, for impartial sight,
but leave a gap to peek into the light –
Since Justice serves to keep world-business clicking,
I need to see who pays and who needs whipping.

(End of scene.)

Switzerland, 1543, image found at Wikimedia Commons user *TheBernFiles*, personal translation, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Berner_Iustitia.jpg, accessed 21 January 2011.

[9] In the rhythm, rhyme and word choice these lines carry reverberations from William Blake, "And did those feet in ancient times," from "Milton: Preface," Northrop Frye, ed., *Selected Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, New York: Random House, 1953, 244-245.

Scene 6. Cassandra farewells the dying Bee.

The Dungeon. CASSANDRA sits motionless with the dying Bee.

CASSANDRA Sad honeybee,
Roll back the clock
Fly to your hive
Keep your sting
And stay alive.

(The dying Bee stirs and dances a message.)

CHORUS Deadly buzzing

Secrets buzzing

CASSANDRA Why did you leave the fields of autumn flowers
and fly across the batteries of war?

Why bring wild hope to haunt this poisoned air?

My Galateo sent you here to me?

He's safe? They haven't found his hiding place,
my uncle's men?

The harvest's in, the pumpkins golden … ripe.

I will not mourn. I'll find my Galateo …

'… on a half-reap'd furrow sound asleep,
Drowsed with the fumes of poppies.'[10]

That's Keats. We used to read each other Keats;
how mad is that?

CHORUS Tired of buzzing

Too much buzzing.

CASSANDRA Live, Bee, don't leave me in the grip of hope,
if hope turns out untrue.

CHORUS Dying.

Gentle dying.

CASSANDRA Gentle goodbye.

(Bee settles on the ground and dies.)

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[10] From John Keats, "To Autumn" (1819), ed. Harold E. Briggs, *Complete Poetry and Selected Prose of John Keats*, New York: Random House, The Modern Library, 1951, 383. (383-4).

CHORUS Goodbye.

CASSANDRA Goodbye.

(Bee rises. It is as if his spirit, imagined by Cassandra, dances goodbye and exits. She tends his imagined tiny corpse where it lies on the ground.)

Stay with me, Bee, for your name stands for brave.
You lie so still. I'll lie with you. A little
earth will make a grave. Make room.

Lying here with you, I'll cheat my Uncle
of his wish to knock me flying down.
I'll learn to lie the sweetest honeyed lies;
I'll nod my head to every lie of his –
He'll think I stand with him and set me free.

What's that buzzing in my dying head?
Is that you, Galateo, still alive?

Feet, help me stand, it costs too much to lie.
I'll meet my uncle's livid eyes with mine.
When men cut throats to prove their lies are true,
Truth has to stand to see what it can do.

Guard, fetch me the torturer who lies at the top,
Fetch to the dungeon Attercop.

JUSTITIA Clear this space of extraneous blubber.
Let immortal Justice take the stage,
impartial, implacable, imperial –
imperial is not my only style,
but if you paint your world a different hue,
you'll need the wherewithal to make it true.
Bring barrels of pork, glazed with porkies' purest art,
Justitia knows how to serve you all –
in courts republican, or democrat,
liberal, conservative, or else
a little red – socialist or theocrat.
Whatever colour you have learned to hate,
the crime that shade commits attacks your state.
So get your costume on and shape up quickly;
Prepare the ground to execute the guilty.

(End of scene.)

Scene 7. Visit of Attercop to the Dungeon.

Dungeon. JUSTITIA is on her plinth. CASSANDRA is unsteady on her feet. Wearing the executioner's skirt and mask and wielding a cat-o'-nine tails made of ribbons, JERRY directs some of the CHORUS to play HAULERS and pull ATTERCOP in his golf-cart cum tumbrel. He's dressed for golf and wields his 3-iron as if it were a sceptre. Others play CROWD and wave Stygian flags.

JERRY Backs to the rope
Hearts to the flag
Feet to the plod

HAULERS Backs to the rope
Hearts to the flag
Feet to the plod

CROWD Backs to the rope
Hearts to the flag
Feet to the plod

CHARLOTTE Loins to the lurch

CRONE Ease to my bones

CHARLOTTE E's to the zone
Coke to the nose

JERRY Back to the ropes

HAULERS Backs to the rope
Feet to the plod

JERRY Hearts to the flag

CRONE Peace to the dead

ATTERCOP Victory to Stygia

CHARLOTTE History to Attercop

ATTERCOP Waiter to the ice-bucket.

(Chorus member plays WAITER and runs after the cart with a drinks trolley like those used in aeroplanes. Waiter and Charlotte run to keep up with the cart. Where space is limited movement is simulated.)

CHARLOTTE Victory to Attercop

ATTERCOP Victory to pretty women, who are you, when you scrub up?

CHARLOTTE Charlotte Corday, star of the guillotine …

WAITER Excuse me, Mr, President, you'll have
to have Dom Pérignon – we've run right out
of Brut…

HAULERS Water to the Haulers

CRONE Give us water

SIMPLE We're thirsty.

CROWD Water to the also rans

JUSTITIA Eyes to the security monitors.

JERRY Defeat to Naphthastani terrorists.

CRONE There's water on the trolley up the front.

WAITER Get back to your seats.

CRONE You have to give us water.
It's in the Geneva Convention.

WAITER Some things don't make it down to Economy.

HAULERS Water.

SIMPLE Give us water.

CROWD Water

JERRY Empire to the cat-o'-nine tails

(With his "cat", Jerry tries to keep the Chorus back.)

ATTERCOP Victory to Stygia.

CASSANDRA People, look there and see who stares you down:
War mounts upon the back of Attercop.
In fetid fever, hunger, thirst, War rides
his man and steams his veins to pleasure's pitch,
his black and oily power that's won with death.
Don't wave War's flag, don't haul his cunning cart,
See where War wraps his colours round your heart.

CRONE Water, give us water.

HAULERS Water, water, water.

JERRY Tasers to the Riot Squad

ATTERCOP Snipers to the balconies

JUSTITIA Tear-gas to the shopping list,
Water-canon, rubber-bullets, pepper-spray …

JERRY Go back to sleep, Justitia
We've got that lot on hand, and more.

(Some Chorus become RIOT SQUAD or SNIPERS. They push back the others and secure the perimeter.)

CASSANDRA See Uncle Courage stop behind the lines
his empty cart … well out of range of screams.

ATTERCOP Not me, my dear. The things that you don't know
are wikipedic. Horror killing comes
from them, not us, they hate each other worse
than death. We're there in Naphthastan
to keep the peace. We're building schools for girls.

CASSANDRA See – Uncle Courage stops to sell his war:
He'll show you pictures there inside his phone;
they skim across his screen in tiny dots;
they flare and flame and vanish in the cloud.
He lives inside a think-tank where he plans
his wars as plots for other people's graves,
He boasts of all the noughts still to be made
from selling war on someone else's ground.

ATTERCOP Your father is the one obsessed with war…
Can I be honest with you now? He wants
to seize the government. Could you
take what I say as serious for once?
My hand shakes when I think what he will do.
He won't shut up; he tries to tell me how
to run my life; he hasn't got a clue
to anything that's off the battlefield,
which makes that man the worst of philistines.
Don't think he'll let you read the book you want.
He'll send all you lot sitting there back home
to work, and call his men to board the doors –
Theatre, in his world, is where you start
a war. A theatre of war. But you're
his daughter, Cass, you know that he loves you.
Here, take my phone and talk to Tungsten now …
he listens to you. Please. I'm saying, Please.
Tell him to stay there at the front – your word
can save who knows how many little lives –

CASSANDRA Our little lives are but a fork enclosed in lies.

ATTERCOP You weren't born poor or stupid, really, Cass.

CASSANDRA Which eye am I? You come to see but one.
Your hoodwinked eyes of snake see nought but you.
I tell you I am not one eye… I am
all eyes…I see it now … inside outside
each “I” more “I”s …
All “I”s are many eyes and one…
Your eyes are bloodshot ones and lost alone

ATTERCOP I'm losing sleep:
they've had me on Pacificum for weeks –
the doctors are no use;
you know I've cared for you since you were born.

CASSANDRA You sat me on your knee and read me Homer.

ATTERCOP Then you should understand why men need war.

CASSANDRA The war turns grave,
the men unpaid,
the cook afraid,
the gruel not made…

Spices stacked
Corpses hacked

The cook got caught
with a spoon too short,
Crying: who are you,
wanting hell’s own stew?

The soldier said,
If I got my wish
I’d up-end the dish
on the top man’s head…

But a soldier’s fed
on his own self dead.

ATTERCOP Our army has no soldier suicides –
It’s terrorists who train their kids for that.

CASSANDRA Uncle, whoever makes a bomb makes pain.

ATTERCOP Since you won't make that call to Naphthastan,
perhaps you'll help me welcome Tungsten home,
We'll stage a feast to celebrate his strengths
and you can talk to him with loving tongue,
persuade him of my love, and send him back.

Don't ask me what to say … you'll find the words.
Praise your father's battles to the skies;
Convince the man we need another surge;
Make him blot out the terrorists who sneak
inside our own safe zone, with fiendish bombs …

Your brother, yes, fine man, taller than me –
we all loved him. His Humvee hit a mine.

CASSANDRA Yes, yesterday …

ATTERCOP You knew?

CASSANDRA My brother was an officer
he had the best tattoo
he put his gun
against his tongue
he knew what soldiers do.
His tongue dropped
his gun hopped
his war stopped.
Drop your gun,
see what you've done
and use your tongue
and stop your own war too.

ATTERCOP I don't know how you can stand your own lies. Your father's devastated. He's bringing what's left of your brother home to bury here, with military honours that the man has earned.

You have two brothers still. Two little lives.
Now think before you answer me, for what
you say could change my orders for the cook.

CASSANDRA The cobra slicks with guile its oily fangs.

ATTERCOP I love peace just as much or more than you.
I'll planned our banquet for prime-time TV –
The people fear the war has gone too long;
but you could save all history for us.
Persuade your father to go back and fight –
His victory secures supplies of oil
and grows the wealth democracy will need:
Our love of peace gives us no choice but war.[11]

Will you put on your party dress and come?

CASSANDRA No.

ATTERCOP No?
Our army only bombs in self-defence.
Last year the floods took out the delta crops;
this year's so hot, there's mountains short of snow,
No snow, no ice, no water in the Spring.
The refugees will be a flood we'll have
to shoot, like farmers shoot their cows in drought,
half-dead and starved and floundered in the mud.
Only it's cow after cow after cow,
He's never going to have enough bullets.
We'll have to find a humane way to make
them burn. Do you know what that smell is like?
No, you want our country over-run.
Our people want their kids to grow up safe…
get into finance, law and pharmaceuticals.
Waiter, bring my niece a drink.

CASSANDRA Give no more orders, Attercop.
Your gifts are poisons that make numb all sense
and separate each act from consequence.
You think you'll win by serving war its feast?
Drown me, again, but serve my brothers peace.

ATTERCOP It's not too late for you to join us all –
your baby brothers too – we all can eat.
Just let your father know you truly care
about our people and our nation's fate.

Or do you want the world to light its lamps
once more with oil of whales?

[11] This rhetoric was inspired by a speech by George W. Bush, made prior to the declaration of war on Iraq, and in which he refers to the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein as one that "gives shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people." G.W Bush, "The Iraq Threat," Cincinnati, OH., USA, 7 October 2002, <www.PresidentialRhetoric.com>, accessed 2 February 2011.

CASSANDRA I dream I am a boat flung from the sea;
my throat is dry, I never want to drink
again.

ATTERCOP I'll give you time to think.
I leave the water for you here.
I told my minions to take care of you,
not house you here in the feculent pit.
When a perfidious situation
forces our nation to use interrogation,
different people have different opinions
on whether a particular technique
constitutes unusual punishment.
Someone's misinterpreted the guidelines.
I will punish the people who did this.

CRONE (*Calls:)* Water, give us water.

CASSANDRA Crone, this water is for you.

CHORUS Water, give us water.

ATTERCOP I'll have that back thank you.

(Attercop takes the water back.)

(Calls:) White Bishop to kingside.

(*Aside:*) A word or two from him will calm the crowd.

(Pause.)

(Calls:) White Bishop to kingside.

Jerry, I'll have a private word or two.
Did you take my Bishop?

JERRY The last one got mixed up in politics –
hung out with new-age Eco-Marxists, stuck
on liberationist theology.
You ordered me to take him off the board…

ATTERCOP I did?

JERRY A pile of papers that you had to sign.
He's on extraordinary rendition to
our trained interrogators in a nation
friendly to us, somewhere safely out
of hearing on the way to Naphthastan.

ATTERCOP I don't remember signing off on that …
You've no idea the pressures on my back.
I'm up all night, the market's diving south;
we're running out of fuel; Cassandra goes
ballistic shouting Peace – why can't she see
that that is what our troops are fighting for?
And now, my Herculean brother, Tungsten,
not content with stuffing up the war,
is coming home to do me in.

JERRY No-one can win this game without a Bishop.

ATTERCOP Pick me a man who knows the feel of pain –
Our work for peace needs smarter vigilance.

JERRY I know someone who's wasted in her job –
She plays that sleeping statue over there…

ATTERCOP Justitia? She's passed her use-by date;
I need a man for this.

JERRY She's flexible.

ATTERCOP Go take her blindfold off and let me see.

(Jerry removes Justitia's blindfold.)

JUSTITIA Hey, what the beep d'you think you're doing?
That blindfold is a vital property of Justice.

JERRY Sorry, Justitia, I could have sworn you were asleep.

JUSTITIA Not in the job description – sleep.

JERRY You've been declared redundant.

JUSTITIA It's the death of the public service!

JERRY Relax. There's a sinecure going among the moral right – a Bishop.
Phenomenal industry, that. Whichever god you pick, it's growth,
growth, growth. You want to audition?

JUSTITIA "Blessed are the meek:
for they shall inherit the earth."[12]

JERRY You've got the part.

JUSTITIA Let's get my vestments on.

(Jerry and Chorus help Justitia transform into BISHOP, a character designated male.)

[12] *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, *Matthew* 5.5.

JERRY The colours suit you. Mitre for your head.
Your Bishop's crosier… you will need that
to hook the legs of any sheep that stray.
Your middle finger – slip this ruby on …
in case somebody needs to kiss your ring.
Now get up there, and don't forget I helped.

(Attercop welcomes Bishop beside him on the cart.)

ATTERCOP Your Eminence.

BISHOP Attercop, at last, the honour's mine. "And Jesus said … I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst."[13]

ATTERCOP My people love a well-dressed priest in skirts.
It makes them feel they're getting their deserts.
Beneath the robes a towering truth lies leaven,
a mystery we need to rise to heaven.

Waiter …
Some bubbles in the Bishop's glass.

(Waiter offers champagne, but Bishop refuses.)

BISHOP Abstain; abjure the lusts that lure the flesh below. Embrace ecstatic righteousness. Ask God to keep your feet right away from the slippery pit.[14]

ATTERCOP You're coming on a bit too strong. Nick out for a few centuries and come back on again after the Reformation.

BISHOP I'd hate to get the timing wrong and come back as a liberationist nun from the nineteen-seventies, drunk on teaching peasants that their farms, their fruit, their oil, belong to them.

ATTERCOP I couldn't allow you to rouse a foreign mob to kick a friendly, <u>good</u> dictator out. Those rulers are our bulwark against marauding fundamentalists. I'd have to get you kidnapped and your corpse left somewhat mangled by the stream.

BISHOP Be serious.

ATTERCOP I was. Do have a drink.

(Waiter tops up Attercop's glass.)

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[13] *The Holy Bible: King James Version*, *John* 6.35. Slightly edited.

[14] For the notion expressed in this line I am indebted to Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758) Enfield, Connecticut, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", in *Select Sermons*, July 8, 1741. Edwards refers to the "foot sliding" and "slippery declining ground, on the edge of a pit". He cites Deuteronomy 32:35 and Psalm 73:18,19, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/edwards/sermons.sinners.html>, accessed 23 September 2009.

BISHOP When Herculean Tungsten took his army
into Naphthastan and pulled the ruthless
despot's statue down, remember how
the people loved your brother then.[15] Don't lose
their love. They're hungry, rioting for bread.
If Tungsten shows more piety than you,
no power on earth will save you from God's coup.

ATTERCOP Your Grace, your glass is empty, mine stays full,
and Tungsten fills and empties his, to suit
each change of wind. Your generous god anointed
you; remember who appointed you.
Unlike your good kind god, I fight when hurt.
Stay at my side – or you will lose your skirt.

BISHOP A small glass, thank you, Waiter, for the toast.

(Pause.)

ATTERCOP Sound freedom's trumpet.

(Fanfare. Attercop with golf club and Bishop with crosier pose for the imagined media. Camera flashes. Crowd wave flags. Jerry introduces Attercop.)

JERRY The Republic of Stygia honours you,
the Museum of Horrors welcomes you,
our President of Presidents –
our pillar of steel, the truly impeccable
rich, wise and infinitely re-electable,
mastermind of words and deeds, our Attercop…

CROWD Hoorah, hoorah, hoorah.

[15] The epithet "ruthless" is borrowed from George W. Bush, then US President, who referred to "ruthless enemies" in a speech he delivered while the Anglo-American forces who had invaded Iraq were approaching Baghdad, George W. Bush, "Remarks at MacDill Air Force Base," Tampa, FL., 26 March 2003, <http://www.presidentialrhetoric.com/speeches/03.26.03.html>, accessed 3 February 2011.

ATTERCOP Friends, Stygians, countrymen,
lend me your screens.
I come to plan for peace, not worship war.[16]
Peace is the flawless green you drive to reach;
Peace is the beer upon your eighteenth hole,
Peace is the parent free to choose the school.
Peace is your sacrifice for those you love.
Peace is your freedom, envied by the world.
Peace is why I say to you with pride,
Our nation is addicted to its war.[17]
War has kept us going since our fathers
took this land and made it grow.

BISHOP We didn't take it. It was ours from God.

(Crowd cheer and wave flags. Camera flashes.)

ATTERCOP We train our "dogs of war" to fight for Good.[18]

CRONE You see the war, you see what it keeps doing.
Why are your eyes not red as fire with weeping?[19]

CROWD 1 Put a sock in it.

(Crone displays her knitting.)

CRONE The soldiers all have holey socks. I knit
my "register" of horrors wholly felt.[20]
When you get old, you have to knit the names
of those you don't want to forget.

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[16] The opening of Attercop's address to the people of Stygia parodies of course Antony's famous oration to the Romans following the assassination of Julius Caesar, William Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.2.79.

[17] Alluded to here is a line from the State of the Union address by George W. Bush, then President of the United States: "America is addicted to oil", 31 January 2006, cited in Elisabeth Bumiller and Adam Nagourney, "Bush: 'America is addicted to oil'", *The New York Times*, 1 February, 2006, page 1 of 3, accessed 1 February 2011.
http://www.nytimes.com/2006/02/01/world/americas/01iht-state.html

[18] Attercop's line alludes to Antony's evocation, "Cry 'Havoc!' and let slip the dogs of war," *Julius Caesar*, 3.1.273.

[19] Crone's speech inverts the import of the speech of Second Citizen, witness to Antony's oration: "Poor soul! His eyes are red as fire with weeping". *Julius Caesar*, 3.2.79.

[20] Crone borrows the term and the concept of a "knitted register" from Charles Dickens' Madame Defarge, Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*: Planet PDF, 303, <http://www.planetpdf.com/>, accessed 3 February 2011.

ATTERCOP My warriors of peace, the lady's right –
Each time a soldier dies, the grief we feel
must stir our hearts to honour sacrifice.
So long as tyrant states give terror suck;
so long as bullies scorch their people's flesh,
our love of peace gives us no choice but war.[21]

CRONE Where's Cassandra? Let her speak of peace.

CROWD 1 Traitor, traitor.

CROWD 2 Off with her head.[22]

ATTERCOP Come now, our nation can afford dissent.

SIMPLE Water, give us water.

CROWD Water, water.

ATTERCOP Water, yes, I'll go without, for everyone:
Our enemies have sought to steal our rain –
Our vision is to turn salt water fresh –
you'll see our Stygian River run again.

Waiter, serve the Crowd, the clear pure water
from my pilot de-sal plant.

(Waiter serves Crowd as they line up for a drink.)

CROWD Water, water.

Attercop. Attercop.

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[21] This rhetoric was inspired by a speech by George W. Bush, made prior to the declaration of war on Iraq, and in which he refers to the Iraqi regime under Saddam Hussein as one that "gives shelter and support to terrorism, and practices terror against its own people." G. W. Bush, "The Iraq Threat," Cincinnati, OH., USA, 7 October 2002, <www.PresidentialRhetoric.com>, accessed 2 February 2011.

[22] It's a famous cry, and beloved by me, as a Louis Carroll acolyte, for the outrageous childishness of its finality as a means of dispatching a too-bothersome other. When the exhortation enters the non-fantasy world, that is another matter. To attest to the endurance of "Off with her head!" as a vengeful cry, which, while it may masquerade as a cry for freedom, is grossly disturbing in its echoes of the reality of Terror, a contemporary reference will suffice. Peter Craven relates that shortly after the announcement that the second-in-line to the English throne, Prince William, was engaged to be married, students calling out "Tory scum" besieged the car in which the heir to the throne Prince Charles and consort Camilla Parker Bowles were travelling along Regent Street. "Seeing the vehicle as a motorised tumbrel, the rioters yelled, 'Off with their heads!' A window was smashed [and] an enraged citizen poked her [Camilla Parker Bowles] with a stick." Peter Conrad, "Falling Stars: The Plight of the Windsors," *The Monthly*, February 2011, 48-49. [note for bibliography: whole article 46-51]. With thanks to Lewis Carroll (1865), *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland; and, Through the Looking-Glass*, New York: Macmillan, 1963.

ATTERCOP Thank you, my fellow Stygians.
It's my sincere regret that times are tough,
and jobs seem scarce and prices always up.
I hold the torch of freedom, not defeat.
Our bankers, scientists and engineers
are conquering the odds to mine the globe
and bring prosperity that you deserve.
No need to have democracy for that
but we will show the world we can have both.

CROWD 1 Stygia for Stygians

ATTERCOP The poor among you will be better off;
you'll wean yourselves off all that welfare fat;
the working families won't be drowned in debt;
by growing rich we'll help you borrow more.

And when we've made the Arctic tundra melt –
the polar bears will have a special zoo –
technology will reach the ice-free oil
and turn that bubbling wealth to greater good.
There's nothing that the market cannot solve;
Our way of life is not negotiable.[23]

BISHOP God bless decency and hope.[24]
God bless Stygia.

(Crowd drink, cheer and wave flags. Camera flashes.)

CRONE Who will speak for what you cover up?

CROWD 3 Let the artists show their work…
the thinkers have their say.

ATTERCOP Ah yes, the wise-guys gang, the arts elite.

CROWD 1 Save our family values from the morally corrupt.

CROWD 3 More work for live saxophonists.

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[23] This line adapts the statement "The American way of life is not negotiable", spoken by George H. W. Bush, then President of the USA, Earth Summit, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, June, 1992, Cited in Robin Buckallew, "The American Way of Life is Not Negotiable," *The Naked Truth: Counterfeiting the American Dream*, Owners Inc., Feb 5, 2005, <http://www.faulkingtruth.com/Articles/GlobalWarning/1024.html>, accessed 2 February 2011.

[24] Attercop's reference to the "torch of freedom" and Bishop's blessing of Stygia both allude to a speech Mitt Romney concluded with the words: "The torch America carries is one of decency and hope. It is not America's torch alone. But it is America's duty – and honor – to hold it high enough that all the world can see its light. Thank you, God bless you, and God bless the United States of America." Justin Green, *Full Transcript/Video of Mitt Romney's Foreign Policy Speech at the VMI [Virginia Military Institute]*, Oct 8, 2012, David Frum, *The Daily Beast*, http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/10/08/full-transcript-video-of-mitt-romney-s-foreign-policy-speech-at-the-vmi.html>, accessed 9 October 2012.

CROWD 1 Not if they're un-Stygian, like you … .

ATTERCOP Creatives can be Stygian like us.

CROWD 2 They should be taken out the back and shot.

ATTERCOP Don't be like that. The penalty for artists isn't death.
They'll settle down – you'll see – when they find out
their funding and endowments are at stake.

CROWD 1 Boot the bludgers off the dole.

ATTERCOP *(To audience:)* Any contrary artists out there? …
Turn the house lights up and let me see.
Any writers out there? … Bent on sabotage? …
Dissenting journalists? …
Subversive scholars, testy academics? …
Dedicated teachers, thinking you
can break our rules? …
Welfare cheats?
Documentary filmmakers desperate to get something up? …
Minority photographers, sculptors, painters, poets, intellectuals,
composers, public broadcasters and playwrights? …
Thespians, rappers and clowns? …
It’s probably safe to put your hands up now.

There’s someone waving – See, you’re still alive.
I'm not Joe Stalin, or that other bad-time Joe –
McCarthy…

All kinds of artists are my friends –
Deliver me your decadence with taste:
I’ll welcome you, like cats, to openings;
We’ll chat each other, while you wine and dine.
Just drink your patron’s health in Chardonnay,
and save your endless whining for the grave.

(Crowd cheer and wave flags. Camera flashes.)

CROWD Attercop. Attercop. Attercop.

CROWD 1 Republic of Stygia rules.

ATTERCOP Stygia rules. Indeed. Stygia rules.
But we are not “Republic” any more –
”Republic” – that's so seventeen hundreds:
The world’s moved on since then and so must we.
”Republic” reeks of weakness. We have fire.
Give our fatherland the full re-brand.
I name our soil, our Stygia – Empire.

My brother General Tungsten’s coming home.
Prepare to feast, then march him back to war.
Give me your vote, and crown me Emperor.

(Crowd cheer and wave flags. Camera flashes.)

CROWD 1 Bring on the dancers. Bring on the show.

ATTERCOP Prepare the scene – the Empire of Stygia’s Waxworks Museum of Horrors Stomp. Jerry, a word…

(Seque to next scene.)

Scene 8. Attercop and Jerry plan Cassandra's future.

Dungeon. ATTERCOP draws JERRY aside, watched by CRONE , CASSANDRA and CHARLOTTE.

ATTERCOP … I'm right, then, Shark, to trust you with my life?

JERRY The bad times breed great talents in a shark.
I want a pearl if I patrol your reef.

ATTERCOP Don't get too greedy with those tiny teeth.
With borrowers defaulting on their debts
I've got to keep on bailing out the banks.
The yachting club is helping with morale,
the golf does keep me more or less in shape,
but if I let the banks go under water,
it's not just your democracy will drown.

CRONE (*Aside:*) When bankers play the oracle,
they say what they most want to hear.

JERRY It's not so much the money in my life –
perhaps a little outing on the yacht –
but let me have Cassandra for my wife.
There's something in her eyes that makes me …

ATTERCOP What!

JERRY Feel…

ATTERCOP What?

JERRY She makes me feel … I don't know what it is
she makes me want … it's something in her eyes.

ATTERCOP She wouldn't look at you, she's into bees –

JERRY She thinks I want the war, but that's not true.

ATTERCOP She wants us free without the work of war
that's holding Stygia against the East.
Tell her that's why you're working here – for peace.

CRONE (*Aside:*) When presidents turn oracle,
the future shrinks in fear.

JERRY Propose me to her as a man of art;
Remake me with an operatic name –
Siegfried, Tristan. I'll stage a life of magic
for her, as your impresario.

CRONE (*Aside:*) When show business plays oracle,
a happy end seems here.

ATTERCOP You need a name with urban chic…Heinrich.
That's it! Leviathan investment banker…

JERRY I'm more authentic if I fund a gallery…

ATTERCOP You run a tax-deductible foundation
in the Cayman Islands, dedicated
to the saving of the whale…

JERRY Cassandra sees there's something good in me…

ATTERCOP You woo her to our war that's just for peace.
One shouldn't ought to love one's niece so much
and be an uncle. Yes, and if a splash
or two with you could cure Cassandra's doom…
I'll owe you big. Your torso looks the part,
dear boy, but is your baby pistle old
enough to know what it should do?

JERRY Yeah, man,
your riper years can buy the fantasy;
but nothing you can do can buy the act.

ATTERCOP Your cheek's so good, I could make you my heir.
I have no sons, while fecund brother Tungsten
– may the rutter choke – gloats from excess.
When we we're kids, he'd pin me, wrestled, screaming,
to the floor. Well, could you get Cassandra,
in her love, to turn her father's hatred
round and make him love a part of me –
more than a part – the me that's born to save
our Stygia from catastrophic fall?

JERRY Hell is what you want and cannot have.

ATTERCOP Make your love work, or bring me Tungsten's kids:
I'll teach the man what helpless screaming means.

CRONE *(Aside:*) When presidents turn torturer,
they multiple their fear.

JERRY It must not come to that.

(Pause.)

ATTERCOP We must spoil Tungsten's military coup,
or you will find your end in shark fin stew.

JERRY That's final. Fine…The End. Let's skip the soup
and serve each other from a bowl of truth…
Cassandra hates me, but I've heart enough…
Don't cheat your shark – you'll find my gristle tough.

ATTERCOP The finest champagne, Waiter, for my niece.
And, Shark, the roses, from my cart.

JERRY (*Aside:*) Hell is happening inside my heart…
the dreadful things I had to do to her –
How can he tell Cassandra I know love?

(Attercop takes the champagne and the bunch of fake roses to Cassandra.)

ATTERCOP Drink this for me, Cassandra …It is real.

Would you prefer a Perrier water?

(Waiter gives Cassandra water. She drinks..)

You like your roses red? I think they're real…
They've got a scent. They're from a friend
of mine, a merchant banker. Rich. Heinrich.
Marry him.…and he'll take off the thorns.

CHARLOTTE *(To Cassandra:*) Give in and get invited to the good life.
Hide inside love's pleasure and know nothing.

CASSANDRA Inside an empty hive no honey flows.

ATTERCOP Take yourself upstairs and have a bath …

(Pause.)

Have it your own way.
Have more water if you want.
I'll leave you the flowers.

(Attercop puts the flowers and returns to Jerry.)

JERRY What did she say?

ATTERCOP Never give up.

CASSANDRA When torturers woo oracles.
Each eye must see more clear.

(End of scene.)

Scene 9. Waxworks Museum of Horrors Stomp.

ATTERCOP and BISHOP are seated onstage as spectators. The performers, CRONE, SIMPLE, CHARLOTTE and others of the CHORUS are ready to perform. JERRY has a clipboard as Emcee. CASSANDRA is as before, with the untouched flowers. If space and cast size permit, some of the Chorus play CROWD, as spectators onstage and among the audience.

JERRY Noble Sovereign-elect, the citizens
who thrive in your deep dungeon have prepared
a bold bucolic dance for you – the grand
Waxworks Museum of Horrors Stomp.

(Camera flashes.)

Music, Maestro:
Fandango of the auto-da-fé:

BISHOP *(Aside to Attercop:)* A good thing too, auto-da-fé, um, at the time, I mean, not now, of course, it's not the done thing any more, you know, it was the fourteen hundreds. Girolamo Savonarola's righteous leap for god against the devil: burn the faggots… sorry, homosexuals, I didn't mean offence. And heretics were in there too, and moral decadents. You needn't cross your legs, Attercop, we don't have Inquisitions now, at least not if you're Christian.

JERRY Fandango of the auto-da-fé:

(All is still. One the Chorus whistles "Greensleeves".[25] The sound swells. Charlotte sings and Chorus dance a symbolic immolation at the stake with Crone and Simple as victims.)

CHARLOTTE All in the beautiful month of May
While the fires burned bright at the break of day
The flames were chasing the clouds away
And the ash on the faggots like silver lay.

Wake, sinners, the sky's so blue
The conflagration is saving you
Up, open your orifice wide
To the flames of the rosy May morning.

(Reprise:)
Wake, sinners, the sky's so blue
The conflagration is saving you
Up, open your orifice wide
To the flames of the rosy May morning.

(Applause from Bishop, Attercop and Crowd.)

[25] The lyrics parody "Greensleeves", a traditional English folk song..

JERRY Electric Shocks to the Body Parts Hokey-Pokey:

(Chorus dance and sing a parody of "Hokey-Pokey."[26] Chorus may invite Bishop, Attercop and members of the audience to participate.)

CHORUS You put your right wire in [*right arm]*
You put your right wire out
You put your right wire in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

You put your left wire in [*left arm]*
You put your left wire out
You put your left wire in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

You put your right leg out
You put your right leg in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

You put your left leg out
You put your left leg in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

You turn the current on
You turn the current off
You turn the current on
And you never cry enough
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

BISHOP *(To Attercop:)*
There's too much flesh, raw tingling flesh.

[26] These lyrics parody "Hokey-Pokey" a traditional participation dance.

CHORUS *(cont'd.)* You put your head in
You put your head out
You put your head in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

You put your backside in
You put your backside out
You put your backside in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

(Applause from Attercop.)

BISHOP My friend, why do you clap this raw and reeking dance? You'll rouse the flesh and over-heat the nether-ended, southern bacchanaliac. Forbid the dance.

ATTERCOP It's Carnival, it's Mardi gras, the Feast of Fools, post-moderned into perfect punk.

BISHOP Out of control can soon mean out of luck.
They roil our city into Nero's Rome
and make our tender-chicken girls and boys
a rotten fruit for savages to pluck.

ATTERCOP I've picked the one I'm going to pluck tonight.

BISHOP You act as if you only need to flash
your toothpaste teeth for ruined girls to dash
and pump your failing spigot full of splash.

ATTERCOP Now choose the pretty one you'd like to pash –
Let's re-erect your hopes before we crash.

BISHOP You shouldn't give the people what they want.

ATTERCOP A people starved of capers,
wine and laughter's Saturnalia
grow dangerous and dank
when the only thing that's soaring
is the debt that's in the bank.

Encore, Maestro!

Will you, won't you, join the dance?[27]

[27] *Alice in Wonderland*.

(Attercop drags Bishop with him to join in.)

CHORUS You put your backside in
You put your backside out
You put your backside in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

CHORUS You put your whole self in
You put your whole self out
You put your whole self in
And you shake it all about
You do the Hokey-Pokey
And you turn around
And that's what it's all about.

BISHOP Enough, your frolic's gone on long enough;
while you reap orgies that undress the flesh,
our General Tungsten ploughs the field of war,
his sole embrace a prickly bomb-proof vest;
his sole release another funeral prayer,
his sole dessert an army ration pack,
dried stew and hardtack military crackers.[28]

ATTERCOP And that's what it's all about.

BISHOP Stop now, or I fly to your brother's side.

ATTERCOP Okay, guys, that's a wrap.

JERRY But…but the Chorus put their hearts in it;
they've been rehearsing day and night for ever;
let me read out the list and you can let
his Grace the Bishop choose.

BISHOP I'll have nothing more to do with it.

JERRY The Polish Pogrom – that's a Pas de deux –
Stalin, Hitler, you know, two big guys face off to see who's got the guts to kill the most.[29] The music's folk-meets-Wagner smudged with "Peter and the Wolf"…

BISHOP Completely out of date.

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[28] For a description of field rations from which I gleaned the terms "military crackers" <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Field_ration> and <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hardtack>

[29] For the idea that Hitler and Stalin pushed one another to ever more murderous actions, I am indebted to Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, London: Bodley Head, 2010.

JERRY The Pol Pot Polka; that's a post-disaster thing…
posted after when Cambodia got dumped with far too many carpet bombs.

The Rape of the Bosnian Women Rap,
Hang on, that's off the list… breach of copyright…
we get this more and more.

The Ku Klux Klan cavort;

The Rwandan Nineties Genocidal Rhumba;

The Tiananmen Square Dance…

BISHOP You can't afford to upset China.

JERRY The Armenian Massacre Aerobics –
Actually, no, that one's been crossed right out of sight;

The Nakba – that's the Palestinian Limbo …
dates way back from nineteen forty-eight…

ATTERCOP People should just shut up about some things.

JERRY The Waltz of the Wounded Knee …

ATTERCOP "… Enough; no more:
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.[30]"
We'll jump straight to the most appealing item.

JERRY Charlotte Corday at the guillotine:
her last beheading, death and execution.

ATTERCOP Tautology.

JERRY Murder.
She stabs the pecs of the French revolutionary
Jean-Paul Marat right in his bath-tub.

BISHOP Indecency and murder.

ATTERCOP I've had about enough of you.

(To Jerry:) Players in their places please.
Set the tumbrel and the guillotine.

(To Bishop:) Get out…get out…quit…go… decamp

BISHOP I ought to preside at the occasion.

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[30] These lines, irony intended, are borrowed of course from Orsino, Duke of Illyria, and are part of his speech, "If music be the food of love, play on", that opens William Shakespeare, *Twelfth-Night*, 1.1.1-15.

ATTERCOP It's France. It's seventeen hundred and ninety three.
They worshipped at the Temple of Reason.

BISHOP Heresy in a godless world.

ATTERCOP Sanity instead of superstition.

BISHOP Tungsten will hear of this.

ATTERCOP I'll text him now. He will enjoy the laugh.

BISHOP I'll book a jet to take me to the front.

ATTERCOP Give Tungsten my regards. Make sure he brings
you back alive with him to the banquet – I'll need your blessing at
my coronation .

BISHOP God cannot let this happen to the world.

ATTERCOP *(Aside to Jerry:)* Come here, my Shark. Dress the Bishop from that
batch of faulty bullet-proof vests, and pack him off to Naphthastan.
Leave the outcome to the snipers of destiny. And hold the scene,
I've got to take a leak.

(Attercop exits, texting.)

CHORUS Meddling priest
Nonie-nonie
Meddling priest
He thinks he'll get free
of that meddling priest.[31]

(Bishop takes possession of the stage.)

BISHOP *(Aside:)* Lord god, nothing I do is for myself
but for the virtue of your hallowed name.
I'm dying here alone of stubborn pride;
Help me convey your love to Tungsten's side,
where lust is dulled and great deeds gratified.

(Jerry straps Bishop into a cartoon-like bomb-proof vest.)

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[31] A spoof on the refrain "Chastity belt, Nonie, Nonie, / Chastity belt," from the traditional song, "Oh say, gentle maiden, may I be your lover?" Anon., "Chastity Belt", accessed 5 February 2011, <http://www-cs.canisius.edu/~salley/SCA/Bardbook/chastity.html>.
At the same time, the lines allude to a deadly struggle between sanctity and profanity for control of the state. In describing Bishop as a "meddling priest", the Chorus borrow from a speech T. S. Eliot assigns to the four Knights who come to Canterbury Cathedral on 29 December, 1170, seeking Archbishop Thomas Becket, whom they murder as a traitor to King Henry 11 of England. It is a speech in which the Knights make a jest of Becket's belief and construe the holiness of his faith as a delusion whose folly confirms their authority to execute the believer: "Where is Becket, the traitor to the King? / Where is Becket, the meddling priest?/ Come down Daniel to the lions' den, / Come down Daniel for the mark of the beast." T. S. Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral*, London: Faber, 1954, 80, first performed, Canterbury Festival, June 1935.

JERRY Fits you like a glove.

BISHOP Trust me, my friends – Give passion to god's plan…
Transform this sordid scene to Naphthastan;
Transform yourselves to soldiers of god's light;
And shine god's truth on Naphthastani night.

CHORUS We undertake with solemn promise our mission to demolish, destroy, devastate, degrade, and ultimately eliminate, the essential infrastructure of the heathen Naphthastan, except where conduits are required for the export of oil.[32]

BISHOP Do you think I look competent in this [*the vest?*]?

JERRY Take care. It's stock the rats were nesting in.

(Jerry exits.

Lights down. Sound-scape of a small deadly street bomb.

Silence.

In the semi-darkness, there are voices:)

CRONE Bandages. Bring bandages.

CHORUS Bandages.

CRONE Rip up the sheets

CHORUS Our sheets are gone for shrouds.

CRONE Rip up more flags

and call an ambulance.

(End of scene.)

[32] Carl Boggs writes: "NATO commander General Wesley Clark boasted that the aim of the air war [in the Balkans during 1999] was to 'demolish, destroy, devastate, degrade, and ultimately eliminate the essential infrastructure of Yugoslavia.' "Carl Boggs, *The Crimes of Empire: Rogue Superpower and World Domination*, London: Pluto Press, 2010, 32. Boggs cites Wesley Clark, quoted in Michael Parenti, *To Kill a Nation* (London: Verso, 2000) 124.

Scene 10. Tungsten in Naphthastan.

A street in Naphthastan. Some of the Chorus become CAPTAIN and SOLDIERS of the occupying Stygian army. CRONE becomes a citizen of Naphthastan and keeps flies from a wounded child. General TUNGSTEN is dressed a masquerade Hercules in parade-ground hat and a loin-cloth of lion-cloth, adorned with medals. He carries a formidable club. Bishop greets him. SIMPLE, playing one of the Soldiers, sneaks from his ranks to offer Crone a pannikin of water. They realise they do not share a language and attempt to communicate with gestures. Tungsten grabs Simple .

TUNGSTEN Captain, control your ranks.

SIMPLE Attention!

(The Soldiers form a sloppy guard of honour.)

TUNGSTEN Men. Men. I know it's hot. You'll get your bath.
Are we at war? Absolutely, we are.
That coffin holds a loyal soldier's steel.
My son. I have his medals here. He died.
He was about to tell me something good.
He died doing what soldiers do: we kill.
We kill the enemy before he can
kill us, we meet his ruthlessness with guts.
My son. They shot away his groin. He kept
on firing till he bled to death, he saved
his men. But you… your bellies full of piss,
you listen to Cassandra on the net,
and just because my half-wit daughter says
this war is wrong and terrorists are really
good guys in disguise, you leave your ranks
to serve your enemy a cup of cheer,
you crock of stained and half-smashed trunkless
tea-pots.

Which one of you flung wide the checkpoint gate
and told the bomber, Come on in? And Pffick.
He blows himself, and school kids on their bus
– lunch-box melted in their laps – right outside
the Ministry of Peace. Where are your heads?
Our army set the Naphthastanis free;
will you throw them again to terror's jaws?
Freedom needs its lions. Are we at war?
Absolutely, we are. Are we winning?

(Pause.)

Are we winning?

(Pause: hold until almost unbearable.)

BISHOP Yes. Yes. Yes.

TUNGSTEN Are we winning?

SIMPLE Yes, sir.

TUNGSTEN Name, soldier?

SIMPLE Private Simple, sir.

TUNGSTEN Simple. Yes. Thank you.

SIMPLE No sir, thank you sir, yes sir, we're winning
yes sir, the barbed wire's caught a five-year old.

(Pause.)

TUNGSTEN I see you think too much, Private Simple
Don't ever let me get near you again.

(Bishop draws Tungsten aside.)

BISHOP General Tungsten, sir, the men are sick;
they're eating spam without a use-by date.
Back home your brother Attercop eats pork;
he farms the army contracts out to friends
to fund their trades in toxic debts and drugs.
His treasurer's bankrupt and skiing in Dubai.
His men and women dance …

TUNGSTEN … Licentious man, you sniff out sin
to see yourself, the perfumed saint, advance,
I'm flying home myself, for men and arms;
You'll come with me and tell this hateful charge
to Attercop, and face to face …

BISHOP Sir, you mistake my meaning, do be warned …
Your brother…

(Tungsten turns away from Bishop.)

TUNGSTEN Captain, call our Naphthastani ally.

CAPTAIN Sir.

(Captain exits.)

TUNGSTEN Men, you know that Economics counts;
There's pain with every wobble of her arse.
Oil's hard to get, fuel's up and markets down.
Bread up, jobs down. Heists up, jails up, crack up.
The war has rescued you and yours from that.
Now ask yourself, what will you do for War?

SIMPLE General, what do we do with the trees?

TUNGSTEN I told you not to come near me.

SIMPLE The olive trees, sir. They get in the way.
Sir. Of the wall, you ordered a wall, sir,
to keep the people in, god put them there,
the trees, before he did the Adam thing.

(Tungsten takes Simple aside and tells him a story. Only the first line is audible.)

TUNGSTEN Don't you think, if god wanted miracles …

(Tungsten continues to whisper his private story. When the story finishes, Simple smiles.)

I see you smile, Private … Sergeant Simple.
At ease. Now go and use the bulldozers.
The trees won't know..

SIMPLE No, sir, you said I'd be your friend if I
could be your eyes and ears and tell you truth
like no-one else. I can't rip roots from trees.

TUNGSTEN Okay, I'll give you greater work than that.
Stay here. I need an executioner.

(CAPTAIN enters.)

CAPTAIN Crown Prince of Naphthastan! Present arms!

(Soldiers salute. PRINCE enters in his sedan chair carried by some of the Chorus who play his RETINUE. Some of them lug bulging sacks. Prince stands and submits to a body search by a Soldier.)

PRINCE The Prince of Occupied Naphthastan greets
you, lord high General, Field Marshall of Stygia.

TUNGSTEN Prince, we're friends here, you can call me Tungsten.

PRINCE Tungsten, friend … you cut your cloth…it suits you.
My father, King of Naphthastan, loves you.
Your presence in our land brings many gifts.
Dad likes the sound of anti-terror tanks;
my sisters build great palaces of ice,
my mother needs her Lamborghini tuned,
but pumping out that oil does make a mess:
our fishing nets drag carcasses ashore,
a cloying catch that reeks of kerosene.

TUNGSTEN I found a fine old restaurant serving boar,
I've fortified the quarter, you'll be safe.

PRINCE The right hand engineers the oil to flow,
the left hand moulds its outcome into bombs.

TUNGSTEN You sound as silly as my daughter Cass…
she gets a bee in her bonnet. Forgive
me, Prince, I lost my son; she'll smile when I
get home. One day our troops will go from here,
exhausted, limbless and unnerved. Of course,
you didn't hear me say that. I'd deny it,
anyway. But you'll be left behind.
I tell you this for you, for Naphthastan,
Learn to stare terror down. Stand tall…Chin up…
Chest out… Firm those abs…Work those glutes…
Come on… Here, try my club… Now, lift. Your biceps?
Lift… You're nearly there. Hit me, come on…
Hit me… Don't give up, man…

(Prince lowers the heavy club, exhausted.)

… a foreign power can only do so much.

PRINCE You knocked our despot off his pedestal
and in his place sways vast unhinged despair.

CRONE Bandages.

CHORUS Bring bandages.

PRINCE I am seized by a ridiculous love
for my people. You see a man who weeps.

TUNGSTEN Dear Prince, come home with me to Stygia.
I see you're not a man of war. Let's choose
a softer course… an M.B.A. You'll have
the world's best university, and you
can help me with my brother Attercop.
He's weak, and like a mouse he fears the bold.
He wants my victory but keeps his hold
too tight upon the funds I need to win.
Come with me, Prince. Just sign these papers here
to authorise refuelling of my plane.

PRINCE Before we talk of how you plan to pay
our nation for ten years of fuel at way
below the market price, a problem you
don't seem to comprehend – the oil you took
would buy us water, schools, industry,
bandages, and doctors good with burns –
there's something in these sacks for you to see.

(The Retinue open the sacks and display some treasures. Prince holds up a tiny horse.)

TUNGSTEN I see you've brought the tribute that you owe;
We'll put it through bomb clearance right away;
Stand by and you can load it on the plane.

PRINCE My people clean the quarters of your men.
This tiny antique horse, alive in bronze,
who rode imaginations' mountains free
of pain, looked out at children through the glass
in our Museum of Heritage and Pride.
These treasures are the stories of our land
and lives… Your men stuffed them like dirty socks
inside their lockers… putrid with gall
and wrapped in torn, be-splattered calendar girls.

Our treasure stinks of whisky and stale piss.
I would prefer the smell of cardamom.

TUNGSTEN Prince, would your mother like a Ferrari?
I've heard she can be very fond of pink.

PRINCE You mock a treasure greater than time past –
my mother.
That's how your god dies in the desert – laughing.

TUNGSTEN Who dropped the bombs on tyranny? Not you.
Who saved you from your big bad wolf? Not you.
Who got your father democratically
elected to the throne for years? Not you.
Who gets the bronze antiquities? Not you.
This horse will be a present for my sons,
they're only lads, they're all that's left. This horse
is something real from me to them so they
will know what war is like. See, look.
No batteries. No switch you have press.
You use your hands to make it gallop…

PRINCE *(To his Retinue:)*
Fill Tungsten's planes with fuel, fast as you can.

(*To Tungsten:)* Get on your plane, get out of Naphthastan,
and all your troops, before your god dies weeping.
The son you lost did not die brave in battle.
Warlords murdered him – feuding over
weapons he was selling rival lords …
Your son was rising like his father, with
no mercy.

TUNGSTEN The peace demands that we defend ourselves.
Seize him.

(Soldiers seize the Prince and Retinue.)

Now let me guess, Crown Prince, your father
doesn't know you're here…

(Pause.)

I thought not.
Whose side is your father on?

(Pause.)

You broke the contract that protects your state,
conspired against your father's greatest friend
and stole the tribute that is ours by right.

You have accused my son, your father's friend,
of running guns, when he gave up his life
to fight with local chiefs who work with us
to clear subversives from the poppy fields
and cleanse the hills of terror training camps.
.
Speak, Prince. Your father's son. Save yourself.

PRINCE Take out my eyes. They see too much.

(Prince cover his eyes with his hands.)

TUNGSTEN Sergeant Simple, your first task:
Take him and his conspirators away.
Cut off the hands that thieve, the nose that smells
so high to heaven. Tie their severed parts
around their necks, mount them on mules and send
them home to mother. What're you waiting for?

SIMPLE I'll get the bulldozer and do the trees.

TUNGSTEN Do as you're told,
or Captain here will demonstrate on you.

BISHOP General, a word. This constitutes, perhaps, somewhat, a cruel and unusual punishment. I think it might, perhaps, somewhat, contravene something – some treaty or other – I'm not sure what. Shall I'll see what Google has to say?

(From deep within his robes, Bishop ferrets out a trendy hand-held internet device and fiddles with it.)

I must be out of range.

TUNGSTEN It happens here a lot… Get used to it.

Simple, they're your prisoners. Off you go.

(Simple hesitates.)

You need to try harder. You're a soldier.
Men, let him hear you roar. Are we at war?
Absolutely, we are. Are we winning?

SOLDIERS *(Roar.)* Yes.

TUNGSTEN Are we winning?

SOLDIERS *(Louder.)* Yes.

TUNGSTEN Better.
I think that Sergeant Simple might be deaf.
Are we winning?

SOLDIERS *(Very loud.)* Yes.

TUNGSTEN Simple?

SIMPLE No, sir.

TUNGSTEN Captain, carry out my orders.

CAPTAIN Sir.

TUNGSTEN And when you're done, check these sacks for bombs
before you load them on my plane. Fetch me
as soon as it is fuelled. Solemn cortège
will board my son's remains with full respect
owed to his rank.
Bishop, there'll just be time enough for coffee.

BISHOP Do they think they have any of those flaky little do-dads with honey,
pistachios and cinnamon?

(Tungsten and Bishop exit.
Time stops for Captain and Soldiers.
Simple touches Prince gently.
Prince takes his hands from his eyes.)

SIMPLE Do you know which side god is on this time?

PRINCE I know what's beating in your chest.

SIMPLE My heart.
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot,

PRINCE Your heart.

My heart is beating very fast.

SIMPLE They're coming for us now.

Our hearts are galloping.

(Time flows again for Captain and Soldiers.)

CAPTAIN Prisoner escort, attention. Quick march.

(Drum, music and voices that intermingle, repeat and fragment into chaos. Soldiers march in slow-step towards Prince and Simple, but never reach them. Tungsten and Bishop return onstage, but remain unmoving as disembodied voices.)

SOLDIERS *(Dead slow.)* Left, left, left, right, left.

CRONE *(Sings:)* Mountain high
Ocean wide
Hold my fear
Child has died.

SIMPLE *(Hoof-beat, heart-beat:)* tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot-tlot.

TUNGSTEN You crock of stained and half-smashed trunkless tea-pots.

RETINUE My heart
Your heart
Our hearts

PRINCE A tiny antique horse, alive in bronze,
who rides the sacred mountains free of pain.

BISHOP Christ have mercy upon us
Lord have mercy upon us
I'll see what Google promises

CAPTAIN Quick march, quick march, quick march.

CRONE *(Keening:)* Way-eye-oh, kee-eye, way-eye-oh, kee-eye.

(End of scene.)

Scene 11. Jerry's waking nightmare.

Stygia. Dungeon. JERRY is in a space on his own, in his executioner's custom but without his mask, rehearsing what to say to Cassandra.

JERRY Your Uncle's sorry; join him for a drink.
There's terrible regrets when accidental
terrorists get caught up in the net
and people who have jobs like mine have got
to do their work. How can I tell her that?
How can I tell her anything?
And if she will not wash and come to him,
I have to put the shackles on.

(CASSANDRA appears as an emanation of his nightmare.)

Please have a sip of water,
I will give you anything you want.

CASSANDRA You should have died before you heard the orders
of a monster as the word of god.
You took his orders and you made them yours.
You forced the water, that is life itself,
to go to war with air, inside my throat.

JERRY It's hard to sleep, I can't turn out the light,
I get these ghastly brain snaps in the night,
the smell, it's on my hands, I hear the screams,
It's like I need a hood on my own head
to shut them up. You've got to gag yourself
of else you'd spew.

CASSANDRA You made our elemental sisters, Water
and Air, war with one another… Air
and Water at war with one another, war
with one another, war with one another,
in our throats.

JERRY He said I have to put the shackles on.

CASSANDRA Come here and kneel with me on mucky earth
where gaolers throw the coffee grounds, dead bank
accounts, potato skins, the carcases
of bombs, and cardboard boxes made to cherish
high-heeled shoes. We'll put our hands in living
soil and beg the help of all our earthworm
friends to feel what blindworms learn to see.

JERRY It's filthy here, Cassandra, stop.

CASSANDRA As if our fingers were alive in earth
without our eyes we'll see each atom move.
We'll feel each grain of life, each jostled self,
each fallen creature animal and plant,
pass through our earthworm gut and re-compose,
as we ourselves will pass through theirs
when our night comes.

JERRY Shut up, will you, shut up!
He said I have to hood your head.

(To himself:) I didn't ask to be here, god, I didn't
ask for this …They catch you blubbering,
you know you're gone. Harden the fuck up, man,
get your act together, harden up.

CRONE Come, help us all get out of gaol for free:
you know where the system keeps the keys.
We'll go together to a home-grown farm –
There was one somewhere once, I think, or else
I must have dreamt… You ever dream that you
could taste a real tomato?
You want a bit of rag to wipe your nose?

JERRY Get out of my face.

CRONE You're young. You've still got time to start again.
You could travel to the olive harvest.
They'll teach you how to strip the trees and sort
the fruit: the olives that are big and sound
go in the brine to pickle for the table;
you take the others to the olive press.
Even the smallest one, gathered from
the ground, where it lay fallen, pink with rot,
has still got good, rich oil to give, inside.[33]

(Pause.)

I need that bit of rag to wipe my face.

JERRY Don't push your luck, old bag, you're killing me.

(Jerry hastens to put on his shark mask.)

CRONE Knit one. Slip one. Pass the slipstitch over.

(Transition to next scene.)

[33] I am indebted to "By Mike, blog, 'How to harvest olives'", *Quarter Year*, February 18, 2009, accessed 25 October 2012, <http://quarteryear.wordpress.com/2009/02/18/how-to-harvest-olives/> .

Scene 12. Guillotining of Charlotte Corday.

Dungeon. CHORUS make ready the guillotine operated by JERRY, in his executioner costume and mask. With cartoon-like weapons, RIOT SQUAD secure the site. One of the Chorus, a bass, plays CLOCK. HAULERS pull CHARLOTTE in the cart, now a tumbrel. She plays to the rowdy CROWD who are corralled or seated onstage. ATTERCOP, golf club in hand, takes the most prominent seat. CASSANDRA is as before, shackled, hooded. CRONE knits.

CRONE Knit one. Slip one. Pass the slipstitch over.

JERRY In the presence of the President of the
Republic of Stygia …

ATTERCOP … Empire
It's the Empire…

JERRY uh … the Empire … that's just what I said,
President of the Empire of Stygia,
the inmates of the Waxworks Museum
of Horrors perform the guillotining
of the beautiful woman who dared
to murder Jean-Paul Marat in his bath –
Charlotte Corday!

(Drum roll.)

CROWD 1 Off with her head.

CRONE Knit one. Slip one. Pass the slipstitch over.

(Attercop leaps up to help Charlotte descend from the tumbrel. She lays her head on the block. Jerry adjusts the basket to catch her head. Attercop strokes Charlotte's hair aside and exposes her neck.)

CROWD This is the night that we give you a fright
Here comes the scandal we hide from your sight
Here comes the butcher who makes children cry
Here comes the baker who bakes them a pie
Here comes the candle to light you to bed
Here comes the chopper to chop off your head.

(Jerry unwinds the halyard from its cleat and tests the movement of the blade. He holds the halyard ready to let the blade fall.)

CROWD Here comes the candle to light you to bed
Here comes the chopper to chop off your head.

(Chorus invites the audience to join the chant:)

CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Ten
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Nine
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Eight
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Seven
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Six
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Five
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Four
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Three
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	Two
CLOCK	Bong	CROWD	One

(Jerry releases the halyard. The blade falls.

Blackout.

In the darkness, soundscape: blade falling; improvised voices:)

CHARLOTTE *(Screams:)* Aaah!

ATTERCOP Fore!

(Clang of metal hitting metal.
Silence.)

CROWD 1 I missed it.

CROWD 2 Did he get her?

CROWD 1 Did you get a photo?

JERRY Power outage. Sorry, we'll have to go again.

(Lights come up slowly to reveal Attercop using his 3-iron to hold up the blade before it reaches Charlotte.)

ATTERCOP One of my better swings if I say so myself.

CHARLOTTE You almost got me there.

CROWD 1 (*Groans of disappointment:*) Orrrr.

CROWD 2 Not fair

ATTERCOP Haul up the blade.

NEMESIS You can't interfere with history.

ATTERCOP This one’s too good to lose. Let’s get her on her feet.

(Jerry hoists the blade back up and secures the halyard. Crowd erupts in mayhem.)

CROWD 3 Rip off. Cheat.

CROWD 1 Give us our money back

CROWD 3 Down with Attercop

CROWD 2 Get her

CROWD 3 Get her, give it to her, get her

ATTERCOP Help! Riot Squad, on the double, whatever it takes.

(Attercop struggles to protect Charlotte from the Crowd who seize her. Riot Squad and Jerry beat them back and release her. The battle is stylised like a comic-book.[34] Dialogue overlaps and repeats and could be improvised as needed.)

RIOT SQUAD Kapow

CROWD Thud

RIOT SQUAD Splat

CROWD Money back

RIOT SQUAD Whump

CROWD Pow

ATTERCOP Grrrrrr

CROWD Arfff, arfff

RIOT SQUAD Crack

CROWD Bonk

RIOT SQUAD Whack

[34] Comic-book sites helped my rendering sound effects into onomatopoeia: “Kapow”, ”Whump”, “Pow”, “Bonk” came from *Cracked.com: America’s only Humor* [sic]*and Video Site,* accessed 3 February 2011, <http://www.cracked.com/funny-1097-comic-book-sound-effects/>. “Crack”, “Whack” and “Grrrrrr” are from *Arts and Letters: Comic-book Clip Art*, accessed 3 February 2011 <http://www.arts-letters.com/comic/lettered_sounds.html>.

CROWD 1 Thwack

CROWD 2 Clonk

CROWD Death to Attercop

RIOT SQUAD Wham

CROWD Money back

RIOT SQUAD Bam

(Riot Squad drag the fallen Crowd into heaps. Crone knits. Attercop strokes Charlotte's neck.)

ATTERCOP A lovely neck… pity about the stitches.
Anyone can have an accident –
You'll like the feel of pretty silk. Scarf!

(One of the Riot Squad passes him a silk scarf purloined from the Crowd. He winds it around Charlotte's neck.)

Shoes!

(Jerry gives Attercop a pair of red stilettos.)

CHARLOTTE Red. I've never had red shoes.

(Attercop fits the shoes on her feet transforming Charlotte into PETAL. Petal is the name the script uses henceforth.)

ATTERCOP Looking good, Petal.

PETAL It's Charlotte.

ATTERCOP That was then. This is now.
It suits you like your shoes, my Petal.
Nobility fused with Italian finesse.[35]
Milan, Las Vegas, Paris, Shanghai, Rome

PETAL Check out the ultra plutocratic heels.

ATTERCOP The force field travels up the leg …
Instep, heel, ankle…calf… thigh…

PETAL With shoes like that, I'll need the full Brazilian…

ATTERCOP Music, Maestro.

(Brazilian-style dance music.)

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[35] Attercop's words adapted from an advertisement for Gucci shoes, *Chanel Prada Versace Footwear*, accessed 30 June 2008, <http://shoeam1.com>.

PETAL You ask a girl to tango dressed in this old rag?

ATTERCOP You're cool like that. It shows me where you're from.

PETAL Who shops for you? Is she, is there … someone?

ATTERCOP It's my own label, Attercopular;
The buckle's pure Palladium
The hood's the best – a diamond stud.

PETAL Are you for real?

ATTERCOP Try me…

PETAL I've kissed a lot of toads.

(Attercop and Petal dance. The now compliant Crowd creep back in to watch. The dance heats into groping and copulation seems inevitable, but Attercop stops short.)

ATTERCOP Not here. You never know …

PETAL It doesn't matter what the servants think.

ATTERCOP Jerry, the three-iron – now.[36]

(Taking the proffered club, he swings at an imagined ball.)

PETAL A hole in one – I want some of your luck.

ATTERCOP Keep still, look, there… Ducks…there… they're ducks,
On the water hazard, sitting ducks.

PETAL Pretty things…We could throw some cake,
Here… quack quack quack quack quack quack quack

(Attercop turns his golf club into a gun, aims and fires.)

ATTERCOP Blam! Blam! Blam![37]

CHORUS Quack, quack, quack, quack, quack quack.

PETAL They got away.

ATTERCOP The sun was in my eyes.

PETAL Get me out of here.

(Attercop helps Petal into the cart. He whistles for Haulers as if they're dogs. They help him into the cart.

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[36] The term "three-iron" came from Brent Kelley, "Irons," *About.com Guide,* accessed 5 February 2011, <http://golf.about.com/cs/golfterms/g/bldef_irons.htm>.
[37] Vocalised sound from <http://www.cracked.com/funny-1097-comic-book-sound-effects/> .

One of the Chorus whistles, or a musician plays, an air from "Greensleeves", like a comic digital ring tone.)

PETAL Cool ring tone.

(Attercop answers his phone, cutting off the tune.)

ATTERCOP *(Into phone:)* Attercop.

PETAL Uber-cool phone…[38]

ATTERCOP *(To Petal:)* Diamond logo and dressed in rose gold.
We bought out Tiffany's –

PETAL They were so twentieth century.

ATTERCOP *(Into phone:)* Dire …
If people won't disperse, call out the tanks.

(Attercop listens for a moment and hangs up.)

(To Jerry.) Shark, Cassandra's
followers are swarming in the square.
Send in our agents in plain dress and once
they get the havoc underway – we need
a mass of stupid people throwing rocks –
The media will prove how bad they are,
So get out there and loose the well-trained dogs,
Send in the horses too.

(To Haulers:) Now, giddy-up.

JERRY Wait, Boss, just let Cassandra talk to them …
she's got these weird ideas, but …

ATTERCOP No, Shark. Have you gone starkest raving mad?
Her thoughts alone are worse than hurricanes,
they'd blow our military bases from
the globe, make matchwood of our ship of state…

JERRY Get her on TV with you right now:
With her weird stuff she'll calm her people down…

ATTERCOP You want to be conscripted to the front?

JERRY What?

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[38] The description of the phone borrows from: Florin, "New luxury iPhone 4 costs $8 million," *unwired view.com,* 14 October 2010, accessed 16 February 2011, <http://www.unwiredview.com/2010/10/14/new-luxury-iphone-4-costs-8-million>.

ATTERCOP It's not so bad if you don't mind the heat,
the mines, the improvised explosions, boom,
blowing all your limbs to bed for good.
Now will you get out there and scare the crowd
Or do I give the job to someone else?

JERRY The shark, that's forced to feed itself on pain,
grows hungrier with each, more monstrous, meal.

ATTERCOP *(Aside to Jerry:)* You've grown too soft. I'll have to send a man
with balls. I'll give you one last chance before
I send you to the front. You seem to like
Cassandra, well, you did the water-boarding
like I asked, the sex will be so sweet,
now go and get her well and truly fucked –
she'll give up trying to prove herself the most
dangerous person in Stygia.[39]
For sure I will deny this conversation…
Just stop before you let the damage show.

(To Haulers:) Giddy-up.

PETAL (*Calls to Jerry:*)
You need to get your mojo, Shark.
Get onto Army stores; they'll lose that skirt.

(Haulers pull Attercop and Petal off, Attercop absorbed with his phone. Jerry shoves his arm in the jaws of his mask.)

CRONE Those teeth are real. You'll cut yourself - watch out…

(Jerry pushes his arm against the shark teeth. Blood runs.)

JERRY (*Stifled cry of pain:*) Aah.

CRONE That will go septic, lad.

JERRY Good.

(Interval.)

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[39] Attercop's words, "the most dangerous person in all Stygia," echo Henry Kissinger, National Security Advisor to President Nixon, who described Daniel Ellsberg in 1971 as "the most dangerous man in America" who "had to be stopped at all costs" for having released classified documents, the so-called "Pentagon Papers". H. Bruce Franklin describes Kissinger's speech as a "wild tirade [that] characterized Ellsberg [. . .] as a fanatical drug-crazed sexual pervert". H. Bruce Franklin, "Pentagon Papers Chase," review of Tom Wells, *Wild Man: The Life and Times of Daniel Ellsberg*, St. Martin's/Palgrave, 2001, *The Nation*, July 9, 2001, 31-36. <http://web.ebscohost.com.simsrad.net.ocs.mq.edu.au/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?hid=122&sid=9b489c9f-617f-404b-a3db-89ea6e02ae68%40sessionmgr114&vid=5>, accessed 5 February 2011.

Scene 13. Rape of Cassandra.

Dungeon. [Note: Although not used again, the guillotine is not struck from the stage, but stays visible throughout the play.] CASSANDRA is shackled . CRONE knits. CHORUS are restless. From offstage come sounds of Soldiers' shouts and someone (Jerry) being beaten. Frank and Wimple enter with a soldier's parade-ground uniform for Jerry.

FRANK (*To Wimple.*) Get the foot-cuffs off the slut.
And let us see her face.

(Wimple is forced to obey. He hides behind Crone – he does not want to be part of the rape. SOLDIERS escort onstage a beaten JERRY in his wrecked executioner's costume. They strip him and dress him in a soldier's parade-ground uniform.)

CASSANDRA The soldiers come to take the butterfly
whose colours spoil their mud-soaked field of mars.
She sees the soldiers fix their bayonets
to cut away the wings that stain their war.

(In slow motion Frank propels Jerry towards Cassandra. Men gather behind Jerry for their turn.)

CRONE Stop, stop, stop Time.
Hold your breath like a child.

WOMEN Hold your fear to the wall
Count to three
Count to three

CRONE He treads.

No! …Whoa!… Whose law gives you the right
to break a butterfly upon your wheel?[40]
Not mine, not yours, no law can give you her,
For if you rack another self with pain,
you'll wreck her life and wrack yourself as well.
Forget what men have done to ruin you,
And run away. It's not too late. Now, go.
You'll break your heart and grind your weal to woe.

JERRY Someone's got to lie her down and do it.

CRONE Every woman's got a hole. Have me
instead. I've had some more experience.

[40] These lines of Crone allude to and subvert a famous figure from Alexander Pope: "Who breaks a butterfly upon a wheel?" The subversion comes in the granting of a coherent voice to the butterfly, embodied in Crone. Alexander Pope (1688–1744), "Satires: Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot", 1734. line 308, accessed 20 February 2011, <http://www.bartleby.com/203/149.html>.

(Jerry shoves Crone out of his way and advances in funereal step towards Cassandra.)

CASSANDRA. Stop, Time. Don’t let him take another step.
Don't make me be this piece of meat, this hole,
this heat that draws his cock to break my day.
Make my flesh as ugly as the corpse
that farts to chase the robbers from her tomb.

He does not turn his nose; he’s lost all sense.
Savaged… Hollow… how he sniffs his meal…

Hack off my hair and frog my face with warts;
Cast boils across these breasts and blow with flies
my secret lips that cannot speak their pain.

Shriek, nether lips, hatch out your unheard voice
and split his ear with shrieks that keep on shrieking.

He stops.

I breathe myself a moment’s life
for what will happen next will never be
the same again.

CHORUS He stops.

CRONE Hold your breath like a child.

(Long pause. Frank jolts Jerry.)

FRANK Get on, man.

JERRY *(Barely audible:)* This woman isn't mine; she isn't anyone’s.

FRANK What are you then, soft-cock, a faggot?

(Frank shoves Jerry forward.)

WOMEN They tread. MEN Tread. Tread.

WOMEN We dread. MEN Tread. Tread.

CASSANDRA *(Aside:)* Time moves, unmoved, and time would see me lost.
Breathe. Breathe.

WOMEN Dread. Dread. MEN Tread. Tread.

Dread. Dread. MEN Tread. Tread.

CASSANDRA Stop there. Stop now, or hear Cassandra's curse.

You think by coming to steal fire from me,
you'll make yourself possessor of a flame?

By the heat of my heart,
By the burn of my breath,
Know now, man –
You batter me,
you curse yourself.

Fire of my spittle,
Steam of my kettle,
Melt to a piddle
your poxed armadiddle.[41]

(Jerry swings at Cassandra. The stylised blow hits the air. As if hit, Cassandra reels and falls to the ground.)

JERRY Close up she grows too ugly for a wife.

(Jerry fumbles, undoing his belt and trousers.)

CRONE Stop time forever child.

FRANK *(To Men:)* Hold her down.

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[41] The neologism, "armadiddle" arrived with the first breath of morning. It was as if Cassandra confected the word to allow herself a moment before horror is inflicted on her. In that moment, she and the Chorus Women who are watching, transcend their shared dread by a solidarity of defiance in the face of overwhelming force. That defiance, although unable to prevent the rape of Cassandra, allows the women the taboo-breaking triumph of mutual recognition that beneath the rapist's armour lies a peculiar vulnerability: Jerry's "taking" – his theft – of Cassandra becomes an act that destroys his desire. Here is an early version of her speech:
Burn the man
He wants to be
Melt to wax
His potency.
I could see immediately that the abstract Latinate pontificating word "potency" had to be struck out. Cassandra is not engaged in pedagogy, but actuality. I had to find a way her words could imply that Jerry's action of stealing from her steals from himself as well. I needed to find for Cassandra a plain but poetic euphemism for Jerry's unreliable organ. Meanwhile the penultimate line "Melt to wax" became "Melt to a puddle". "Puddle", with its feminine ending, broke the masculinity of the rhythm, which became lilting instead of martial, a game instead of a lesson on the fate of Icarus. I felt asleep comforted that in the morning I could consult Jonathon Green's rich compendium, *The Penguin Slang Thesaurus* (London: Penguin, 1999.) But, I didn't need to. The morning found the word for me: "Armadiddle" – the lumbering self-aggrandising shell-protected armadillo reduced to a hey-diddle-diddle. "Puddle" became "piddle", whose twin connotations of a trifle and a child urinating reduce Jerry to a watery mockery that dribbles away his intention, as the state's forcibly-recruited rapist, to project himself as steel. As soon as Cassandra's insult arrived in my head, it created an immediate response from the dream-play Jerry. He swung at Cassandra with ferocious violence and knocked her to the ground. I had not expected that – indeed I had not wanted to show any violence towards her on stage. That blow enacted itself unbidden in my head with such force, it made me include it as an onstage direction in the script. The blow is stylised, a violent punching of the air that swings at Cassandra, but does not pretend to be actual. That violence signifies the violence of the rape, its power and force. I make it clear in the final stage direction of the scene that the rape is not to be staged through any action or sound.

CASSANDRA Time, close my eyes, I cannot be.
Aiee, Aiee, Aiee.

(The scene cuts abruptly. Do not stage any simulation of the rape whatsoever, through actions or sounds.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 14. Petal renovates.

Nowhere, or, in other words, a space where Petal obliterates from her consciousness what is really there in the Dungeon.

PETAL I can't put off the renovations now…
I need an entertainment space that flows;
There's got to be a budget line for that,
The market will bounce back; it always does,
We'll open up the walls to seamless space –
The indoors will flow out, the outdoors in.
I hate our avenue of cypress trees –
they're gloomy – not that easy to replace.
The pool needs interest – like, a waterfall,
a curving row of date palms, hung with fruit –
we'll have to get them helicoptered in.
It's hard to get good tradesmen any more.
You really have to be there when they bring
the bob-cats in or else you'll lose the lot –
You're really at the mercy of these people.

(End of scene.)

Scene 15. Descent of Galateo to the dungeon.

Night-time. CHORUS, SIMPLE, CRONE and CASSANDRA are asleep. GALATEO enters, wrapped in a dark garment that all but conceals his bee costume. Only the faint light he's carrying is visible as it flickers on the sleeping figures. The flicker of light approaches Cassandra. All other lights stay down till indicated.

CRONE Get away from her, if you hurt her again …

GALATEO …It's all right, it's only me.

CASSANDRA *(Overlapping:)* Galateo.

CRONE It's Galateo.

CASSANDRA Galateo.

CHORUS It's Galateo.
Danger.
Terror.

CASSANDRA Galateo.

GALATEO My love
My once so happy love.

CHORUS He's bribed the guards
They've let him in
We daren't look
He mustn't see the pain she feels
It mustn't show
We mustn't tell
He mustn't know.

(As the lights come up they reveal Galateo holding Cassandra. Afraid the guards might be watching, Cassandra breaks the embrace, but Galateo won't let go her hands.)

GALATEO Your hands, these stains,
The blood?
What have you done?

(Pause. Cassandra is silent.)

What have they done?

CRONE He fears the wounds he cannot see
His tears will fill the heaving sea.

GALATEO Cassandra, let me wash the hurt away

CHORUS Water.

GALATEO No fresh water?

CHORUS We have no water,
Bring us water.

CRONE She cannot cry, this one, she cannot cry,
but we have cried, and I have cried,
and you have cried:
Salt tears,
an ocean of salt tears…

(Crone brings Galateo a bucket of water, imagined to be tears. He gently washes Cassandra's hands and face.)

GALATEO I fear the hurt I cannot see;
Be safe my love, be safe with me:
My tears will wash away the shame
My tears will wash away the pain.
Come with me now,
Come through the mountain pass:
The winter's long, then spring will come,
the pumpkins flower,
the bees will dance, alive and well,
their hive will overcome the mites,
The gourds will plump, the apples swell.

CASSANDRA (*Aside:)*
I cannot speak
I cannot tell.

GALATEO Come with me now
Come through the mountain pass;
I need you at my side,
The fox is back
The chickens need
a deeper fence;
The strawberries are running wild…
so are the slugs – we'll bait some traps with beer
Come with me now
The guards will let you out:
I promised them we'll give them half the crop…
They've promised they will let you out.

When autumn comes, we'll get a cyder-press;
We'll teach the children songs to sing and dance.

(Cassandra wipes tears from Galateo's face.)

CASSANDRA *(Aside:)* It's not too late,
My brothers surely want to stay alive.
When Attercop sees youth, he'll sheath his knife –
If I taught them a song that they could sing…

GALATEO The guards will say you've died.
They've put a corpse on hold –
They'd planned to take it out to sea,
They'll stick it in the coffin
they've had waiting there for you.
They'll say they fought to keep you from the window,
but you liked to lean too far out on the edge.
You fell:
An accidental death.[42]
They'll give you a fine funeral:
Attercop will turn his head to show
the crowd how hard he wipes his eyes
on his white handkerchief,
but you won't have to be there,
you'll be home.

(Cassandra moves a little apart, unable to speak.)

Cassandra?

CASSANDRA (*Aside:)* Don't ask
Don't ask me words of hope
Just hold me in your arms

GALATEO Come with me now
Come through the mountain pass
The pumpkin vine's in flower
Come with me now.

[42] Galateo's speech is nourished by the work of Dario Fo's fictional depiction of the extra-judicial powers of the Italian state. Fo draws on Commedia dell'Arte traditions to create onstage the searing horror, knife-edge ironies, and side-splitting absurdities of events on December 16, 1969, when the police interrogation of Guiseppe Pinelli, arrested on suspicion of bomb-planting terrorism, was terminated by the accidental defenestration of the accused. Dario Fo (1971), *Accidental death of an anarchist* [Morte accidentale di un anarchico], adapted by Gavin Richards from a translation by Gillian Hanna; introduced by Stuart Hood, London : Methuen, 1987, c1980. Originally published: London: Pluto, 1980. "The first investigation by the Public Prosecutor concluded Pinelli's death was 'una morte accidentale' [an accidental death]. The second investigation was inconclusive, but opted for suicide." Northern Broadsides Theatre Company, UK., "Education pack: Dario Fo, *Accidental Death of an Anarchist*, produced by Northern Broadsides, 2008, <http://www.northern-broadsides.co.uk/PAGES/Anarchist.htm>, accessed 12 February 2011.

CASSANDRA I cannot speak
I cannot leave.
If I profess I love my little brothers,
do I stand or lie? There is no single
word for “tell the truth”, but “lie” can hide
its double tongue behind no end of masks.
My brothers are my father’s joys. They are
his sons. They stand not near as tall as me,
and yet I balk before I pat their heads
or join in play with weapons for our arms.
Our father holds their worth more high than mine,
as generals hold the virtue of their tanks
above a living person’s daub of paint.
My brothers play their games with war-like skill:
Each kill they score as mounting victory;
Each victory they boast by counting kill.

Go, my love, you must go safely home,
I cannot leave the boys to die alone.

GALATEO Come with me now
The bees are back, alive and well,
The gourds will plump, the apples swell
Come with me now.

CASSANDRA Don't ask me words of hope
Just hold me in your arms
a moment more
a moment more;
Now fly away my love
another sunless day comes near.

GALATEO The night will go.
The light with come
and touch the wall.
The sun will rise;
the dungeon fall.
What have they done to you, my love?

You cannot trust me?

CASSANDRA I dare not tell; I cannot say.
My words like rocks would crash and flood,
for rage would roar and crack our clay
and scour our slope of love away –
our valley choked in mud.

Pain could not stop if I began
to tell what hatred did to me
where once the sacred river ran
through forests measureless to man
down to a life-filled sea.[43]

GALATEO I love you,

CASSANDRA Love, fly away, love, fly away
I love you.

(Two men of the CHORUS become FRANK and WIMPLE and pull Galateo from Cassandra.)

FRANK Get a headlock on him.

WIMPLE Time's up, I'm sorry to say.

(Wimple fumbles as he shackles Cassandra.)

FRANK Get on with it, you klutz. I promised the wife I'd dig something up for dinner.

(Wimple helps Frank drag Galateo out. Crone unravels her knitting.)

(End of scene.)

[43] With gratitude to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, "Kubla Khan," first published 1816, ed. John Hayward, *The Penguin Book of English Verse*, London: Penguin, 1956, 255-257.

Scene 16. From dungeon to beauty-parlour.

The Dungeon. Dark. Looking stylish, PETAL arrives, waving a document. CASSANDRA in shackles tries to avoid her but movement is painful..

PETAL Cassandra, get up. It's me. Petal. Charlotte that was.
(To Chorus:) Get cracking, you lot, get her shackles off.

We need more light in here.

(Lights come up to beauty salon brightness. CHORUS become BEAUTICIANS, unshackle Cassandra, and roll in a beauty chair and the drinks trolley, now stacked with beauty products too. CRONE mingles with Beauticians.)

(To Cassandra:) Sign this and they'll let you out –
What colour do you want your hair?

(Petal gives Cassandra the paper and a pen and pushes her into the chair, where Beauticians pummel-massage her.)

They won't hurt you – you're cheekbones are okay.
The Beauty Girls will give you just the look,
You'll stand with me and Attercop, and tell
the media the truth. The facts you used
to think were facts weren't facts at all, and people
should get back to work and off the streets –
it's all your fault they've occupied the morgue –
The war on terror's made them better off
and no-one minds austerity one bit
so long as everyone gets back to work
and stimulates the future going shopping.

(Cassandra breaks free and gets to her feet.)

CASSANDRA Don't paint my toenails, please, not red, not black,
not anything.

PETAL Don't you have your toenails done when you go to Bali?

CASSANDRA Nightmares, whirl the world about,
Upside down and inside out;
Strike your hooves against my sky,
Snap your tails where horrors lie;
Dip your snouts where secrets weep;
Suck my oceans, cool my heat;
Come, wild horses, shuck your reins,
Tear the barbed wire from my brain,
Ride me through this hurricane.

(Cassandra screws up the paper.)

PETAL They caught a terrorist called Galateo

CASSANDRA Galateo grows pumpkins.

PETAL He’s in a cell, where he could hang himself.
It’s up to you.

(Petal presents the paper to Cassandra again. She signs.)

CASSANDRA Where have they taken him? Come on, I've signed it now, you must free Galateo with me too. Let’s go.

PETAL He’s being well looked after. I’m texting Attercop to keep him safe.

CASSANDRA My little brothers – where have you hidden them?

PETAL Stop fussing. I’m texting Attercop to keep them safe.

CASSANDRA Let us out, let all of us out,
for each of us is one,
and one alone is none.
So long as one is caught,
all the rest are naught.

PETAL You have to trust me, cause there’s no-one else.

CASSANDRA Wait…

BEAUTICIAN The mud-pack always shuts them up.

(Beauticians trap Cassandra with treatments and apply a mud-mask, gagging her.)

PETAL Lie back, relax. We’ll start with sliced cucumber – shut your eyes. I'm getting you a dog and one thing leading to another, pretty soon you'll want a truly useful husband, like a banker, name of Heinrich. The honey-moon with him comes in a coral reef.
I’ll help you pick the perfect dog. You'll like your Labrador-cross-Poodle … Labradoodle. Labradoodle comes in Toy, Mini, or Maxi – Maxi, that’s pretty close to King, but is size important to you? It depends what you want but the top of the designer range is the Groodle – that’s your Golden Retriever on Poodle, but how big’s your bed? If you'll pardon me asking. You don't have to say a thing, but if your bed’s no bigger than a queen, I wouldn't recommend a Groodle. And think about your couch size too – if that’s a problem – it’s not a problem if you go for something smaller, like a Schnoodle … your Schnoodle’s Schnauzer crossed with Poodle. That's the thing if you want to get you into dog-walk dating you can't go past a Schnoodle. You can order from the colour chart – an unbeatable range: strictly black, heavenly chocolate, through to macchiato, latte, cappuccino, or your pure baby-cino, just the froth with no dust-ons if you’re allergic to colour.

BEAUTICIAN Does she want a chocolate body scrub?

(Cassandra struggles to protest.)

PETAL I don't think so.

BEAUTICIAN Okay, okay.

PETAL Okay, let’s go with a Cavoodle – that’s a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel cross Poodle. Your Cavoodle is the avatar of love – you'll turn your grumpiest dog-dater into mush. You'll suit the Cavoodle…It’s the lap-dog of no resistance.

(To Beauticians:) And when you’re done with her, get this old dungeon scrubbed and clean, we’re getting it converted into Banquet Bunker – Attercop says the insurgents on Cassandra’s side stole some mobile rocket launchers; we’ll be safer underground. We've got a new regime – we're into human rights, we’re getting all of you a brand new set of earphones. No-one will ever have to hear how close the rockets come.

(Petal pulls the gag from Cassandra’s mouth.)

I wouldn't want you not to breathe the air.

BEAUTICIAN What product does she want in her hair?

CASSANDRA None. No. Nothing. None.

PETAL That’s not what it’s about.

(Petal plugs herself in to earphones and exits, leaving Cassandra helpless in the beauty chair.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 17. Crone gives Cassandra pumpkin seeds.

In the Dungeon, CASSANDRA sits helpless in the beauty chair, asleep, the slices of cucumber still covering her eyes and the brightly-coloured mud-pack her face. CRONE puts a bundle of herbs in Cassandra's lap.

CRONE Cassandra…

CASSANDRA Friend.

(Cassandra leaps up, knocking the cucumber slices from her eyes and the herbs to the ground.)

I fell asleep, but they'll be back.

(Crone holds Cassandra.)

CRONE Your eyes are wild like demons of the night …
I fear your unshed tears – they brew a storm.

(Cassandra picks up the bundle of herbs.)

He brought you herbs from the garden.

CASSANDRA Lemon balm! Smell it, dear friend.
From Galateo's garden? He's escaped?
Tell me my love's escaped?

(Crone puts a packet of seeds in Cassandra's hand.)

CRONE Not yet, and, these, they're pumpkin seeds…

CASSANDRA Galateo grew these? He held them in his hands?

CRONE Sweet golden pumpkins, seeds of hope.
Tuck the packet here inside your breast.
He's still alive; he sends you seeds, and seeds
can grow.

(Crone lifts Cassandra's hand that holds the packet of seeds and presses it against Cassandra's heart.)

CASSANDRA I've nothing I can send.

CRONE Give him the trust you give yourself.

CASSANDRA And which self do I trust, I'd like to know?
How can I trust the self that shifts in me,
when every shift invites another blow?

CRONE I'm looking for an answer I could give…
I think that in the questions we might live.

(Pause.)

CASSANDRA They held me down. It hurts. You retch with pain…
But worse …They learn from one another how
to sear your body in its fear and shame.
They laugh.
There's worse… You thought you knew the human face;
You thought you had a human face; you think,
no matter what they do, I'm still myself,
a human self who's one of human-kind …
You try to speak…That's when they take your face;
They flay your flesh to empty you of you;
They flay your mind to make you taste their death
a thousand times, as they have died in you –
until you scream out loud to kill yourself.

(Pause.)

That's when she came along and made them stop…
There's worse: I'm here; I failed; I'm still alive.
That's not the worst; I want them hurt. Her too.
I'll have them dead. All of them dead. Her dead.
She will be back to get me. She'll be back.

(Crone puts her arms around Cassandra.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 18. Galateo escapes from the dungeon.

Night. Outside the dungeon. Two men of the Chorus, FRANK and WIMPLE, manoeuvre, with difficulty, a supermarket trolley, in which a body slumps, concealed in sackcloth, revealed later in the scene to be GALATEO.

FRANK They're not in their right mind.
They should of given us a wheelie bin.

(They pause. Wimple pulls a bottle of water from the trolley and drinks.)

You got anything to eat?

WIMPLE *[Wishful thinking:*] Pizza. Bacon. Eggs. A nice tomato and a bit of cucumber. Even a carrot.

FRANK Roast pumpkin and a dab of butter.

WIMPLE D’you like brussel sprouts?

FRANK Come on.

(Frank struggles to pull the trolley.)

You know Attercop can't get it up?

WIMPLE What’s that got to do with it?

(Pause.)

Have you?

FRANK What?

WIMPLE Got anything to eat?

FRANK No.

WIMPLE They said this one grows pumpkins.

FRANK They didn't give any to us. Up to no good, the lot of them.

WIMPLE Come on, then.

(Wimple tries to drag the trolley counter to Frank.)

FRANK Where are you going, Wimple? Stop.
It’s over there.
They said the river.

WIMPLE The river's full.

(Pause.)

We have to go the garbage dump.

FRANK Too many scavengers. They don't want this one found.

(Pause.)

My cousin knows a butcher pays good money for a load of no-name mince.

WIMPLE Don't flap your tongue like that … you'll make it true.

FRANK We'll go the tailings pond.

(Frank yanks the trolley onwards, making Wimple follow. They travel: forward motion could be mimed. Frank brings the trolley to a stop. Wimple shines his torch into the imagined pond.)

WIMPLE The goo's too thick, the body's gonna float.

FRANK We'll go the reservoir.

(Frank yanks the trolley forward again.)

Slit his belly open, fill him up with stones and push him in the well: 'Splosh'.[44]

WIMPLE He'll turn the water bad.

FRANK But we'll be out of here by then.

(Pause.)

You want to take all night to dig a hole?

(Frank lifts the cloth and uncovers Galateo, his torso naked, a paper in his left hand, his right arm dangling, holding a quill. The effect is reminiscent of Jacques-Louis David's painting of Marat dead in his bath.[45] *Wimple shines his torch on Galateo's chest.)*

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[44] An allusion to the fairy-tale fate of the greedy wolf who ate the little goats, Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, ed. and trans. Maria Tatar, "The Wolf and the Seven Little Goats," *The Annotated Brothers Grimm*, New York: W.W. Norton, 2004, 29-35. In *Hurricane Eye*, Frank assumes here that any corpse given to him to dispose of must be culpable and deserving of the wolf's fate.

[45] Jacques-Louis David, *Marat assassiné*. 1793, Oil on canvas. 165 x 128 cm, Brussels: Museum of Modern Art, Royal Museums of Fine Arts of Belgium accessed 13 June 2011, <http://www.opac-fabritius.be/fr/F_database.htm>. Note: I discovered on 29 May 2013 that the originally accessed website <http://www.fine-arts-museum.be> was no longer available and have updated the URL to the new site, which appears to be available only in French or Dutch. On the site originally accessed, 13

WIMPLE There's not a mark on him.

(Galateo stirs:)

GALATEO *(Moans:)* Waaarrrr.

WIMPLE Catabolic combustors!
How'd he get out the dungeon walls alive?

GALATEO *(Moans:)* Waaarrrr.

FRANK Get a brick and hit him on the head.

WIMPLE He might belong to somebody.

FRANK Wimple the wimp…Wimple's a wimp.

WIMPLE You can't blame someone for what name they're born.

FRANK I'll find a rock or something.

(Wimple studies Galateo's face in the torchlight.)

WIMPLE Wait, Frank, you gotta see his face.

FRANK What?

WIMPLE I used to look like that.

FRANK What?

WIMPLE Young. You know, when I was young.

FRANK I had a son. Looked like that. Threw rocks.
He said the army wouldn't fire on people, but they did.

GALATEO Waaar… Water.

FRANK He's thirsty. Give's your bottle.

(Wimple holds the bottle himself for Galateo to drink.)

WIMPLE Ask him where he lives.

FRANK Leave it, just leave the god-damned bottle there, let's go.

WIMPLE What if he dies?

FRANK They say there's agitators going to hit the streets again tomorrow.
Thousands. Someone's going to find him when they want to load his trolley up with rocks.

June 2011, the title of the painting, *Marat assassiné*, had been translated into one that is less accusatory: *The Death of Marat*.

WIMPLE Are you going to help?

FRANK What?

WIMPLE Tomorrow? Go with the people? Help to fill the square?

FRANK You bury your son for an idiot, you don't do funerals.

(Frank gently touches Galateo's cheek.)

WIMPLE Not the people with the rocks –
The people who sit down, and sing.

FRANK Nah… maybe.

It could be cold tonight. Give us your jacket.

(Wimple takes off his jacket. He shivers. Frank discards the paper from Galateo's hand, and tucks him in, under the jacket and sackcloth, like a child.)

I could.

WIMPLE What?

FRANK Help. Sing. I might be out of tune.

If you weren't such a wimp.

WIMPLE What's the piece of paper say?

(Frank retrieves Galateo's paper from where it fell, and scrutinises it in the light of Wimple's torch.)

FRANK Squiggles, gobble-de-gook.

WIMPLE It's like a bee danced over round and back.

FRANK Wimp, it's just an order for some take-away Chinese.

WIMPLE You ask him what it says when he wakes up.

FRANK Hungry, I'll bet.

(By unspoken mutual consent, Frank and Wimple push Galateo away with them, taking care not to jolt the trolley.)

(End of scene.)

Scene 19. Cassandra in the eye of the hurricane.

Dungeon, as before, overlaid with Palace. CASSANDRA tethered as before. CRONE brings her a bundle of herbs .

CASSANDRA It’s quiet. Cool. I've stopped sweating. Breath comes,
breath goes … comes … goes. The hurricane
that whirled me to its eye, now holds the centre
still. Inside this clear and unfogged eye,
the ground that thought itself a rock, now sees
itself a fabrication of the wind …
a fleeting foot on cataclysmic earth,
an evanescent, un-intentioned nothing.
And yet, these eyes insist this self is true.
I should’ve kept the lid on eyes and mouths,
I should’ve held my little brothers’ hands
and stolen us away before the storm.

CRONE There’s salvia for you, sweet sage. It undoes grief.

CASSANDRA It’s too late now; I stand inside the eye,
and any moment now, the hurricane
returns.

CRONE Grief has no time but now.
The storm of harm that pulled you to its core,
will hold you in its claws of pain, as if
that’s how things always were and always ought
to be. You've got your lover’s lupin seeds:
Hold them to your heart and ride the storm,
for love will grow, as weeds do, where there’s soil.

CASSANDRA Spin then, cruel wind, spin me and do your worst.
You spun the gaol that tore my truth to false.
Spin now, mad wind, against the clock, and whirl
this dungeon, widdershins, from false to true.

(End of scene.)

Scene 20. Mugwort.

Dungeon. CHORUS, playing SERVANTS change the space from Dungeon to Palace: they roll out a red carpet and set a banquet table. WAITER brings in the drinks trolley. CRONE knits. CASSANDRA holds her bundle of herbs. BEAUTICIANS bring dresses and shoes.

PETAL Let's get you in a frock and shoes before
the party starts. Do you like tangerine?

CASSANDRA My baby brothers shriek against the knife.

PETAL The menu says two little sucking pigs …
sweet apples melting in their tender mouths.
I've styled a coronation banquet that
will outperform King Solomon's own feast:
larks' tongues in aspic, hearts of artichoke,
choice baby clams, wild hart and fattened fowl.[46]

CASSANDRA Your sty so fat and foul, the heart clams shut…

PETAL The chef is using world's best practice here;
He sees the good in Attercop and me:
he's helping stimulate a spending spree
to save the nation from financial stew.

BEAUTICIANS When things get shocking
We just go shopping

CASSANDRA Come with me now to Attercop, it's not
too late – and you could open up his heart.
Charlotte, please?

PETAL That's not my name, not now.

CASSANDRA Petal… use that slippery pit of yours,
just this once, for something good. Don't turn
away from me, or you will taste your conquest
of my Uncle as it is – defeat.

(Petal proffers a grey dress for Cassandra.)

PETAL You'll like gunmetal when you get it on,
I'm calling grey the season's newest black;
Now, lose the greenery, you ditzy doof…

(Petal tries to take Cassandra's bundle of herbs, but Cassandra's response is to offer Petal a sprig.)

CASSANDRA Hold yarrow to your breast. It staves off evil…

[46] Harts and fatted fowl are listed among King Solomon's provisions. 1 *Kings* 4, v. 22.

PETAL I've got the best tattoo for that …it's from
the ancient falcon god: the Eye of Horus.
It's not for showing everyone. It's a
seduction affirmation, but it works.
Horus gave Egyptians pyramids…
How much bigger do you want than that?
It takes a bit of practice if you want
to make the tattoo's purple eyebrow move…
I've had the full Brazilian. You can have
a teensy little peek… I'll have to whisper
what that does to Attercop…

(Petal begins to unfasten garments, as if to reveal an intimate tattoo.)

CASSANDRA Keep your hair on – I mean your clothes, your self…

PETAL Cassandra, you're a clueless prude.

CASSANDRA I'm telling you the truth – if truth makes friends.
Security are catching everything
on closed-circuit TV…

(Petal hastily covers up again.)

PETAL You're right, of course.
I should say thanks. They'll jump on images
of me, upload them like pornography
and Attercop will stumble on the link…

You think I'm anybody's, but you're wrong.
I'm giving Attercop the love he needs
and Love is going to make this kingdom kind.
Who saved you from the dungeon? It was me,
but all because of Love. That's what worked …
I made him swear he'll never throw you back.

Aren't you going to say, "Well, Petal, thanks" …

You think I'm having fun in bed with Attercop?
Forget what I just said – the words slipped out –
You see a need – well, someone's got to do it

(Cassandra offers Petal more herbs.)

CASSANDRA Here's mugwort

PETAL And what the Jurassic use is that, Smug-fart?

CASSANDRA Mugwort will free your nightmares from their pen
and in the ghastly motion of their truth
your eye will wake and notice where it lies.

PETAL I rescued you from rot to be my friend –
What can I say to make you care for me?
I shouldn't tell you this, but you should know,
Att's heart's not good, he's got to watch his carbs…
I've told the chef we're cutting out trans fats.

CASSANDRA Tuck mugwort in your pillowslips before
you take your Attercop to bed tonight –
You'll see the lie his torture makes of Love –
he makes you mire the silky sheets with mud
and reeking, play again the steamy sow,
who grunts and squeals upon her fetid boar …

(Petal strikes Cassandra.)

PETAL You lie, you uptight sneaky spying toad.

CASSANDRA Out-whipped, his course collapsed, he falls asleep,
and leaves you and your delight undone.
He turns his back and you are freed at last
to rub yourself in secret to the music
of his snores …

(Petal strikes Cassandra.)

PETAL Orangoutang.

CASSANDRA … and his forgotten sow, so hungry still,
her teeth peck, febrile, at his fallen neck.

(Petal strikes Cassandra.)

PETAL Unfeeling wasp.

CASSANDRA *(Cry of pain:)* Ahh.

PETAL It didn't hurt…See what you've made me do

CASSANDRA You take the Dungeon with you in your hands…

PETAL Sit down, shut up, and have a drink.
It's far too late for anything but that.
Garçon, champagne, and something for my pooch,
I mean Cassandra here, saved from the pound
and learning to say thanks or back she goes…

(Waiter gives Petal a champagne.)

Merci, garçon.

(Aside to Waiter:) And make a pretty cocktail for the bitch.
I've got some canine tranquilizers …here…

(Waiter drops the pills Petal gives him in a drink.)

WAITER This will get them down the lady's throat…

PETAL She's got a gift for going barking mad.

(Waiter offers Cassandra the drink. She refuses to take it.)

CASSANDRA *(To Petal:*) I want to help, I really am your friend…
I start to talk, I say too much…I make
you mad … you're not listening.

PETAL Bottom's up.

(*To Waiter:*) You served my champagne warm.
I can't drink that.

WAITER We're cleaned clear out of ice. The power is down.
There's trouble with the grid…

PETAL You can't do that to us. I've got my banquet…

WAITER The generator's coping with the lights…
There's always enough gas for the ovens.

PETAL That's not enough to win the war on terror
any more. Attercop has got
the best speech of his life lined up tonight,
We've got to have the nation watching him.
You've got to serve the media cold beer.

WAITER I'll get the army on the case.

(JERRY enters in dress uniform, his ceremonial sword in a scabbard; his face still shows signs of his having been beaten up. Unnoticed by Petal, Cassandra tips her glass of drink onto the potted palm.)

JERRY Attention.

(Chorus becomes SOLDIERS who follow Jerry orders as he tries to get the column to escape Cassandra. Using simple repeated or improvised commands, Jerry's speech continues under Cassandra's interventions.)

Shoulder arms.
Quick march.
Right turn
Eyes Right.
Eyes Left.
About Turn.

CASSANDRA Soldier, curse the heart you forge to steel

JERRY Left Wheel
Left Wheel
Left Turn
Right Turn
Left Turn
Right Turn

CASSANDRA You men, break ranks, or he will forge your hearts

JERRY By the centre
Left, left, left, right, left.
Change step
Right turn

CASSANDRA He'll forge your eyes, your wits, your heart… stop now
before you forge your cock to senseless steel
cruelled to fit the scabbard of the state
and play its rapier.

JERRY Squadron, halt.
To the left Salute.

(Soldiers salute Petal.
Petal pulls Cassandra away from Jerry.)

PETAL *(Aside to Cassandra:)* You know what Jerry's like, he's just a man.
He was the rotten apple in the bunch.
There's always one. See, look, he's quite reformed,
he drills the unemployed to fight the war.

JERRY Stand at ease.
Attention.
Present arms.

(Desperate, Cassandra swigs her drink.)

PETAL Thirsty are we? – Don't you even notice
that it's warm.

(To Jerry:) Shark, We're out of ice.

JERRY The generator's working at the morgue –
There's fridge- fulls of disaster-ready ice.

PETAL You'd better take a tank, they might resist.

JERRY Attention.
To the morgue.
On the double.
Quick march.

(Jerry and Soldiers exit, pursued by Waiter pushing the trolley. Cassandra slumps to the floor, drugged. Petal's phone signals she has received a text.)

PETAL Curl up and have a little rest, sweet bitch
Your father's landed and I hope he's feeling hungry.
.At least the decorations are to die for.
I could've been an artist.

(End of scene.)

Scene 21. Tungsten's homecoming.

Dungeon, made over as Palace. The CHORUS and CASSANDRA are motionless. TUNGSTEN, dressed as Hercules as he was in Stygia, enters with his wheelie-luggage and duty free shopping. He is greeted by the soon-to-be-married couple, ATTERCOP and PETAL.

PETAL How was your flight?

TUNGSTEN Mouth-watering. What's for dinner?

ATTERCOP Children.

PETAL He's just kidding, he likes children.

ATTERCOP I like the way they crunch and munch and scrunch
when I eat them.[47]

PETAL Children are bitter. You can't eat them
without coating them with sugar.[48]

TUNGSTEN Sweet.

ATTERCOP It all depends whose kids the war might have
to eat if we're to win.

TUNGSTEN I never let my soldiers target children.
If any die, it's the unfortunate
result of enemies who put them in
the way. They lure the media to feed
upon each half-grown corpse, so they can stir
the world's barbarians to hating us.

PETAL Attercop says you're letting the savages win.

ATTERCOP He always thinks that he's the one in charge.
Who commands the state? The nation's chief.

---

[47] This speech of Attercop's came from dialogue improvised by my partner Warren Salomon when he and my grandson, Raffaele Hughes, then aged 9, followed the example of Ursula Dubosarsky's protagonist Becky, and transformed the sofa into a stage and the loungeroom to an auditorium. See Ursula Dubosarsky, *The Puppet Show,* Camberwell, Vic.: Puffin, 2006, 3-5. Using glove puppets of Australian bush animals, Warren and Raf performed their improvised re-invention of Grimms' fairy-tale of Hansel and Gretel, 10 May, 2011. Thrilled with the vigour, wit and rhythm of the off-the-cuff dialogue, I rushed for pencil and paper. Warren later told me that the words, "I like the way they crunch and munch and scrunch when I eat them", which he'd spoken for his glove puppet, a Tasmanian Devil playing the Wicked Witch, came from a line Roald Dahl gives to a wily, child-hunting crocodile from whose jaws the children are rescued by the intervention of other animals. Roald Dahl *The Enormous Crocodile*, New York: Knopf; distributed by Random House, c1978.

[48] This speech of Petal's is my verbatim transcription of a line that young Raffaele improvised for his puppet, a young kangaroo playing Gretel, who, at the moment, was in imminent danger of being fattened, cooked and eaten. I made several attempts to "improve" on the line, but none of my tweaking had the vigour of the original, as recorded here. See previous footnote.

PETAL You talk too much. Go and get changed for dinner.

ATTERCOP It's Tungsten doesn't have a clue about
PR. He's the one that launched heat-seeking
missiles took the children's party out.
Oops! And oops again. And who's the one
who has to wear the damage here at home?
Moi.

TUNGSTEN He starts a war, he's gotta know "Stuff Happens."[49]

ATTERCOP So who's the idiot, there on the ground,
whose cock-ups spike the war's public relations
bills by double digit millions?[50]
Him.

TUNGSTEN And who's the slack-arsed one, who boasts he's won,
But starves my war of troops that I have earned?
Him.

ATTERCOP You…

TUNGSTEN Moi?
Him.
Make him confess how much the war is raking
in. Confess whose skills at making war
have won for him the land of Naphthastan
where his great corporations suck their fill.[51]

ATTERCOP Who squanders every surge of troops I send?
You.
You, and who's the one who brings the skills
To hide your stream of body-bags back home?
Moi.

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[49] *Stuff Happens* is the title of a play by David Hare, that presents his account of the path to the war on Iraq. The play uses verbatim material, including from key figures in the administration of George W. Bush, the President of the United States of America. Hare took his title from words of Donald Rumsfeld's in reaction to the looting of art treasures from the museums of Baghdad that the occupying forces did not protect. David Hare, *Stuff Happens* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2004). See Robert Fisk, "When art is incapable of matching life", *The Age of the Warrior: Selected Writings,* London: Harper, 2009, 167-174.

[50] Drawing on James Bamford, Carl Boggs states that "the war in Iraq was opened up by a lengthy, expensive propaganda campaign managed in great part by the Rendon Group and abetted by the corporate media. Beginning in the early 1990s, the Pentagon secretly awarded Rendon tens of millions of dollars in contracts to provide the ideological context in which regime change in Iraq could be effectively pursued." Carl Boggs, *The Crimes of Empire: Rogue Superpower and World Domination*, London: Pluto Press, 2010, 39. Boggs cites James Bamford, "How Public Relations Gave us the War in Iraq," *Rolling Stone* (December 1, 2005), 53.

[51] For a study of the profits to oil corporations and to firms servicing the military, like Bechtel, Halliburton, Chevron, Lockheed-Martin, and Raytheon, see Antonia Juhasz, *The Bush Agenda*, New York: Regan Books, 6-8; 41; 177-8; 252, as cited in Boggs, *The Crimes of Empire*, 40-42.

TUNGSTEN And who delivers you the fattened calf
that overhangs your paunch and hides the man?
Me.

ATTERCOP Moi.

TUNGSTEN Him?

ATTERCOP *(Threatening:)* You…I'll…

TUNGSTEN Me.
Then bring it on. Or can't you stop the wobble
in your gut?

PETAL Cool it, the both of you, don't try and win
the argument, you know you never will.
Now go, my love, let's see you dressed to kill.

(Attercop pretends to exit, but instead, conceals himself to spy on Tungsten and Petal. JERRY joins Attercop and struggles to perform the service of a butler and dress him for dinner, while Attercop is riveted by what Petal and Tungsten are doing.)

TUNGSTEN So.

PETAL Hot… I mean…
I mean, it's hot. Aren't you? Aren't you hot?

TUNGSTEN I see you wear my supine brother's ring;
His bauble's cold, and I must call you 'sister'?
But what, my hungry lamb, would you call me?

PETAL Mr. Lion.

TUNGSTEN Mr. Wolf.

PETAL What's the time, Mr. Wolf?

TUNGSTEN One o'clock.

PETAL What's the time, Mr. Wolf?

TUNGSTEN Two o'clock.

PETAL What's the time, Mr. Wolf?

TUNGSTEN You and me o'clock.
There is no three o'clock.

PETAL What big eyes you have, Mr. Wolf

TUNGSTEN All the better to trust me with, Mistress Wolf.

PETAL What big teeth you have, Mr. Wolf.

TUNGSTEN All the better to eat you up.

PETAL Eat me. Eat every bit of me. Eat me…

TUNGSTEN …Up.

(Attercop watches Petal and Tungsten embark on devouring each other.)

ATTERCOP *(Aside, to Jerry:)* Shark, get that raw face attended to…

JERRY You promised me Cassandra for my wife
She looks at me, unmerciful, with bile.

ATTERCOP Go find her little brothers – Tungsten's sons,
and give them to the cook. Let's see how Tungsten
stuffs his mouth with his two little pigs.

JERRY The shark you train to gobble those you hate
learns how to read your mind and bring more bait.

ATTERCOP It is already done?

JERRY You've got your wish;
War devours its children – from your dish.

(Jerry exits.
Attercop interrupts Tungsten and Petal.)

ATTERCOP Brother dear, now don't mind me,
You're much too big to thrash
She'll never fill your empty heart,
She's yours, the worthless trash.

(End of scene.)

Scene 22. Cassandra breaks bread.

Dungeon, set for the Banquet. Cassandra alone with a loaf of bread.

CASSANDRA Only the brave break bread on Tuesdays. Tuesday,
Second day of making worlds. The day
the dough rises. Tuesday. First day of making
war. Tuesday. You were, to some, a day of fun,
before – before they named you after Tiw,
the Teutons' God of War.[52] Tuesday. The fat
grows head and hands …head and hands
grow teeth and claws. Tuesday. Mars' Day. Day
of wars. And still I struggle not to look:
I cannot stop the horrid thrill that wants
to watch the fiery blasts and tortured flesh.
I didn't do it; I just have to see.
So snap your jaws, you greedy gods of wars:
Come Friday, bloated, you will beg for fish
and priests to come and bless a bloodless dish.

The sky drops only toads.
Fish cavort in puddles.
Gulls clack their beaks.
Tuesday gorges Monday, eviscerates
Wednesday, threatens Thursday, frightens Friday,
Sated by Saturday, sets fire to Sunday.
Only the brave bake bread on Tuesday. Whore's day.

(End of scene.)

[52] Derivation adapted from "Tuesday," *OED*.

Scene 23. Jerry orders his own execution.

Dungeon, set for the Banquet. CASSANDRA, barefoot, still tethered, watches. JERRY marches in with the SOLDIERS and encounters PETAL.

JERRY I've got your ice, but where's the glacier
that's big enough to cool down Attercop
when he finds out whose pants you dropped?

PETAL Where are the orphans that you promised me?
I must have orphans singing at the feast.

JERRY Tough. We caught some orphans on the street
we've locked them up, we found them much too hungry
to obey – you can't teach them to sing.

PETAL Go back and get them fed. The Bishop's got
the Choir-boys well rehearsed; we've got to have
the orphans too, ragged, cherub-cheeked –
I want the world in love with what we do.

JERRY Shut up and listen, which you never have.
Tell the Bishop when he buries me –
Forget the filth I made of life, and say
a word of hope that once was somewhere here.
Tell Attercop to find another shark.
If I had guts I'd take his life with mine,
but, Charlotte Corday …

PETAL That's not me … I'm Petal.

JERRY Yes, of course. You stab one monster dead,
you make another grow. Sharks have to eat,
but even sharks can drown in their own blood.

(Jerry gives orders to the Soldiers, who obey.)

Squadron, attention.
Orders for the execution of a discombobulated human shark:
Suicide by firing squad.
Captain, hood your prisoner.

(Jerry lets the Captain put a hood over his head.)

JERRY *(Muffled:)* Escort the captive to the wall.

CAPTAIN Firing squad
Quick march.

(Captain and Soldiers march Jerry out.)

PETAL Thank god that's over with. Was that for real, or did I make it up? It makes me wonder what these pills I'm taking do, if they make people go like that.

CAPTAIN *(Off.)* Firing squad halt.
Ready.
Aim.
Fire.

(Noises off: a round of gunfire.)

(Cassandra offers Petal some broken sticks of green.)

CASSANDRA There's balm to cool the heated head;
Where is the balm to soothe the dead?

PETAL Are those pills I gave you wearing off, sweet-heart? I'll get you more. Don't try to talk.

(Petal undoes Cassandra's lead.)

Where are your shoes? What's gotten into you? It doesn't matter if they hurt. You just have to put up with your feet, if you want to get anywhere in life.

(Cassandra allows Petal to put her feet in a pair of high heeled shoes.)

Now, which dress would you like?

CASSANDRA A mogadon clown in a designer gown.

(End of scene.)

Scene 24. Galateo infiltrates the palace.

On a level higher than the Dungeon, GALATEO enters, disoriented, dressed in his Bee costume and mask. He encounters WAITER who is preoccupied with the drinks trolley. CRONE watches.

GALATEO Excuse me, you look kind inside, where is
the party?

WAITER It's only A-list invitees and none of them need fancy-dress.

GALATEO Oh, please, I'm on the B-list - Dancer.

(Galateo dances a brief exuberant demonstration.)

WAITER What are you on?

GALATEO Life…

WAITER That's that new designer drug, not worth the risk.

GALATEO Which way's the ogre's feast? My love is there. I have to take her
home. They tried to kill me once, but I came back in on the pumpkin
flowers.

WAITER The chef will serve them golden from the pan,
stuffed with goat's cheese and black mission figs –
sweet basil leaves to make the garland crown.

GALATEO Don't put asparagus with that.

I lost my way. The kitchen smells of screams.

WAITER Get out of here, you crazy, while you can.
I've got to go down there, I don't know how,
and serve the dignitaries the roasted kids.

GALATEO Cassandra's brothers. Wrap their bones in sleep.
They showed me how to make a treasure map
for getting out of hell. You can come too.

(Galateo shows Waiter his squiggle-paper.)

WAITER It's squiggles, like they were too young to know.

GALATEO When men make hell the heart of their known world,
a map you make with friends could lead you out,
but first I need a guide to get me past
the teeth of hell and down inside its maw.
I cannot leave Cassandra in that pit.

CRONE We've still got time. Here, have a sprig…

(CRONE offers Waiter some herbs.)

WAITER Wild thyme! The leaves smell like the sun.

GALATEO Bees love the flowers of thyme.

CRONE It clears the head for courage to go on.

WAITER Grab the ice bucket.
We'll go the service lift, straight down.

(End of scene.)

Scene 25. Attercop meets Jerry's corpse.

The Dungeon, made-over as Palace. ATTERCOP and BISHOP encounter CAPTAIN and SOLDIERS as they drag on Jerry's corpse, upside down, his torso naked, his fingers gripped around his shark mask. On his chest and back, red ribbons– not stage blood – mark the wounds from the bullets. CASSANDRA watches.)

CAPTAIN Hey boss, where do you want the meat?

ATTERCOP My Shark.
You're sure he's dead?
Jerry?
I didn't ask for this.

CAPTAIN We can't get in the morgue. They've barred the doors.
The grid's still down, they've been cleaned out of ice,
so tell your Princess, "Sorry." Do you want
the looters shot?

ATTERCOP That's Jerry's job, not hers … so now that makes it yours.

(Cassandra lays a sprig of green on Jerry's corpse. Moved by her care of the body, Captain and Soldiers handle it with respect and prepare to carry it off. Bishop lays hands on Jerry in blessing. On impulse, he embraces the body. He recovers himself and recites Psalm 51.7:)

BISHOP "Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow."[53]

(Captain and Soldiers carry the body out.)

(End of scene.)

[53] Psalm 51, v.7. Bible, King James Version. 18 Feb 1997 http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/k/kjv/kjv-idx?type=DIV2&byte=2275266

Scene 26. The Banquet – War devours its children.

The Dungeon, made-over as Palace. While the RIOT SQUAD frisk people, check for bombs and secure the perimeters, SERVANTS set the table with grotesque covered dishes and baskets of fruit and bread. GIRL, BOY and other ORPHANS grab food, but the Riot Squad chase them away with fly swats and batons. The thwack of the swat on the table makes a percussive rhythm that others amplify, with cartoon-like voices, the slap of batons in gloved hands and the stamp of feet. The Orphans counter with a profane rhythm of body percussion, tin plates and spoons.

ORPHANS Welcome to war's table
Eat while you are able
Raid store and sty and cradle
The feast is on the table

RIOT SQUAD Thwack

Smack

Noses full of tear gas
Eyeballs dashed with pepper

Crack

ORPHANS Welcome to war's table
Snaffle what you're able

RIOT SQUAD Thwack.

Who wants pepper with that?

Crack

You'll have pepper with that?

Thwack.

(WAITER arrives with the drinks trolley helped by CRONE and GALATEO who appears to others as a Bee. Galateo dances a zigzag course. Riot Squad try to swat him.)

BOY Buzzing. Something's buzzing.

GIRL Wild and buzzing.

RIOT SQUAD Who let that bee in here?

Thwack.

BOY Let's go buzzing

RIOT SQUAD Thwack.

GIRL Zigzag buzzing.

GALATEO *(To Waiter:)* What have they done with Cassandra?

WAITER Hide, they're coming.

CHOIR BOYS *(Off:)* Kyrie elèison
Christe elèison
Kyrie elèison.[54]

(Galateo settles in open view on the banquet table, a Bee on a flower, invisible to anyone who isn't looking. The procession enters on the red carpet, with CHOIR BOYS and BISHOP in the lead, followed by TUNGSTEN, ATTERCOP and PETAL in her red shoes, dressed like a princess at a racing carnival, her scarf concealing the stitches on her neck. She holds CASSANDRA on a leash like a naughty dog being trained to walk in a frock and heels. Also on leashes, Petal manages the DIGNITARIES in mock cocktail wear who romp around her like dogs. Choir Boys and Orphans sing a musical war of the sacred versus the profane. Orphans add foul percussion. Waiter creates music or percussion using the trolley, bottles and glasses. Cameras flash.)

ORPHANS Welcome to war's table
Snaffle what you're able
Raid store and sty and cradle
The feast is on the table

CHOIR BOYS Kyrie elèison
Christe elèison
Kyrie elèison.[55]

(Crone rattles a tin mug with coins.)

CRONE Spare a crown
for a common crone.

(Tungsten pushes Crone away.)

ORPHAN BOY War has set the table
Spread it with abundament.
Peace, that foolish fable,
Gets stuck up its own fundament.

(Galateo flies to Cassandra. Silence. Time stops for everyone else.)

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[54] Latin Liturgy Association, *Text of the Latin Mass (Both Rites)*: from *New Roman Missal* (1962), trans. Rev. F. X. Lasance, Rev. Francis Augustine, accessed 12 November 2009, <http://www.latinliturgy.com/id18.htm>.
[55] Latin Liturgy Association, *Text of the Latin Mass.*

GALATEO Come with me now.

CASSANDRA I can't.

GALATEO I know which way to go.

CASSANDRA I've got to stop my father having anything to eat.

GALATEO He's not worth it, they're not worth it, come…

(Time starts again for everyone. A Riot Squad chases Galateo away the fly swat.)

RIOT SQUAD Terror's buzzing
Kill that buzzing.

Thwack.

ORPHANS Welcome to war's table
Eat while you're able
Raid store and sty and cradle
The feast is on the table

CHOIR BOYS Kyrie elèison
Christe elèison
Kyrie elèison.

BISHOP The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handywork.[56]

(Tungsten lifts a dish, revealing a facsimile of planet Earth. He scoops some up and eats with relish.)

TUNGSTEN Good cook.

(Cassandra taps Tungsten on the shoulder. He whirls around and, just in time, stops himself from chopping her neck with his hand. Time stops for everyone else.)

TUNGSTEN Cassie, all dressed up, I didn't rec…(*recognise*)
But don't you ever tap me on my back
like that again I'm trained for quick response
I could have struck you cold
I see you can look lovely when you try.

CASSANDRA Make me as glass
and you will see
how much the dazzle
fights the dark.

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[56] Psalm 19, v.1. *Bible*, King James Version, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/k/kjv/kjv-idx?type=citation&book=Psalms&chapno=19&startverse=1&endverse=> accessed 13 August 2010.

(Tungsten removes Cassandra's collar and leash.)

TUNGSTEN You let his floozy put you on a leash?
I've loved you since you were a little girl
Now run and fetch your little brothers here
She's hidden something in a banquet dish –
She wants to hide the crown from me – the boys
can help me find which dish it's in, and you
can be the one to set it on my head.

CASSANDRA The war has turned the law to jellied eel,
and set it, like my brothers, in a dish.
Don't talk, keep still … our ears will find it out;
We'll hear law lick its stinging, salted wounds
and writhe upon itself in bottled slime.

TUNGSTEN Your mother was a beauty too, except
she had her mother's skin … too dark for someone
good like her…you're not so bad …if you
could smile you'd almost pass …
Don't frown, it makes your face as swarthy
as that cheeky Prince of Naphthastan.
He'll have no sons. I've stopped his balls from bouncing.

CASSANDRA The savage lion whose hairy pelt you stole
has never roared with words as cruel as you.

TUNGSTEN It's Attercop who starves the front of men
And spends the spoils on that two timing bitch.

CASSANDRA War grows a tongue that's like the serpent's – forked.
Make peace, or war will swiftly stab your heart
and fork your frightened jelly to its mouth.

TUNGSTEN Talk to me in bullet points, or else
your babble makes no sense.

(Cassandra gives Tungsten some herbs:)

CASSANDRA There's thyme for you; there's thyme for every plate;
Thyme clears the head of noise and battle smoke
and lets you breathe the forest air again.
And so, through time, you'll sniff each banquet dish,
and smell the bones that in the gravy drown.

(Time moves again.)

RIOT SQUAD Who wants pepper with that?

Crack.

ORPHAN BOY War has set the table
Spread it with abundament.
Peace, that foolish fable,
Gets stuck up its own fundament.

CHOIR BOYS Agnus Dei,
qui tolis peccàta mundi,
miserère nobis
dona nobis pacem.

BISHOP Lamb of God
Who takes from us the sins of the world.
Have mercy on us
Grant us peace.[57]

(Bishop kneels in prayer. Time stops for everyone else.)

Lamb of God, don't make me bless the meal,
Don't make me choose which man to sit beside,
Don't make me set the crown on either head
My stomach churns with what they'll make me eat.

(Time moves again for everyone.)

RIOT SQUAD You'll have pepper with that?

Crack.

ORPHANS Come whet your knives
And spare no lives
The winner
Gets the dinner.

CHOIR BOYS Dona nobis pacem.

(Tungsten speaks to Attercop. Time stops for everyone else.)

TUNGSTEN I've brought my boys this perfect antique horse
It’s from a famous tomb in Naphthastan
Your nose is twitching like a sewer rat
Where are my sons?

ATTERCOP Sit down, they'll be here for the main course.

(Time moves again for everyone. TUNGSTEN sits in the most commanding position at the table. Attercop, Petal and Dignitaries jostle for position round the banquet table. Cameras flash. Bishop does not know where to sit.)

[57] Edited text from Latin Liturgy Association, *Text of the Latin Mass*. No translator cited.

RIOT SQUAD You'll have pepper with that?

Crack.

(Attercop takes Petal aside. Time stops for everyone else.)

ATTERCOP You can't let him sit there… that throne's for me –
Make up your mind, are you with me or him?

PETAL That thing I had with him…it wasn't real,
I've said I'm sorry twice. We've got to get
the crown on you. We'll need the Riot Squad
with us when he finds out what's in the food,
Don't bring the blood bath into play just yet,
Not while you've got the cameras in your face,
The market needs to see us happy, eating.

(Time moves again for everyone. Attercop mounts the table. Cameras flash. Bishop and Petal sit. Dignitaries sit like leashed dogs.)

RIOT SQUAD Who wants pepper with that?

Crack.

ATTERCOP Fellow Stygians, You have my love.
Gather round your screens and feel at home.
Tonight His Grace, Archbishop, crowns me King.

BISHOP *(Aside:)* Archbishop. God, he's sucked me in again.

ATTERCOP Tomorrow, His Grace buries General Tungsten's
eldest son. The rumours you are hearing
of his running arms to terrorists
are wrong. He died of course, a hero.
His Grace then executes a happy task.
He marries me and Princess Petal here.
She's suffered much in life and death and love
and so for love, I'll end her suffering.

(Bishop claps, leading the applause.)

My brother lion, our Hercules, whose loins
and standing army keep you safe in bed,
I pin this horny medal on his tungsten chest.

(Attercop pins the medal on Tungsten.)

ORPHANS The General sorrows
for what war swallows.
but where war wallows
his belly follows.

ATTERCOP Our cheers and love will send the General back
to Naphthastan to win the war for us.

(Petal claps, leading the applause. Crone tugs at Tungsten and rattles her tin mug.)

CRONE Alms
Alms
for an ancient abuela [*grandmother]*.[58]

(Tungsten rips off the medal and throws it in Crone's mug.)

TUNGSTEN As your new king I'll see the poor are fed.

(Orphans and Riot Squad cheer. Tungsten takes the lid off the dish in front of him revealing a crown which he puts on his own head. Lights flicker and pale.)

ATTERCOP Who killed the lights? Seek out the saboteurs.

BOY I'm scared
I'm scared of the dark
the dark
the dark

ATTERCOP Stay in your seats, friends, there is nothing wrong,
The Riot Squad will shine their light in each
performer's face.

(Riot Squad play torches on actors and audience.)

GIRL I'm scared
I'm scared of the dark
the dark
the dark
the Stygian dark

ATTERCOP Get candles here you pack of useless gits.

BISHOP Let us pray, brethren, for illumination.
Lord god, in your wisdom, you have seen fit
to set beneath the lands of heathen hordes
your greatest store of oil for them to burn,
instead of giving those vast hoards to us.
You must have meant for us to conquer them
and take possession of their land and fuel.
Help us to rescue them from ignorance
before they shroud your day in endless night.

[58] Grandmother (Spanish).

(The lights flicker and come back on.
The crown is now on Attercop's head. The Riot Squad guard him.)

CHOIR BOYS Dona nobis pacem.
Pacem.
Dona nobis pacem.

ORPHANS The General sorrows
for what war swallows.
but where war wallows
his belly follows.

TUNGSTEN Serve me my meal.

ATTERCOP Let loose the dogs of war.

(Dignitaries break free of their leashes and prowl the space as a pack. Riot Squad and Waiter break free of their roles and invade the space as ACROBATS and DANCERS. They perform outrageous acts, such as clowning, tumbling, fire-eating, uni-cycle riding, food-juggling, grenade-juggling, salsa and table dancing. They entertain, flirt and cadge money and food while Choir Boys and Orphans resume choral warfare.)

TUNGSTEN Serve me my meal.

(Attercop moves to lift the lid from a large dish. Cassandra leans on the lid and stops him.)

CASSANDRA War shuts each I inside its dish. Hold tight
the lid, keep shut the eye, keep shut the mouth,
a lid on every hole.

TUNGSTEN Serve me my meal.

PETAL It's not that dish, Cassandra, it's another one.

(Puzzled, Cassandra releases her grip. Attercop opens the dish revealing an indistinguishable tomato coloured stew.)

TUNGSTEN It smells as if you burnt the stew.

(Attercop serves Tungsten some stew.)

ATTERCOP Here, Brother, eat.

ORPHANS The General sorrows
for what war swallows.
but where war wallows
his belly follows.

(Tungsten digs in his spoon.)

TUNGSTEN You wouldn't try to poison me…

CASSANDRA Father no, he's cooked your sons, each night
I hear my little brothers shriek. They're
on your spoon.

(Tungsten looks at his spoon.)

TUNGSTEN I see their snarling faces.
I hated them alive. And dead, I hate
them worse. They'll grow just like my eldest son…

BISHOP God rest his soul…

TUNGSTEN They fill my spoon with soldiers' deaths and bray
like baby donkeys – Come and put me in by beds.

(Tungsten raises his spoon towards his mouth. He stops. He is afraid.)

ATTERCOP You've scooped up their little chitterlings.

Their balls.

Lost your appetite?

(Cassandra covers her father's mouth with her hands, stopping him from putting the spoon in his mouth.)

CASSANDRA No.

GIRL I hear buzzing. Frightful buzzing.

(Galateo approaches ready to sting Tungsten.)

CASSANDRA (*Aside to Galateo:*)
No, my love. Please, no. You mustn't sting him, no,
Don't die for me.

GALATEO *(Aside to Cassandra:)*
Then come with me, we'll find somewhere to hide.

*(Tungsten hurls Cassandra away from him.
Lights flicker off.)*

CHILDREN Buzzing. Deadly buzzing.

(Lights flicker on. Cassandra is prone, dying. Galateo gathers her in his arms, Crone and Girl tend her.)

CASSANDRA Away, away, away.

GIRL Don't go, you've got to tell me what to do.

(Girl leans her ear close to Cassandra's face and listens.

Cassandra dies.

Crone wraps her arms around Galateo and Cassandra.

Tungsten digs his spoon in the bowl again but cannot lift it to his mouth.

Attercop scoops some of the stew from the dish with his hands and offers it to the General like a sacrament of death.

Tungsten pushes Attercop's hands into his (Attercop's) face, smearing the stew across his mouth.

Attercop grabs Tungsten in a wrestling hold like youths in the playground.)

PETAL Stop acting like a goat…

(Attercop shrugs her off.)

…he's young enough
to break your neck and then who's going pay
for all the renovations?

(Attercop swings at her.
Petal flees, staggering in her heels.

Tungsten and Attercop wrestle. It is stylised, perhaps in slow motion, or as a series of tableaux, where each change of pose is punctuated by darkness as the lights flick off and on again. Attercop, the weaker brother, fights dirty. They wrestle for their lives with a slow deliberate ferocity. The wrestling tears off their costumes and they become naked.

The Chorus – Riot Squad, Dogs of War and Children – becomes a living ring of spectators which amplifies the movement and sounds of the wrestling bodies.

Tungsten puts Attercop's neck in a hold. Their eyes meet and lock together. They both know Tungsten could break Attercop's neck. Their breath heaves.)

DOGS *(Chant:)* Eat, eat, eat
Get your teeth in
Set your teeth in
Eat, eat, eat.

(Pause.)

ATTERCOP Kill me then. Finish it.

(Tungsten helps Attercop to his feet.
Attercop staggers and grips Tungsten's proffered arm to stop himself falling. They hold one another's gaze.)

I lost my footing.

TUNGSTEN Get him some water.

(The brothers grasp one another to stop themselves falling.
Their gaze flickers away and then back again, for neither can bear the chaos, madness and grief on his own.
Their breath comes in gulps, heaves and slowly subsides.
Their eyes fixed on each other, their bodies grow very still as if turned to wax.)

The Children run through the space with red ribbons signalling fire.)

CHILDREN Stygia's burning
Stygia's burning
Call the engine
Call the engine
Fire! Fire!
Pour on water
Pour on water.[59]

(End of scene.)

[59] On 9 August 2011, watching BBC footage of riots in parts of London that were setting vehicles and buildings ablaze, I heard the old song

Epilogue.

CRONE walks the ruins of the Palace/Dungeon, now open to the sky, sowing seeds from a sling. CHILDREN run on. The guillotine, the tableau of the wrestling brothers and the debris that was on the Dungeon floor are still there.).

BOY What's that you're throwing everywhere?

CRONE Seeds. I'm sowing pumpkins. Seeds of peace.

GIRL Will they grow?

BOY You have to water them.

GIRL I know that.

CRONE You can help if you like.

(Crone gives Boy and Girl some seeds.

PETAL enters, still in her red shoes.)

PETAL Nowhere to go.
I can walk in these shoes, but I can't run.

CRONE Take them off.

PETAL Who can I be then who can I be?

CRONE Sit down and take them off.

PETAL Who…then…who can I be?

(Petal sits and tugs at her shoes, but they won't come off.)

GIRL I don't like pumpkins.

CRONE You have to let the rind go hard and colour up…
You test it with your thumbnail…
If you can't dig in your nail, you know it's ripe…
Sweeter than icecream.

(Galateo enters dancing.).

CHORUS What's that buzzing, breezy buzzing?
Busy buzzing.

CRONE Bee has come back.

BOY I'll kill it for you.

GIRL No, it's our friend.

CRONE Now the bees are back I won't have to pollinate the pumpkins with a paintbrush.

GIRL Cassandra said to plant an apple tree over her head. Can we help?

(Petal tugs at her shoes. Like Estragon in Beckett's Waiting for Godot *she gives up.)*

PETAL Nothing to be done.[60]

GIRL Hey, Petal, come and help us pick the apples.

PETAL It's not Petal. It's Charlotte.

GIRL You'll have to take off your shoes.

(Petal struggles to remove a shoe.
Bee dances.)

(End of play.)

[60] Petal repeats Estragon's famous opening line, from Samuel Beckett, *Waiting for Godot: A Tragicomedy in Two Acts*, 1956, (Faber and Faber, 2006) 1.

Third Movement:
The Crafting of *Hurricane Eye*

– *appassionato* [impassioned] –

CHARLOTTE CORDAY.
They say
that the head
held high in the executioner's hand
still lives
that the eyes still see
that the tongue still writhes
and down below the arms and legs still shudder

Peter Weiss, trans. Geoffrey Skelton, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade*, 1969.[1]

……..

TODD. I'm just saying I wouldn't be sorry if the crocodiles were on one of the sides we have alliances with. They're unstoppable, come on.

HARPER. Crocodiles are evil and it is always right to be opposed to crocodiles. Their skin, their teeth, the foul smell of their mouths from the dead meat. Crocodiles wait till zebras are crossing the river and bite the weak ones with those jaws and pull them down. Crocodiles invade villages at night and take children out of their beds. A crocodile will carry a dozen heads back to the river, tenderly like it carries its young, and put them in the water where they bob about as trophies till they rot.

TODD. I'm just saying we could use that.

Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, 2000.[2]

……..

The desire for transcendence

My new play, *Hurricane Eye*, has been crafted as an egg. Still raw, despite having been coddled through draft after draft, the script nestles in a nowhere land, longing for a theatre to bring its collaborative heat, fluidity, discombobulation and discovery which would foster the rewriting needed to transmute its pap to bone and sinew, and

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[1] Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade*, 1965, trans. Geoffrey Skelton; verse adaptation by Adrian Mitchell, 5th. (London: J. Calder, 1969) 92. Original performance and publication in German: *Die Verfolgung und Ermordung Jean Paul Marats, dargestellt durch die Schauspielgruppe des Hospizes zu Charenton unter Anleitung des Herrn de Sade: Drama in zwei Akten*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1964).

[2] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away*, *Plays: Four*, 2000 (London: Nick Hern, 2008) 155.

then hatch it into live performance. It was desire that nudged the script towards that imagined fledging: the desire for experience. Desire was inchoate, for it had neither title nor metaphor to manifest its purpose, as a nest might make tangible the longing to protect the chick, or an eye reveal the terror that lurks at the centre of the storm. Without teeth, or eyes, or taste, or anything, desire could frame itself only as its grandiose and intangible intention: to challenge empire's routine of war, torture, rape and plunder by loosing in war's face the unarmed furies of compassion, grief, foresight, insight, profanity, resistance, courage and love, culminating in a dramatic opportunity for the guardians of War to recognise the harm they are doing, to themselves, to others, to our fellow creatures and our Earth.

This essay explores the quest to find a form in which to express, on the page at least, the desired experience, imagined for performance, where those characters who are guilty of war would be brought to recognise the consequences of their actions. Raymond Gaita, following Socrates, describes "remorse" as "an awakened sense of the reality of another."[3] That awakening is crucial if the wrong-doer is to come, not to self-pity, but to a state of awareness that Gaita calls "the proper recognition of the harm" he or she has done, to the victim and to him or herself.[4] I wanted to craft my play so that the action would agitate a warmongering character to such a pitch his habitual certitude would crack and he would glimpse, through the shards, "an awakened sense of the reality of another". My use of the male pronoun for the character promulgating war is deliberate, because I wanted the male persona of that character to allude to aspects of the key heads of state in the Coalition of the Willing that invaded Iraq in 2003, namely U.S. President George W. Bush, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom Tony Blair and the Australian Prime Minister John Howard.

A multiplicity of challenges, philosophical and practical, arose in the crafting of a script that sought to bring a fictional head of state to what Smith, describing the work of Howard Barker, calls "the catastrophic theatrical experience."[5] As mooted earlier,

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[3] Raimond Gaita, *Good and Evil : An Absolute Conception*, 1991, 2nd. edition, (London: Routledge, 2004) 51.
[4] Gaita, *Good and Evil*, 63. Gaita is cited in previous work: Lyssa, "Black and White: Australia's History Onstage in Four Plays of the New Millennium." 208. Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History," 79-80.
[5] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 41. For my earlier reference to Smith's discussion of Barker, see "Introduction," 17.

Smith draws on Kristeva to argue that acts such as the infanticide and the graveyard sex in Barker's *Gertrude – The Cry* not only break "moral and social taboos" but do so in an intense concentration of "the abject and the sublime" that "opens up the representation of the invisible".[6] In *Gertrude*, Smith writes, Barker's narrative, which is "poised between *Eros* and *Thanatos* (original emphasis)", represents an experience of a connection between sex and death that "exposes an audience to the most extreme limits of the 'pornographic imagination'."[7]

Given my desire to script representations of concatenations of the sublime and the abject – power, sex, sanctity and death in a state of war and torture – there were two significant challenges to my craft, each of them with its own philosophical and practical questions. The first of these challenges concerned the representation of violence onstage and the significance and responsibility that that might entail for myself as the writer and for a potential audience. I had already made the decision that, like Sewell in *Gates of Egypt*, whose representations of offstage rape have been discussed earlier, the script for my play would not mark as a visual presence the rape that is carried out as an act of war. To do so would risk replicating what Gilbert and Tompkins identify as the violent use of women's bodies as territory claimed in war as a representation of its battlefield.[8] Instead, I chose to make traces of the rape imaginatively visible through the active responses of the character, Cassandra, before and after the event.

In her introduction to *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age*, which examines ethical questions arising from contemporary representations of violence and the often contradictory, ambivalent and unsettling effects on spectators, Helena Grehan writes that the theme of her book grew from her personal response to a performance of Romeo Castellucci and Socìetas Raffaello Sanzio's production, *Genesi: from the museum of sleep*. She had left the theatre "feeling dis-abled or profoundly unsettled and totally insecure." Her complex response to *Genesi*, a work which she categories as "fierce theatre", urged her "to think through and feel through

[6] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 51-2. Smith cites J. Kristeva, "Bataille and the sun, or the guilty text," in *Tales of Love* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987), 112.
[7] Smith, "'I am not what I Was,'" 51-2. Smith cites J. Kristeva, "Bataille and the sun, or the guilty text," in *Tales of Love* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1987), 371.
[8] As discussed earlier, see Gilbert and Tompkins 213-5.

what might, and perhaps, what should not be represented within the context of performance."[9]

An onstage pretence that the violence is a simulation does not protect the spectator from feeling a fierce and destabilising physical and emotional response. Grehan describes a scene from *Tragedia Endogonidia Br.#04*, a work from the same company that created *Genesi.* With an artifice that is "heightened (in the extreme)" through such devices as the obvious pouring and smearing of fake blood, and the amplifications of sounds beyond 'reality', *Tragedia* performs beating inflicted by three policeman upon a man whom they strip to his underwear. With each amplified blow, the "hyper violence" becomes more difficult to watch. Grehan describes how she "sat in silence squirming, eventually resorting to hiding behind [her] hands, as [she] could no longer witness the scene."[10]

Early in my project to write *Hurricane Eye*, I had made a decision to follow the broad tradition of ancient Greek theatre and, for the most part, keep offstage extreme representations of what I might call, following Smith, the torturer's "pornographic imagination". Would that decision curtail the power of my play to engage the spectator in what Grehan, drawing on Emmanuel Levinas, calls "the realm of the sensible"? Work such as *Genesi*, Grehan posits, makes use of a "pre-tragic" theatre that "troubles representation and elicits feelings of vulnerability, tension, fear, desire and admiration."[11] Borrowing terms from Levinas, Grehan suggests that *Genesi* moves spectators to the "realm of the sensible", a realm that is beyond the "betrayal" that Levinas marks as the "price" of language.[12] Instead of asking for "understanding", for the work takes the spectator beyond any possibility of a "singular or unified way" of understanding, *Genesi* calls us to "respond." In the proximate space that the performance generates, "we, the spectators, are confronted by the call

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[9] Helena Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship in a Global Age*, (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) 2, 60. *Genesi* was first performed in 1999. Grehan attended a performance at His Majesty's Theatre, Perth, 30 January 2003. Grehan, "Notes: Introduction," 176, ft. 2.

[10] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 59. Grehan attended a performance of *Tragedia Endogonidia Br.#04* at the Melbourne International Arts Festival in October 2006. Grehan, 59, "Notes: chapter 2," 179, ft. 14.

[11] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 61.

[12] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 61.

of the other."[13] It is a call that I wanted for my play, even while recognising that such a longing was akin to a dream. Any unsettlement I might generate in an audience would have to take a paler, very different form from that of *Genesi*.

The second major challenge in the crafting of my script required constant vigilance: how would I avoid the temptation to let the action narrow to a facile idealised solution would bring about the death of ambiguity by banishing aggression from the stage? To yield to that temptation would be to replicate the binary antinomy between "good" and "evil" characters.

Phelan's advice (cited earlier in my discussion of Enoch's *Black Medea* and Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*) is salient here, for she points to the continual need for the binary to be provoked out of its fixity, and its static positions mobilized and made continually to disappear.[14] In my search for an imaginative way to script a wrongdoer coming to "the proper recognition of the harm" he has committed (Gaita), I would need to remain alert to Phelan's warning that when the sources of the existing power structure are rendered conscious, the "new relations which emerge [. . .] risk becoming new monoliths themselves."[15] In her cognizance of the reality of power, Phelan does not advocate abandonment of the optimism of the task of creating "those moments of clarity" that reveal what power would deny. Although Phelan insists that those experiences of clarity must themselves disappear because of power's "overwhelming tendency to obscure itself," those moments suggest a discovery of hope. Such optimism lies not in the "understanding" of another, a project that leads to "a concomitant narrative of betrayal, disappointment, and rage," but in the perpetual act of negotiation:

> It is in the attempt to walk (and live) on the rackety bridge between self and other – and not the attempt to arrive at one side or the other – that we discover real hope. That walk is our always suspended performance [. . .] (original emphasis).[16]

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[13] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 59-60. Grehan cites Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press: Pittsburgh, 1998) 6.
[14] Phelan, *Unmarked* 173. See earlier discussion, "Re-membering the body politic," 28.
[15] Phelan, *Unmarked* 173-4.
[16] Phelan, *Unmarked* 174. My thesis for my Masters concluded with this quotation, in a more extended form. See Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History," 198.

I had set myself a complex task: to create a script that would press a character – a parodic yet 'real' embodiment of torture and war – to such an extremity that he would come fleetingly but irresistibly to an optimistic moment of "clarity" (Phelan) in which he would feel the presence of another and the reality of the harm he has done (Gaita). It seemed an inherently impossible task for it sought to use language as well as silence, parody as well as sleepwalking nightmare, the chaos of comedy as well as the contrived order of tragedy. Yet the longing remained to confront the spectator with an experience in "the realm of the sensible", a realm outside language, satire and understanding, a realm open to an experience that Grehan calls pre-tragic: "the call of the other".

In her review of *Black Medea*, Alison Croggon describes her literal "goosebumps" when Margaret Harvey gave her "skin-tighteningly compelling" performance of Medea's curses and their defiance of fate. Croggon calls it "a great theatrical moment."[17] As Croggon's experience attests, Enoch's text and direction create a ground for performance that stirs a visceral response, one that concurs with my own. That response of the skin, whose intensity feels, in my own experience, akin however fleetingly, to the Levinasian "realm of the sensible",[18] occurs in *Black Medea* even though the onstage violence – Jason's repeated battering of Medea, and Medea's momentous and taboo-breaking murder of her child – is represented as stylised or ritual action, not as "hyper violence" (Grehan) that requires the spectators to bear the unbearable. Although I appreciate the intensity with which such depictions of violence open a spectator to the suffering of the other, I knew that I could not script such work myself. I would have to find other ways to unsettle spectators.

Research into the craft of other playwrights, including Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* and Enoch's *Black Medea*, was essential for a honing of my own. The plays considered in this essay include: Sophocles' *Antigone*;[19] Peter Weiss' *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade*;[20] Barker's *Victory*;[21] and, Caryl

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[17] Croggon, rev. of Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*.
[18] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 61.
[19] Sophocles, *Antigone*, trans. Robert Fagles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1982).
[20] Peter Weiss, *The Persecution and Assassination of Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton under the Direction of the Marquis De Sade*, 1965, trans. Geoffrey Skelton; verse adaptation by Adrian Mitchell, 5th ed., (London: J. Calder, 1969).

Churchill's *Far Away*.[22] As well as plays, varied texts from different discourses are included in this essay because they were relevant to the construction of *Hurricane Eye*, its characters, dialogue and multiple styles. The forms used include iambic pentameter, political speeches, performance within performance, acts of doubling which pit fake terror against the absent 'real', lullaby, polyvocal parody, slapstick, tableaux, ritual, song, sales-pitched balderdash and curses. The research drew on writers such as Margaret Atwood,[23] Vaclav Havel,[24] and Marguerite Yourcenar,[25] as well as on media coverage of George W. Bush's speeches concerning the invasion of Iraq.

In early research for a form for the script I toyed with a drama of revenge, with its richly compelling games of desire and hatred, retribution and relief. Revenge is, however, insatiable and although a dramatist may manipulate the plot to give victory where one chooses, any order that emerges from acts of revenge risks achieving only a pretence of stability, for revenge keeps calling to those excluded from satisfaction, until it obliterates all contenders or somebody refuses its call.

In *Payback*, her analysis of debt and the shadow side of wealth, Margaret Atwood finds a telling similarity in the relationship creditors have with their debtors and the nexus revengers form with those they wish to kill:

> They come in pairs. They're joined at the hip. And it is just a short step from here to the Jungian theory of the Shadow."[26]

For Jungians, writes Atwood, the urge to rely on revenge to liberate oneself from "an irrational and obsessive hatred, especially of some person or group one doesn't really know well" is indicative of a failure to integrate the Shadow side of the self.[27] Gaita's concept of the harm the evildoer does to her or himself has resonances here,

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[21] Howard Barker, *Victory: Choices in Reaction*, *Barker: Plays One*, 1990 (London: Oberon Books, 2006, 2010). First performed, Joint Stock Theatre Group in association with Royal Court Theatre, 23 March 1983.
[22] Caryl Churchill, *Far Away* (London: Methuen, 2001).
[23] Margaret Atwood, *Payback*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2008).
[24] Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace : A Conversation with Karel Hvízdala*, trans. Paul Wilson, (New York, N.Y.: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990).
[25] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Fires*, *[Feux]* 1936, trans. Dori Katz, (Henley-on-Thames, Oxon: Aidan Ellis, 1982).
[26] Atwood, *Payback* 150.
[27] Atwood, *Payback* 150.

for, as Atwood attests, revenge does not only destroy its target and those who are caught in its blood-soaked scatter of damage, but the avenger as well, who suffers a "psychic debt [. . .], a wound to the soul."[28]

The challenge for *Hurricane Eye* was to shape a scenario where psychically wounded characters would perform an allegory of a nation state that has the temper of a piqued and vengeful bull. Atwood shows an infectious delight in the literary and theatrical examples she cites where revenge is embodied in characters who project their "dark side" onto somebody else. It is a game of horror, exacerbated by the principle of "tit-for-tat", for each act of revenge leads to another:

> [. . .] the Revenge Tragedy illustrates the trickle-down theory of revenge: relatively innocent bystanders get the stuff splashed all over them. *Hamlet* is among other things a Revenge Tragedy, but as usual Shakespeare takes something from elsewhere and redoes it in a surprising way: it's the slowness of the revenge, not its rapidity, that results in the dead-body pyramid at play's end.[29]

While appreciating, with Atwood, that *Hamlet* is about much more than revenge, I could see in *Hamlet* a problem of Shakespeare's time that I wanted to avoid in my own – the risk that once the drama of revenge has obliterated the main contenders for control of the realm, the exhausted hiatus at play's end subverts its own peaceful intent by allowing the state to retake the stage with its martial fabric ceremonially renewed.

The mortally wounded Hamlet lives long enough to hear the "war-like noise" that heralds Fortinbras, fresh from his conquest in Poland.[30] One imagines the twinkle in Shakespeare's eyes when he (or so one supposes) concocted the *franglais* moniker "Fortinbras (Strong-in-arms)" for the usurping soldier to whom the dying Hamlet gifts the throne of Denmark.[31] *Fort* is of course French for *strong*, and *bras* the part of the body that English speakers call our *arms*, but, at least as far as my French dictionary reveals, the French do not use *bras* in the English sense of *arms* as *weapons*, but *armes.*[32] "Fortinbras" could be construed as Shakespeare's witty reminder that the construction of the soldier's weapons as natural to his body is a cultural one, even as

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[28] Atwood, *Payback* 150.
[29] Atwood, *Payback* 151.
[30] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* 5.2.363-66.
[31] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.370.
[32] Collins Robert *French Dictionary*, Ninth Edition, Glasgow: HarperCollins, 2010, 1978.

the resolution of the play not only assimilates firearms but honours them as a natural part of the body and continuity of the state.

In *Hamlet*'s opening scene, Horatio describes young Fortinbras as unruly: "Of unimproved mettle hot and full," and threatening to bring his band of "lawless resolutes" to seize territory from Denmark.[33] In the final scene, Horatio skips any criticism of the now assimilable Fortinbras who has come to hold the force of the state of Denmark in his arms. For the benefit of his new king, Horatio categorises the killings that clutter the stage as aberrations: "carnal, bloody, and unnatural acts."[34] Horatio's vocabulary shows similarities with that of the Ghost of Hamlet's father when he calls upon Hamlet to "Revenge his foul and most unnatural murder."[35] Both place the acts of individual slaughter as extremes outside the natural order that Fortinbras is now being called upon to restore to the state. Fortinbras embraces "with sorrow" his own good fortune in taking over the kingdom and orders a soldier's burial for Hamlet.[36] Lest any further shades, or projections of the dark side, come to seek advantage through revenge, the crown's right to war – and its rites of war – will keep them at arms' length. *Hamlet* closes with Fortinbras' command for such a ceremony: "Go, bid the soldiers shoot."[37]

The contrast between that martial farewell to Hamlet and the shabby funeral earlier accorded Ophelia is stark. Polonius forces upon his daughter Ophelia a metaphoric cutting of her head from her body lest the carnally performed truth of the love she shares with Hamlet threaten her honour and, even more importantly, the propriety of Polonius' position in the court.[38] The damage done to Ophelia by her father's orders to refuse Hamlet's love is compounded by the damage that the orders given by his father's Ghost have caused to Hamlet. Ophelia's madness and suicide by drowning receives no stately salute.

In Peter Weiss, *Marat Sade*, Charlotte Corday is obsessed with her plan to assassinate Jean-Paul Marat. As if her bloody deed could rid her nation of its self-inflicted terror, she paints with words a portrait of the state's most common

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[33] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.1.95-103.
[34] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.395.
[35] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 1.5.25.
[36] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.402-04
[37] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 5.2.417.

victim, the guillotined self. It is an apposite portrait, which is why it appears as an epigraph for this chapter, for it bears witness to the literal and philosophical damage the wounded psyche of the state is daily causing. It is a portrait rich in dramatic irony too, for although the character Charlotte cannot know her fate, death by guillotine is the sentence that was passed upon the historic Corday as punishment for the murder of Marat.

The state's exultation at its parting of reason from sentience is imagined in Charlotte's description of "the head held high / in the executioner's hand", while her mourning for her own lost connection with herself (the corollary of revenge) is made palpable in her description of the agony suffered by the victim's severed organs of perception, discourse, feeling and motion: "the eyes still see [. . .] / the tongue still writhes / and down below the arms and legs still shudder".[39]

At the head of this chapter, Charlotte Corday's staccato wail for the decapitated self has been given a companion epigraph: an exchange of dialogue between two characters in Caryl Churchill's *Far Away*. Their words make imaginatively visible the conceptual gulf between sentience and exploitation. From one side of that gulf Harper resists the severance of the brain from common sense and, from the other side, Todd presses for his belief that every means, even the ironically tender cruelty of crocodiles, must be used if they are to overcome an enemy that could be mounting an attack anywhere or everywhere, an attack whose form could be human, or animal, or the very stuff of a damaged and no longer dependable planet.[40]

I am indebted to a paper delivered in Melbourne in July 2007 by Una Chaudhuri who drew attention to the power of Churchill's *Far Away* to render the lived experience of the contemporary age of terror. The dwarfing anonymity and individual meaninglessness of nuclear war has been replaced by a universalising of terror, where anyone and everyone and everything can be the enemy and no-one can be certain whose side an infected and degraded nature might be on, while at the same time desire for righteous actions fuels fundamentalism.[41]

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[38] See, for example, Polonius' instructions to Ophelia to reject Hamlet for being above her station, *Hamlet* 1.3.88-135.
[39] Weiss, *Marat Sade* 92.
[40] Churchill, *Far Away* 155.
[41] Una Chaudhuri, "The Anthropological Machine in Overdrive: Zooësis and Extremity," Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies (ADSA) Annual Conference, "Extreme

In her paper, Chaudhuri set her analysis of *Far Away* (and other selected works for performance) in a philosophical and political context which challenges humanity's categorisation of itself from those it designates non-human or animal. That context includes the work of environmental historian Edmund Russell who alerts us to severe consequences of that categorical separation: human control of nature has expanded the scale of war and led to the mutual enablement of genocide and ecocide. The posthumanist philosopher Giorgio Agamben unravels and resists the anthropological machine of Western humanism that makes the founding distinction of its bio-politics the separation of human from animal and of "man" from "non-man". It is a distinction that gives rise to the animalisation of certain modes of human beings and leads both to the totalitarian separation of the Jew, the "non-man" from the "man" and to the images from Abu Ghraib of the "animalised human". It is a distinction, Chaudhuri tells her audience, that Agamben says must be abolished. I can feel the attention – the assent – of the audience of which I am a member. We want to be rescued from evil. But, Chaudhuri will not leave us complacent in our obsession with the extreme images of cruelty we associate with the holocaust or Abu Ghraib. [There is no Horatio to come onstage and soothe us with assurances that what we have witnessed are unnatural acts.] Churchill's play, Chaudhuri says, makes a conceptual intervention that refuses to see the extreme events as exceptions. Instead, Churchill shocks us into recognising how we have rationalised war.[42]

Assigned the task of writing a new play, my imagination craved a release from rationalisation long enough to be able to re-create itself. Caduceus in hand, imagination wanted to be a Messenger. The mind wanted to move and it wanted its re-creation of itself to move an audience. Marguerite Yourcenar dedicates *Fires*, a lyrical and incisive gathering of prose pieces on the theme of love, to Hermes.[43] The shape-changing presence of quicksilver touches places that reason forgot, for Yourcenar carves her intelligence in the notion of love as the antidote to conquest with such fine strokes her incisions appear as sutures. In the piece entitled "Antigone", where Yourcenar re-creates Aeschylus' character as the heart of the

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States: Issues of Scale - political, performative, emotional," University of Melbourne, School of Culture and Communication, and La Trobe University, School of Communications, Arts and Critical Enquiry, 4 July, 2007. Personal notes.

[42] Chaudhuri, "The Anthropological Machine", 4 July, 2007. Personal notes.

[43] Marguerite Yourcenar, *Fires*, *[Feux]* 1936, trans. Dori Katz, (Henley-on-Thames, Oxon: Aidan Ellis, 1982) frontispiece.

earth, the grief-stricken heroine "turns her back on the vile absolution that comes from punishing" and defies her uncle Creon's prohibition on the burial of her dead brother, the traitor Polynices:

> She bends over him like the sky over the earth, and with that gesture defines her universe; a dark possessive instinct makes her lean toward this culprit no one will claim from her. This dead man is the empty urn in which to pour all the wine of a great love.[44]

The resolution that Yourcenar creates installs Antigone's "great love" as the divinely ordained mover of the world. It is an embrace of heaven and earth. In a Thebes that King Creon's destruction of Antigone has "deprived of stars", the sonic reverberations of his actions become his nightmare. Creon rises from his insomniac bed, the bed that belonged to his predecessor Oedipus, the bed that "rests on Reasons of State, a hard pillow."[45] Descending to the catacombs where he has immured Antigone, Creon finds the source of "the underground beating" that buffeted him from sleep. Antigone has taken her own life and her lover Haemon, Creon's son, has hanged himself from her neck:

> They are tied one to the other as if to make a heavier weight; their slow oscillation drives them each time further into the grave, and this throbbing weight rewinds the machinery of the stars. [. . .]. Time starts running again to the sound of God's clock. The world's pendulum is Antigone's heart.[46]

Yourcenar's words cease here. The rest of the page is silent. The image of Antigone's heart remains. Its motion insists that Creon abandon his blind delusion, as he abandoned his rigid and Reasoned bed of State, and feel instead the movement of the heart as a divination from a resonant earth. Alive to impossibility, my imagination wanted to import from Yourcenar both the raw simplicity and cut crystal poetry of her writing and the idea of a catharsis that does not settle itself weeping on the churned and blood-soaked ground to await the boots of a resurgent king, but turns its gaze to reverse the curse of the petrified reason which kings use for their pillow. In a character dramatically equivalent to Creon, I wanted to create an image of

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[44] Yourcenar, *Fires* 40.
[45] Yourcenar, *Fires* 42.
[46] Yourcenar, *Fires* 43.

a conqueror of the new millennium, a torturer, rapist and burner of cities whom the drama would turn from Creonic stone to sentient being, alive in pity and fear.[47]

Yourcenar praises “the great Racine” for the poetic power with which his tragedy *Andromache* [Andromaque] conveys the despair of Pyrrhus, warrior and King, as he struggles to reconcile his participation in the Greek conquest of Troy with the unrequited love he now feels for his captive, Andromache, who is the widow of the Trojan hero Hector who was slain in battle by Pyrrhus’ own father, Achilles.[48] Here in a line of dialogue that Yourcenar describes as a “famous”, Pyrrhus confounds the pain that burns within him from Andromache’s rejection of his love with the remorse he suffers from having set Troy ablaze:

> PYRRHUS. [. . .]
> Consumed by more fires than I ignited
> [. . .].[49]

In Racine’s original text, the line begins not with the abstraction “Consumed”, but with the vivid *Brûlé* [Burned], which seems preferable because it offers the material simplicity of a visible link between the pain that fires Pyrrhus and the pain that burned Troy.[50] While part of me was consuming the skill with which Racine and Yourcenar severally make an image from the simple word and the simple action, another part of me moved inside the eyes of Andromache where I felt repelled by the callous arrogance of Pyrrhus that he should weigh the pain of the metaphoric love-fire of his heart in the same balance as the conflagration that his conquest had made of Troy.

It was baffling and (confess it!) more than a tad annoying to discover that Yourcenar not only accords great value to the poetic, dramatic and emotional content of Pyrrhus’ speech but attests that it is the reader’s fault if “we do not feel the dark introspective musings of a man who has been pitiless and who begins to learn what suffering is like.”[51]

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[47] The allusion is of course to Aristotle’s definition of tragedy. Aristotle, *'The Poetics,' Sophocles' King Oedipus*, trans. W. B. Yeats, (Macmillan Company of Canada, 1969) 18-19, Section IV.
[48] Marguerite Yourcenar, Preface, 1975, trans. Dori Katz, *Fires*, by Yourcenar (Henley-on-Thames, Oxon: Aidan Ellis, 1982) xix. See Jean Racine, 1667, *Andromache [Andromaque]. Andromache, Phaedra, Athalia*, trans. Tim Chilcott, bi-lingual text, 2003, Tim Chilcott Literary Translations, accessed 20 March 2013, http://www.tclt.org.uk/translations.html>. 2-154.
[49] Yourcenar, Preface, trans. Katz, xix.
[50] Racine, *Andromache*, 38.
[51] Yourcenar, Preface, trans. Katz, xix. Racine, *Andromache*, 38.

What, then, had Yourcenar found in Racine's trope that I had missed? I was slow to let understanding reach me but, when it came, its depth and simplicity rippled like a smile. If the warrior King is to let himself be moved, he must first, like a child, a madman, a lover, or a fool, step inside his own body, feel his own hurt and know in his own pain the harm he makes for others. Only then, untutored, unhinged and unconfined by protocol, can he set free its heart to notice consequences that the owned and argued realm denies.

When Shakespeare's King Lear, his kingdom lost, roams the heath unconfined, an elemental mimicry of pain breaks through his protocols of conquest. He calls down upon his head "cataracts and hurricanoes", "sulphurous and thought-executing fires," and "oak cleaving-thunderbolts".[52] The imagery with which he rouses the storm makes palpable the pain in his head that has been wrought by the ingratitude of his daughters Goneril and Regan, whom he once seduced to his side as allies in his war to conquer complexity and Cordelia:

> LEAR. Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the world![53]

The storm strikes flat the wearing of a crown and the poor victory it represents: the false sanity of its conquest of feeling. The storm stilled, Lear is left in the madness of knowing grief. He tears at his clothes, strips off his rich "lendings" and finds himself in the body of himself, "a poor, bare, forked animal".[54] Expelled from his former world, a covered world where victory goes to dissemblance, force and the crushing of (in)sight, Lear's discovery of himself takes him a step closer to be able to feel the as yet unknown grief that will come to him at the climax of the play with the death of his non-dissembling daughter Cordelia.[55] He shares the storm-struck heath with the outcast Edgar, the perspicacious Fool and the blind-sighted Gloucester who does not yet know that he will lose his eyes before he learns to see.[56] Having been struck from, or having struck themselves from, the world where truth is falsehood, Lear's companions on the heath must appear to that world as mad, child-like, blind or treacherous, as Cordelia once appeared to him when he threw her away from his life to prove himself the ruler of the world of false sanity.

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[52] William Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.2.1-9.
[53] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.2.7. For the scene of metaphoric seduction through greed, a seduction which Cordelia of course refuses, see 1.1.1-190.
[54] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.4.103-12.
[55] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 1.1.1-190.

To interrupt the patterns that cast war and its cruelties as sanity, *Hurricane Eye* needed a scenario where a pitiless conqueror, perhaps through a metaphoric storm or nightmare, or the loss of love, encounters the pain in himself, so that he, like Lear, or Creon, or Pyrrhus, "begins to learn what suffering is like" (Yourcenar). I knew that I wanted neither the Elizabethan or Jacobean tragedy of revenge, nor the Enlightenment's project of the perfectibility of man, nor the end-of-the-Cold-War's halcyon belief in the triumph of marketable self-interest, nor the resurgent humanist theatre that Howard Barker condemns because its "writers are smitten with the idea of themselves as educators" and "have made a theatre of morals almost as rigid as the medieval stage and have contributed to a new style of social conformism."[57]

Above all, I wanted to avoid the closing of possibilities through the reproduction of idealisations, whether positive or negative. In my investigation of selected contemporary Australian plays for my Master's thesis (2006),[58] I had identified perils of righteousness in two lauded works by non-Indigenous playwrights: Andrew Bovell's *Holy Day* (2001)[59] and Katherine Thomson's *Wonderlands* (2003).[60] While Bovell and Thomson both use programme notes and interviews to express impeccable pedagogical ideals of righting the wrongs we white people have done to the nation's Indigenous' people, it was my argument that their plays in performance trap the Indigenous characters in the service of a white-directed fantasy, be it feminised, kindly and utopian (*Wonderlands*), or masculinised, self-preserving and dystopic (*Holy Day*).[61]

Although these plays and their ancillary texts undoubtedly draw our attention to foundational crimes in Australia's history, it was my contention that onstage Bovell's *Holy Day* and Thomson's *Wonderlands* replicate two foundational tasks of empire: the imputation of good and evil to particular categories of people and the truncation

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[56] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 3.2.; 3,4; 3.7.
[57] Barker, *Arguments* 76-77.
[58] Alison Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History: acts of danger in four Australian plays of the early 21st century," Masters in English, Macquarie University, 2006. For a distillation of my thesis, see Lyssa, "Black and White," *Australasian Drama Studies*, 28 (2006): 203-227.
[59] Andrew Bovell, *Holy Day*, Current Theatre Series, (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2001). First performed State Theatre Company of South Australia, The Playhouse, Adelaide Festival Centre, 21 August 2001.
[60] Katherine Thomson, *Wonderlands*, (Sydney: Currency, 2004). First performed HotHouse Theatre, at the Butter Factory Theatre, Albury Wodonga, 13 June 2003.
[61] For my detailed analysis of Thomson's *Wonderlands* and Bovell's *Holy Day*, see Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 86-134 (*Wonderlands*) and 43-85 (*Holy Day)*.

of particular characters' desires to fit the moral lesson. From my detailed analysis of the gaps in each play between the stated moral intent and the performance of the characters' raced, classed and gendered desire, I concluded that intent alone may not shake empire from the stage:

> The closure that silences the Indigenous characters at the end of *Holy Day* and *Wonderlands* has been operating throughout both plays to constrain Indigenous desire. Closure, whether constructed as benign, or malign, mimics an imperial world, committed to its own destiny and its own certainty, whether imagined as brutal, as in *Holy Day*, or redemptive, as in *Wonderlands*. *Holy Day* cuts off Australia's vicious past and freezes that cruelty as the past. *Wonderlands* freezes goodness as past, present and future.[62]

Holy Day closes on the sole surviving Indigenous character, a young woman named Obedience. Having been raped and had her tongue cut out, Obedience stands immobile and emptied, doomed to voiceless servitude on a stage cleared of compassion and of history, leaving power in the hands of the white male squatter and his sheep.[63] Within the fable of certainty, Bovell's *Holy Day* appears as a portrait of atrocity unearthed from empire's grave, only to make the victim stand suspended on the bridge between yesterday and tomorrow in a perpetual scream of silence.

Wonderlands closes on two good women, one black and one white. When the racist white pastoralist, active opponent of Indigenous land rights, is rendered helpless by a stroke, the women are freed to gift one another reconciliation. The pastoralist's wife, the good white woman, gifts her newly devolved power to the good black woman in the form of a meticulous kinship record, kept by pastoralist forebears from pioneer times. The record will enable the Indigenous woman to present her community's land rights' claim to the court for it demonstrates their ancestral connection with their land before they were forcibly removed. With the court itself and the uncertainty of a favourable judgment projected beyond the frame, the drama closes with the music of relief.[64] Within the fable of certainty, Thomson's *Wonderlands* appears as a magical potion that has cured its audience of empire's apocalyptic history by sluicing the aggression of man from the apothecary's phial.

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[62] Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 195-6.
[63] Bovell, *Holy Day* 66.
[64] Thomson, *Wonderlands* 65-6.

Within the fable of certainty, the courage to write my own play rode through imagination's forest on the same horse as the fear that the allure of utopia would snatch the play's life from my arms. I felt like the father who, in Goethe's allegorical "*Der Erlkönig* [The Erlking]," rode "through night and wind [*durch Nacht und Wind*]" to carry his child out of reach of death's consumptive promise.[65] The more urgently the father clasps his child and the more cogently he tells him that the figures heard whispering of eternal delights are not the Erlking and his daughters, but deceptions of mist and leaves, the more vulnerable the child becomes. The greater the father's effort to flee, the greater his sensation that the Erlking is already seizing by force the child who would not come willingly to his kingdom. In his terror, the father rides fast, but it is too late when he reaches the farmhouse:

> In his arms, the child was dead
> [*In seinen Armen das Kind war tot.*]"[66]

With this image and its current of grief, the poem closes in the past tense. Certainty has triumphed and life has gone. The contrast between life (struggle) and death (certainty) is marked in the poem's structure. Having presented the core of the journey in the present tense as a dramatic dialogue between the father and his child, Goethe reverts in the closing stanza to the form with which he opens his poem, a narration in the past tense. The journey is over. The child cannot be revived. In the father's anguish at his loss, I recognised my own terror that the life of my infant play would be snaffled by a twenty-first century Erlking and his daughters, whom I could not outrun, for they would ride with me. Their form would seem as natural as mist and leaves. Their whisperings would be as irresistible as bewitchment, promising that if I were to give them my play, it would find a home in their beguiling world. In its contemporary guise, their kingdom promulgated the enticing and stifling ideal that Howard Barker denounces as "the reigning moral consensus". No matter how hard one rode its spell would seduce or force even the unwilling to enter "the fatal bond between imagination and existent morality." Barker states the threat to theatre thus:

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[65] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Der Erlkönig [The Erlking]," 1782, *The Penguin Book of German Verse: with plain prose translation of each poem*, ed. Leonard Forster (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1957) 214-5. The fragment quoted is my own transliteration. Goethe uses the rhythmic freedom of poetic licence to omit the requisite articles and I wanted to enjoy in English as well the power of his verse.

[66] Goethe, "The Erlking" 215. Forster's plain prose translation is apt. The line in English has two syllables fewer and any attempt to match the original rhythm would only mangle the simplicity and power of Goethe's poetry.

> I think it is safe to say that no accessible play denies the moral burden of the climate in which it is created. In its exegesis it affirms the reigning moral consensus, no matter what the shocks it delivers en route. In the fatal bond between imagination and existent morality, the play about 'issues' becomes the most 'relevant', 'important' and 'accessible' of all theatre, since it can operate only in a field of shared morality … the suffocating insistence of liberal-humanist ideological solidarity.[67]

Intensive training in un-filtered perception would be needed if I were to gallop my own play away from the "accessible" solution. If one drew the right gate, of course, the inside track might bring success through performing relevant issues and flashing requisite shocks for the audience, but Barker delivers such a passionate warning against the tyranny of "the liberal-humanist ideological solidarity" one needs to find a different path. However generous the applause, a play that bonds itself to received morality could yield its life to the empire that indulges (and funds) its presence on the stage. Yet it seemed much easier to state what was not wanted than to work out my own path to an alternative form where an as yet unknown act would break the spell of empire and bring war to recognise itself – in Gaita's sense of feeling remorse for the harm that it has done.

While I had come to see Thomson's *Wonderlands* and Bovell's *Holy Day* as variations on a theme of well-meaning ideological consensus that my own new play would endeavour to outrun, inspiration came from two other works my Masters' thesis had explored, each by an Indigenous Australian playwright: Tammy Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* (2001)[68] and Richard J. Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* (2002).[69] Polymorphous and open-ended, these plays refuse to accept empire's construction of itself as natural/ism.[70]

My study of the witness to trauma in *I Don't Wanna Play House* and *Conversations with the Dead* had been informed by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony:*

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[67] Barker, *Arguments*, 87.

[68] Tammy Anderson, *I Don't Wanna Play House*, *Blak Inside: 6 Indigenous Plays from Victoria*, Current Theatre Series (Sydney: Currency in assn. with Playbox Theatre, 2002). First performed by Playbox Theatre, dir. John Bolton, musician Don Hopkins, at The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 25 April 2001.

[69] Frankland, *Conversations (Currency/Playbox)*. First co-produced by Ilbijerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Theatre Cooperative, Playbox and La Mama, dir. Richard J. Frankland, at Carlton Courthouse, Melbourne, 13 February 2002. Transferred to The Beckett Theatre, The C.U.B. Malthouse, Melbourne, 26 February 2002. New production by Company B, Belvoir, dir. Wesley Enoch, at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, 30 July 2003.

Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History.[71] In a world where "people failed to believe in the reality of the gas chambers", Felman posits that "a performative act" is needed, an act of "illumination" that releases the darkness from inside into the light through creating "an effective and affective shock that resonates [. . .] in the whole body [. . .].[72] Such testimony, Laub elaborates, gives birth to "the 'knowing' of the event," in a way that is different from its presentation "simply as an overwhelming shock."[73] It had been my argument that in Thomson's *Wonderlands* and Bovell's *Holy Day* witness is trammelled because the greater dramatic weight is given to the righteous *telling* of historic trauma, whether such a telling is effected through spoken report or through a staged mimesis of suffering that brings overwhelming shock. In contrast, Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* and Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead* give centre stage to acts of *witness* – performative acts whose shock is one of "illumination" (Felman) or "knowing" (Laub).[74] When the time came for me to write my own play, the work of Felman and Laub encouraged persistence in looking for an allegorical way to stage witness to the trauma of war that might offer the shock that illuminates instead of overwhelming.

Felman illustrates her thesis through an analysis of Albert Camus' *The Plague* [*La Peste*] (1947).[75] Because Camus has imagined the unreality of the plague as a metaphor for the unreality of what happened during World War Two, the allegory makes it possible "to name the *vanishing of the event* as part of its *actual historical occurrence*" (original emphasis).[76] To be effective in the face of "history as holocaust" and its "failure to imagine", witness cannot be "simply referential", such as might be presented in traditional journalism or historical writing, but needs an "imaginative medium" with the courage of Camus' character/narrator Rieűx, whose uncompromising utterance Felman quotes:[77]

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[70] For my detailed analysis of Anderson's *I Don't Wanna Play House* and Frankland's *Conversations with the Dead*, see Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 135-155 (*I Don't Wanna*) and 156-178 *(Conversations*).
[71] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony : Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, (New York: Routledge, 1992).
[72] Felman, *Testimony* 53, 239.
[73] Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," *Testimony* 57.
[74] See Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 33-42; 57-83; 116-8; 173-4; 184.
[75] Shoshana Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*, or a Monument to Witnessing," in Felman and Laub, *Testimony : Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992) 93-119.
[76] Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 102.
[77] Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 105, 108.

> I've no use for testimonies that are not unqualified [*Je n'admets que les témoignages sans reserve*]."[78]

To avoid the negatives that are not there in Camus' original text, my Master's thesis offered a different rendering into English: "I only recognise testimonies without boundaries."[79] That translation has association with Heiner Müller's notion of acts of theatre that are boundary-crossing.[80] But there is clarity and force too in Felman's choice of epithet: "unqualified". Felman writes that when the act of witness presents a total, unqualified condemnation, it "*implicates* its bearer, *contaminates* the witness, *includes* the onlooker" (original emphasis). No-one is exempt. It is "a situation from which one cannot choose to exclude oneself, except by self deception."[81] Tough words. They challenge timidity and abhor retreat to a representation of horror that would feign keep the self at a safe distance. Here is Felman again:

> If the failure to imagine out of which history as holocaust proceeds stems, precisely, from the witnesses' failure to imagine their own implication and their own inclusion in the condemnation, Camus' own literary testimony must, above all, wrench the witnessing away from this historical failure of imagination. Literature bears testimony not just to duplicate or to record events, but to make history available to the imaginative act whose historical unavailability has prompted, and made possible, a holocaust.[82]

Theatre would, one surmises, be accorded parallel status with literature, for any artist may challenge history and its appropriation of truth. Felman writes that in Camus' essay, "*Le Témoin de la liberté* [Freedom's witness]" (1948), the artist's vocation is to bear witness not so much to truth, which is but a theory, but to freedom. The artist, Felman writes, paraphrasing Camus, "testifies not to the law, but to the body [*les artistes…sont les témoins de la chair, non de la loi*]." The artist's act of bearing witness, comments Felman, reveals "the body's otherness to theory, the body's physical *resistance to theory*" (original emphasis).[83]

If I were to ride / write my own play out of the forest of the denial of death, I would need to imagine performative acts of discovery, from which I would not be exempt.

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[78] Camus' *The Plague*, trans. Felman, in Felman, *Testimony* 105.
[79] Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 62, footnote 81.
[80] Müller, in *Hamletmachine* ed. Weber 14.
[81] Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 107.
[82] Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 108.
[83] Camus, trans. Felman, *Le Témoin de la liberté* [Freedom's witness]", Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 108-9. Felman cites *Oeuvres complètes d'Albert Camus*, Vol 5, Paris: Gallimard and Club de L'Honnête Homme, 1983, (1948) 188-191.

Dori Laub offers succinct tribute to the public and private mirroring of inside and outside that are the performative power of witness:

> One has to know one's buried truth in order to be able to live one's life.[84]

Tennessee Williams makes no exemptions for himself, his characters, his audience or the people who will stage the witness. In *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Williams scripts a lengthy stage direction that prescribes how, in the closing minutes of the play, Chance and Princess will bear witness to their own buried truths. Williams' precise detail, conveyed partly through imagery, insists that each character perform the self-recognition that comes with his or her realisation of imminent doom. It is a witness that is *sans reserve* (Camus), or (in Felman's translation) "unqualified". In Williams' late 1950s Cold War America where opponents of common and civil rights exerted power to press the law (and people's bodies) into their service, one senses the playwright's determination to forestall any timid producers who might try to mitigate for the audience the burden of the tragic acts of self-recognition that are about to be performed. The stage direction begins:

> NOTE: in this area it is very important that Chance's attitude should be self-recognition but not self-pity – a sort of deathbed dignity and honesty apparent in it [original emphasis]. In both Chance and the Princess, we should return to the huddling-together of the lost, but not with sentiment, which is false, but with whatever is truthful in the moments when people share doom, face firing squads together. [. . .].[85]

Williams' direction resists any misguided effort to confine and qualify the freedom of Chance and Princess to bear witness. Each of these lives has been damaged in very different ways by Boss Finley's southern American fiefdom of corrupt politics, brutish racism, sexual double standards and patriarchal tyranny. It is an empire that grasps to keep itself upright through intertwining myths that money is virtue, white blood sacred, youth perpetual and love a property for purchase. As a young man, Chance embraced a momentary passionate glory with Boss Finley's fifteen-year old daughter Heavenly, before her father rendered their lives and love spurious by forbidding their union. In her youth, the Princess thrived on the screen idol's glory of adoration and

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[84] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," Felman and Laub, *Testimony* 78. Cited in Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 62.

[85] Tennessee Williams, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, *A Streetcar Named Desire and Other Plays*, 1959 (London: Penguin, 1962) 109. First performed, dir. Elia Kazan, Martin Beck Theatre, New York, 10 March 1959.

fame, until the public turned from her ageing self and emptied her of both. The desires of Chance and Princess to recapture their lost glory cannot co-exist within Boss Finley's territory. Their presence confutes the public and private falsehoods with which Boss Finley propagates himself, flails his enemies and rouses his supporters as he fights to save his besieged and juddering empire.[86]

Alone, despite the presence of one another in the vacuous tenure of a hotel bedroom, Chance and Princess know they are condemned to castration, actual for him and symbolic for her. Although the enactment of their doom is projected beyond stage time, foreboding fills the frame as each of them comes to recognise his or her disillusion and dissolution. The shudder transmits to the audience. The emotion opens to reflection much more than each character's peculiar pain. The dissolution of Boss Finley, his family and his empire is made metonymically present through the destruction of illusion performed by Princess and Chance.[87]

Cloaking the Princess's tragic action in "sentiment", would, Williams directs, "falsify her future" and reinstate the romantic illusion that her "spurious glory" of youth and beauty will be restored. Through the "dignity and honesty" with which Princess and Chance perform their own truth the false morality of Boss Finley is illuminated. Having reached the sense of self-worth that is dignity, Princess leaves, escorted by the trooper Boss Finley sent to get her out of town. The Boss's son Tom and his henchman arrive to keep the town moral by castrating Chance. An apt name. In curtailing Chance, the agents of empire are docking the land of Opportunity itself, lest anyone else deemed undeserving attempts to make use of its attributes.

Like Howard Barker, Tennessee Williams puts to the test the moral sentiments that conceal power relationships and their cruelties. Both playwrights make a moral philosopher's distinction between syrup and honesty. When Barker describes himself as a "moralist", he defines it as "one who is tough with morality, who exposes it to risk, even to oblivion."[88] For the final moment of *Sweet Bird of Youth*, it is not hatred or vengeance that Williams gifts to Chance, but witness to his own dignity (or freedom in Camus' sense) in the face of overwhelming horror. The didascalia direct Chance to advance to the forestage. His address to a world beyond the lights speaks

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[86] Williams, *Sweet Bird of Youth* 95-96.
[87] Williams, *Sweet Bird of Youth* 109-11.
[88] Barker, *Arguments* 76.

to the hearts of his assailants, whether they lurk in or out of the frame. Whether their hearts are listening or not cannot be told, but no-one is exempt:

> CHANCE. I don't ask for your pity, but just for your understanding – not even that – no. Just for your recognition of me in you, and the enemy time, in us all.[89]

The irreversible power of "the enemy time" could be read as a metaphor for Boss Finley's empire where violence binds the motion of earth to its purpose. Unlike Bovell's *Holy Day* where violence is left triumphant over the depleted bodies of its victims, in Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth* the surface triumph of violence is unsettled by the testimony that will not stay "buried" (Laub). Writing in *The New York Times* prior to the Broadway opening of *Sweet Bird of Youth* (1959), Williams connects the "barrage of violence" in his plays with his need to be honest with himself:

> Since I am a member of the human race, when I attack its behaviour towards fellow members I am obviously including myself in the attack, unless I regard myself as not human but superior to humanity. I don't. In fact, I can't expose a human weakness on the stage unless I know it through having it myself. I have exposed a good many human weaknesses and brutalities and consequently I have them.[90]

Having named "guilty feelings" and "defiant aggressions" as "universal" human traits that bring "the deep dark of despair that haunts our dreams, our creative work and makes us distrust each other", Williams offers theatre as a counterweight not only to despair but to the etiolation of *telling*:

> Enough of these philosophical abstractions, for now. To get back to writing for the theatre, if there is any truth in the Aristotelian idea that violence is purged by its poetic representation on a stage, then it may be that my cycle of violent plays have had a moral justification after all. I know that I have felt it. I have always felt a release from the sense of meaningless and death when a work of tragic intention has seemed to me to have achieved that intention, even if only approximately, nearly.[91]

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[89] Williams, *Sweet Bird of Youth* 111. First performed on a proscenium arch stage, Martin Beck Theatre (renamed Al Hirschfeld Theatre, 2003). See Andreas Praefcke, photographer, "Al Hirschfeld Theatre: View to the stage", May 2007, *Wikipedia*, <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Beck_Theatre> (accessed 12 March 2013).
[90] Tennessee Williams, Foreword, *Sweet Bird of Youth*, by Williams (London: Penguin, 1962) 11-12. First published, *The New York Times*, 8 March 1959.
[91] Williams, Foreword 12-13.

Through its power to project and release the suffering self in the suffering culture, Tennessee Williams grants immanence to tragedy. The stage direction that guards *Sweet Bird of Youth* against those who would cloy its witness in the falsehood of soap reveals that Williams, like a modern Hamlet, hunts for transcendence through the un-cloyed revelation of the horror the body endures:

> I would say that there is something much bigger in life and death than we have become aware of (or adequately recorded) in our living and dying. And, further, to compound this shameless romanticism, I would say that our serious theatre is a search for that something that is not yet successful but is still going on.[92]

Perversely perhaps, because the outcome for the characters is tragic, there is optimism in Williams' vision of catharsis as the search for an act of (self) discovery. Given that reading Howard Barker had almost convinced me to shape my own play as "serious theatre" rather than comedy, which he scorns as "the suspension, the denial of emotion",[93] I would need the "shameless romanticism" of Tennessee Williams' search for the unknown. It would sweeten the acerbity of Barker's dictum that art moves nothing beyond itself and therefore, in a dying culture, it might as well hurt:

> Since no art form generates action, the most appropriate art for a culture on the edge of extinction is one that stimulates pain.[94]

Nietzsche, of course, wants us to have our tragedy and eat our comedy too, moved by the Apolline poet and danced by the Dionysiac chorus of the satyrs. Alive with "thoughts of repulsion at the horror and absurdity of existence" he personifies *art* as "a redeeming, healing enchantress" who alone can turn those mangling thoughts that veer towards extinction "into ideas compatible with life: these are the *sublime* – the taming of horror through art; and *comedy* – the artistic release from the repellence of the absurd (original emphases).[95]

Perhaps we make sacred whatever brings us purpose. Barker, I suggest, invites us to the sacrament of tragedy. He writes that tragedy is the only form that can licence the actor to "do the undoable" and take us "out of ourselves". When tragedy lets the

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[92] Williams, Foreword 13.
[93] Barker, *Arguments* 77.
[94] Barker, *Arguments*, 19. Cited in Lyssa, "Performing Australia's Black and White History" 83.
[95] Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, 40.

actor and the audience off the leash of conscience, we run free in “a pre-moral world”, a landscape of atavistic relief, wildness, barbarism and fear.[96] Yet Barker’s plays flicker and fire with compassion and wit that cannot be pared from the tragic trajectory for they are part of its purpose. In *Victory: Choices in Reaction* (1983), which Barker sets in a devastated England at the end of the Civil War, the life of the widow of the defeated Puritan Bradshaw shrinks into a degraded, grovelling, deceitful desperation to survive.[97] When I saw *Victory* at the Sydney Theatre Company in 2004,[98] I left the theatre as salted and weak as a basin of gruel. Yet, reflection revealed that compassion is there, although it dare not let itself be seen above the rim. Were Bradshaw (the widow is known only by her late husband’s surname) to glimpse compassion in herself, it would sap the strength she needs for her task of Isis – the re-collection of her husband’s bones.

The play opens with her husband’s remains being disinterred on the orders of King Charles. He celebrates the restoration of the monarchy and his own ascension by taking vengeance on Bradshaw’s bones for the murder of his father, the first King Charles.[99] With slapstick as intemperately and riotously harrowing as that of Punch, Guignol, or Jarry’s Ubu Rex,[100] the new King displays Bradshaw’s head in public for uses it through his window as a skittle. The widow reserves her courage for a different morality, the private stilling of herself into the witness who survives. She takes what she needs and accepts whatever viciousness or ignominy she cannot avoid while she gleans, begs or steals from officers of the realm, right up to the King, the bits of the body that were severed and must be re-membered.[101]

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[96] Barker, *Arguments* 77. Cited in part in Lyssa, “Performing Australia’s Black and White History” 39.
[97] Howard Barker, *Victory: Choices in Reaction*, *Barker: Plays One*, 1990 (London: Oberon Books, 2006, 2010). First performed, Joint Stock Theatre Group in association with Royal Court Theatre, 23 March 1983.
[98] *Victory: Choices in Reaction*, by Howard Barker, dir. Judy Davis and Benjamin Winspear, perf. by Judy Davis and Colin Friels, first perf. 20 April 2004, Wharf 1 Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney, 22 May 2004.
[99] Barker, *Victory* 14.
[100] Alfred Jarry, *The Ubu Plays*, trans. Cyril Connolly and Simon Watson Taylor, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1968, 1978). *Ubu Roi* was first performed 1896. Pa Ubu boasts of his formula for order and the millions it shall transfer to his own pocket: “Bring up the first Noble and pass me the boat-hook. Those who are condemned to death, I shall push through this trap door. They will fall down into the bleed-pig chambers, and will then proceed to the cash-room where they will be debrained.” *Ubu Roi* 39.
[101] See, for example, the scene in which the widow Bradshaw accepts a violent blow from the Footman when she steals her husband’s head from the sleeping King, Barker, *Victory* 81-3.

In the closing scene of Barker's *Victory*, compassion sears with the heat of buried coals. If compassion be "suffering together with another", which my dictionary marks as its first, and obsolete sense, Barker's play brings us to where we might, together, know that suffering.[102] We suffer with Bradshaw when she arrives at last at the house of her daughter Cropper carrying the sleeping baby born to her from rape. We suffer with the rapist, Ball whom Bradshaw now leads at the end of a rope, while he lugs the sack of her husband's remains that she has harvested, ready to re-plant.[103] Bradshaw is now married to the rapist – his tongue having been cut out and his body racked on the orders of the King as punishment for having killed his friend, a banker.[104]

We suffer too with Bradshaw's daughter Cropper. Her name suggests her power to sow and reap the future, but now she struggles with her mother's insistence that she look in the bag of bones and recognise what it might have cost her mother to bring her father back to her. For Cropper the bones cannot be the father that she knew, the one who is greatly in her thoughts: she announces that she has learned Latin. Her mother's response flattens us: "Latin. What's that?" It is a question so honest and so unanswerable we are walloped. But Cropper picks herself up, so alive is she with the story of her labour which is an intimate extension of her father's. When she could have been joining the ordinary world and going into unhappy sleep, she has been transforming herself, like him, into one of those pesky mice who nibble and gnaw inside the hem of empire:

> CROPPER. I read his book. By night. Run my dirty finger through the words. Mice in the skirting. Husband groaning in his kip. The sentence coming to me like a birth in the pale morning. I am translating it. 'Harmonia Britannia.' I am printing it.[105]

Baker scripts a pause, a silence in which anything could happen. In that hiatus, the widow makes no comment on the past or the future. Her wretched and demeaning journey over, she simply re-collects her own body. She is there. She is nowhere else but there. There is nowhere else to go. Here are her words and her daughter's response – the final spoken moments of the play:

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[102] *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.*
[103] Barker, *Victory* 83-4.
[104] Barker's bawdy satire of the game of power played underground between the King and the bankers – the buyers and sellers of kings – is one of the myriad delights of *Victory.* See 20-29.
[105] Barker, *Victory* 85.

> BRADSHAW. Oh, look, it's raining…
>
> CROPPER. Quickly, come to the house.[106]

Unseen and unremarked, the gods have nonetheless been watching and are sharing our pathos. Our anger too. Barker's stage direction scripts *Thunder*, as if the coming storm might bring again, or tear away, the cruelties hacked into people and their bones. Bradshaw does not move, but Cropper, in the spirit of shared humanity and reason, takes the baby and hastens to shelter. In the play's rich subtextual life, this child, unlike its mother, will grow up learning to read.

The script lets *a few moments* pass. We need the time to suffer with each character. Wordless, Bradshaw puts her arm around Ball and protects his head with a scarf. They go *clasped together towards the house.*[107] The King's vengeance has not silenced thought, or history. The daughter of the King's enemy has acquired her father's learning and is planting his ideas, and perhaps her own, in the vernacular. In sending rain, the gods (whose role as bringers of coincidence cannot be acknowledged of course) drop more than sympathy upon the earth. There is cleansing in that rain and fury in the thunder, but there is also an unspoken sense that the rain will water the daughter's crop. The past has been re-collected and its harvest dis-seminated – its seed sown in infant life and in fresh ploughing of the ground of thought where, watered with compassion, rich fruits, as yet unseen, may grow.[108]

Here was inspiration indeed. Lest it stick to an audience as falsehood, Barker serves the concealed optimism of his characters with "dignity and honesty", in a similar spirit to that with which Tennessee Williams treats his characters in *Sweet Bird of Youth.*

Writing in *RealTime*, critic Keith Gallasch deploys a vocabulary rich in associations with the divine and the hellish to evoke what he sees as polarities of "hope" and "darkness" in Barker's *Victory*:

> By the end, the smallest glimmer of hope and personal restoration is liberating, but the darkness of loss and brutal compromise refuses to

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[106] Barker, *Victory* 85.
[107] Barker, *Victory* 85.
[108] The English word "recollect" derives from the Latin *recolligere. OED*. The same source gave the French the word *récolter* ["to harvest"]. *Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales*, accessed 12 December 2012, <http://www.cnrtl.fr/etymologie/r%E9colte>.

> disperse. The exhilaration the audience feels is twofold: awe at the art and joy that so damning a vision can allow at least one of its characters some grace.[109]

Victory subjects us to a "damning" vision of humanity and to the giving of at least "some grace", although, unlike Gallasch, I would argue that the play does not so much polarise "darkness" and "grace" as integrate them. Rather than being trapped by the fly-paper of the triumph of Good over Evil, we are moved to thought as well as to affect. We are taken, as Barker puts it, "out of ourselves".[110] Barker's theatre may be an act of transcendence, but it is a non-conformist one. The shock of the play's witness invites the audience to reflect on the nature of power and their own complicity. As Gallasch puts it, "the darkness [. . .] refuses to disperse."

In the world that must be lived beyond the theatre, Laub writes of the terror that touches us when survivors give testimony to their experience of the Holocaust:

> Insofar as they remind us of a horrible, traumatic past, insofar as they bear witness to our own historical disfiguration, survivors frighten us. [. . .]. We are indeed profoundly terrified to truly face the traumas of our history, much like the survivor and the listener are. [111]

Laub relates the story of a Holocaust survivor who came to believe that if she could not stop the atrocities she witnessed, or rescue the victims, *she* was responsible for their pain (original emphasis).[112] Laub writes that the inability of the "historical insider" to detach herself sufficiently from the inside "so as to stay entirely *outside* of the trapping roles…of the victim or of the executioner is imposed upon her by "the delusional ideology" that the perpetrators of the Holocaust forced upon their victims (original emphasis). Any outside point of reference was excluded and it became impossible for the victims to bear witness to themselves and to "the *real* truth … the destruction of their humanity" (original emphasis).[113]

I wanted to write the terror as if from the inside *and* create an act of theatre that would bring the inside into the outside – into the light, in Felman and Laub's sense.[114] I wanted that act of illumination to be at once affective and political, able to move the

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[109] Keith Gallasch, "A Cruel History of Choices," rev. of *Victory: Choices in Reaction*, by Howard Barker, *Real Time*. 61 (2004).
[110] Barker, *Arguments* 77.
[111] Laub, "Bearing Witness" 73-4.
[112] Laub, "Bearing Witness" 80.
[113] Laub, "Bearing Witness" 81-2.

audience to a catharsis *and* create a detachment that could expose a brutal ideology to view and cogitation, without inadvertently re-enforcing the categories that justify its tyranny. From Barker's play *Victory*, I wanted to borrow both Bradshaw's immersion in her task of the rescue of bones from hegemonic horror *and* Cropper's acts of intellectual detachment and personal compassion that sow a different future. I wanted theatre to be both a political act of danger *and* an offering of transcendence – if one could arrange that with Barker's gods of rain and thunder.

Ubersfeld ascribes a welcome power to theatre when she calls it "a dangerous art," as evinced by the censorship it has "always" attracted, whether imposed directly by the police, or indirectly, either through an economy that nurtures theatre as "entertainment for the pleasure of the dominant class", or else through "self-censorship" – a form of restriction she names as "particularly perverse".[115] I wanted my play not to be afraid. I wanted it to have Heiner Müller's courage to create an act of revolutionary "border-crossing".[116] I wanted a play that was but a grand theory of everything, detached and affective, a work of comedy and tragedy, coupled with a thespian's version of physicist Werner Heisenberg's "uncertainty principle".[117]

In *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, Rebecca Solnit muses on the search for what is not yet known, a search that will transform and extend "the boundaries of the self":

> Leave the door open for the unknown, the door into the dark. That's where the most important things come from, where you yourself came from, and where you will go. [. . .]
>
> Certainly for artists of all stripes, the unknown, the idea of the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found. It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophesies, the unknown, the unfamiliar; it's where their work comes from, although its arrival signals the beginning of the long disciplined process of making it their own. Scientists too, as J. Robert Oppenheimer once remarked, "live always at the 'edge of mystery' – the boundary of the unknown." But they transform the unknown into the known, haul it in like fishermen; artists get you out into that dark sea.[118]

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[114] Felman and Laub *Testimony* 239.
[115] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre*, 4. Cited in Lyssa, ""Performing Australia's Black and White History" 11.
[116] Interview with Müller, *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 200. Personal translation.
[117] Jan Hilgevoord and Jos Uffink, "The Uncertainty Principle," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Spring 2011, 2001, accessed 20 September 2011, <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2011/entries/qt-uncertainty/>.
[118] Rebecca Solnit, *A Field Guide to Getting Lost*, (New York, N.Y: Penguin, 2005) 4-5

Advice came as well from Margaret Atwood:

> The only way you can write the truth is to assume that what you set down will never be read. Not by any other person, and not even by yourself at some later date. Otherwise you begin excusing yourself. You must see the writing as emerging like a long scroll of ink from the index finger of your right hand; you must see your left hand erasing it.
>
> Impossible, of course.
>
> I pay out my line, I pay out my line, this black thread I'm spinning across the page.[119]

Spinning one's black thread without knowing where one is going while trusting that what one spins will play its own truth was not the same game as the one my righteous mind set whirling, a game where it would try to create an onstage avatar who would force war to do what it was told and become contrite. One ought to have paid attention to the passionate and humble wisdom of Heiner Müller:

> I don't think a play can be good unless you burn all your intentions during the writing process.[120]

Who would win the joust? The desire to play like a child in the sandpit of language, build a world from its grains of speech and move passion and thought into action? Or, would the winner be the need to script a play where war is forced to beg for redemption, as positive proof my intentions were good?

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[119] Margaret Atwood, *The Blind Assassin*, (London: Virago Press, 2001) 345.
[120] Heiner Müller, interview with Sylvère Lotringer, "Walls," trans. Bernard Schütze and Caroline Schütze, ed. Lotringer, *Germania*, (New York, N.Y.: Semiotext(e), 1990) 46.

The search for a metaphor

The script began as a writing exercise, sparked by a box of crayons that languished open on the desk with one vital colour lost. Where was the red? From that bloodless box, desire seized a working title, *Missing Red,* and ran with that absence as fast as pen would carry it, into the unknown, for it had no notion of where or how it would find characters, setting, action, form or metaphor. The character of Cassandra appeared as the voice of the monologue that scrawled across the page, and although none of its specific content was to become part of the play, the play now had a protagonist.

The desire to write was certain of only one thing: it wanted to craft an experience of horror, grief and compassion that would find expression in the systole and diastole of live performance. In that bodily rhythm, what is experienced may be felt or understood as peculiar to oneself, but may also be felt not only in an island self, but as a tide that laps at the boundaries of others. In that flux and reflux lay a utopian dream whose strategic question became: how might one create a form for a drama that would prompt warring kings, along with their queens, bishops, pawns, knights, sundry avatars and pretenders, to accept responsibility for their actions? Hamlet puts the concept enticingly, as he frames his plan to use the skill of his friends the strolling players to test the veracity of the Ghost's story that Claudius murdered Hamlet's father:

> HAMLET. [. . .]. I have heard
> That guilty creatures sitting at a play
> Have by the very cunning of the scene
> Been struck so to the soul that presently
> They have proclaim'd their malefactions;
> For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
> With most miraculous organ. [. . .].[121]

When the players' performance of the *Murder of Gonzago* causes Claudius to rise to his feet with hurricane force, his loyal Lord Chamberlain Polonius knows where to direct the blame. He punishes the offending piece of theatre: "Give o'er the play."[122] Hamlet's belief in the "very cunning of the scene" is vindicated. The public performance of a concealed truth has the power to fright not only the head of a trespassing state, but its censorious functionaries as well.

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[121] Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 2.2.625-31.
[122] *Hamlet* 3.2.284. See also 2.2.570, 3.2.276-83.

If I was to craft an action that would fright war from its throne, as the play within a play frights Claudius from his, I needed to trust theatre's ancient belief in itself. Strikingly, Hamlet himself does not entirely trust his conviction that "[. . .] the play's the thing / wherein I'll catch the conscience of the king."[123] While the players are performing before the court, Hamlet inhabits both scene and audience, as if he were a self-appointed chorus.[124] From that in-between space, he directs the audience's eye to the action and their ear to the subtext, lest they fail to apprehend the deeper truth of what they are watching. The scene moves towards its climax when the Player Lucianus approaches his sleeping uncle, the Player King. Lucianus has a speech that makes clear his intention for the "mixture rank, of midnight weeds collected," that he holds in his phial: "On wholesome life usurp immediately".[125] It is Hamlet, however, who elucidates the motives of the murderer, that mirror Claudius' own: the killing of a king to gain a crown and a queen. While Lucianus is pouring his drug in the Player King's ear, the silence of that bodily performance is amplified by Hamlet:

> HAMLET. He poisons him i' the garden for's estate. His name's Gonzago [. . .]. You shall see anon how the murderer gets the love of Gonzago's wife.[126]

Hamlet's words shift the locus of the crisis from the mirroring play to the court itself. The performance and the chorus work in synchrony to bring the watching king to his feet in terror.[127] By turning the player-murderer's motives into a verbal battering ram, Hamlet makes it impossible for the stricken king to dismiss the play as mere entertainment, or to isolate its substance from his own act of murder. Unable to recover his public composure, Claudius flees the scene.[128] In private he drops to his knees in a failed attempt at contrition, lamenting that his heart has "strings of steel", but his self-pity does not morph into remorse. Self-interest prevails. He reminds himself that if he were to let his heart become "soft as sinews of the new-born babe," he would forfeit the crown and the queen for which he committed the murder.[129] His self-surgery confirmed – his heart forged to steel by his head – he consumes what

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[123] *Hamlet* 2.2.641-42.
[124] During the play within a play Hamlet makes many interjections and elucidations that meld into his banter with his uncle the king, with his mother and with Ophelia, who, in one such bout, calls him "a good chorus", *Hamlet* 3.2.259.
[125] *Hamlet* 3.2.270-75.
[126] *Hamlet* 3.2.276-80.
[127] *Hamlet* 3.2.281.
[128] *Hamlet* 3.2.285.

little life he has left in schemes to butcher Hamlet. His actions could be read as a crusade to take revenge on truth for daring to perform itself. The more Claudius tries to make the truth go away, the more unable he becomes to stop the killing. When Gertrude is about to drink from the poisoned cup he has prepared for Hamlet, Claudius has lost all power to speak the truth even though it would prevent his so-dearly won wife and queen from becoming what modern plotters of death call "collateral damage".[130]

Claudius' headlong rush into a self-interested revenge against truth could be seen as a running away from remorse and thus abandoning a quality which Gaita argues is "fundamental amongst the ethical determinations of human individuality." Gaita makes a clear distinction between self-interest [and here I think of Claudius' motives] and an ethics where remorse, through its "recognition of the reality of evil – evil done and evil suffered," awakens the self to others: "The pain of remorse cannot provide a motive for an ethics of self-interest as that is usually conceived, because the self that discovers itself in the remorse and the self that seeks only its reductively conceived interests are incommensurable."[131] To bring war to remorse in Gaita's sense of the term, I decide that a chorus could be useful for my play, as a bridge between visceral experience and conscience, horror and language, heart-knowing and the ability of the head to pretend not to know.

In Sophocles' *Oedipus the King*, it is the plague's public performance of his (as yet unrecognised) inner blight that frights Oedipus out of his royal house and into the street.[132] The plague performs itself as a bodily and sensory experience. It expresses itself in the suffering bodies of the people as they bring branches to the altar in supplication. It inhabits the sights, sounds and smells of which Oedipus speaks as if

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[129] The dialogue quoted is from Claudius' soliloquy, "O! my offence is rank, it smells to heaven," Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.3.36-72 and 3.3.97-98.

[130] For Claudius' culpability when Gertrude drinks from the cup he has poisoned, see *Hamlet* 5.2.301-306 and 5.2.322-324. For a telling definition of "collateral damage" as damage not only to "collateral" but to "innocent people", see Don Watson, *Watson's Dictionary of Weasel Words, Contemporary Clichés, Cant & Management Jargon*, (Sydney: Random House, 2004) 73. Watson sources "collateral damage" from *United States Air Force Intelligence Targeting Guide*, 1998, although elsewhere he attributes the origins of the term to language used in World War Two. Watson, *Death Sentence* 118. Boggs estimates that since 1945 U.S. military have killed approximately eight million civilians, and that is a conservative accounting, "with higher estimates reaching double that figure." Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 52

[131] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 78.

[132] Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, trans. Robert Fagles, *The Three Theban Plays: Antigone, Oedipus the King, Oedipus at Colonus* (New York, N.Y.: Penguin, 1982) lines 1-9.

he felt the sensations as wounds: “the wailing for the dead” and the city that “reeks of the smoke of burning incense.”[133] It roils in the Priest’s urgent plea to Oedipus: “Our city – look around you and see with your own eyes” how “the red waves of death” are destroying Thebes.[134] It chants in the torment and rhythmic movement of the Chorus who make the people’s voiceless agony audible:

> CHORUS. [. . .].
> and the fruits of our famous earth, they will not ripen
> no and the women cannot scream their pains to birth – [135]

The plague pounds in the heart of Oedipus. Its shocks reverberate inside him and around him, throughout the city of Thebes and its surrounding land. With each beat, these shocks batter the hubris of Oedipus and its cast of truth as a god-like intelligence that saves Thebes from the Sphinx by solving the riddle of life. The shocks force that truth to batter itself against a different truth, one that knows he is a human being, who has failed to see who he is.

Where Claudius forges himself into a weapon to battle the truth inside and outside himself, Oedipus struggles to divine his truth. I use the word “divine” deliberately, for there is a sense in Sophocles’ play that the truth Oedipus seeks renders the sacred and the human indivisible. Gaita too sees in the recognition of truth a sacred as well as a secular dimension. In the secular frame Gaita describes the need of evildoers to understand that the harm they do themselves “cannot be separated as a motive from the acknowledgment of another as an absolute limit to their wills.” In its “religious expression”, the recognition that comes in remorse brings understanding of what one has become – an understanding that carries with it “the shock of the acknowledgment of the sacred in ourselves and in our victims.”[136]

Oedipus fights every obstacle to the discovery of his truth, even when Jocasta, wild with grief, begs him to stop his search. Her motive is later made clear by her death at her own hand: she was trying to protect him from knowing what she has understood:

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[133] *Oedipus the King* lines 4- 5.
[134] *Oedipus the King* lines 28-31.
[135] *Oedipus the King* lines 194-97. A stage direction preceding the entry of the Chorus (at line 168) calls for them to “march around the altar, chanting”.
[136] Gaita, *Good and Evil* 78.

that he is her son, that he murdered his father, and that she has taken him as her husband.[137]

In a dramatic elaboration of the plague's catalytic performance of Oedipus' inner pain, a series of people carry to Oedipus an ever heavier burden of the human / sacred truth that he seeks to uncover. The rank of these people descends from the royalty of his brother-in-law Creon, arriving fired with self-righteous and condemnatory authority from Apollo's oracle at Delphi, down to the humility of the Shepherd. The wretched man admits that many years earlier he disobeyed the order to kill the baby Oedipus, because he pitied him.[138] It is through the Shepherd's compassion that Oedipus awakens, to his own pain and to the pain that others suffer because of what he has done.[139] Now without his eyes, which he himself has punished for their lack of sight, he weeps for his children and the ruin he has made of their future.[140]

In my script I wanted to bring the action to such a pitch that war itself, like Oedipus, would eschew its eyes, see with its heart and know what it has done. It seemed an outcome so desirable it had to be pursued despite its patent impossibility. I wanted war not only to be frighted from its throne, but to weep for its children. I would need to think with the heart to find a metaphor. What was the "most miraculous organ"[141] through which war might be frighted into piping the truth to itself?

Perhaps there was a clue in that prophet of the heart William Blake. His ear was alive to the cry of misery that a warring coal-fed empire was wringing from its youthful harlot, its chimney-sweeper and its hapless soldier. Blake's imagery calls attention to how people, Earth and desire were being re-conceived in modernity's own image, to serve the flow of wealth and order demanded by the capital of empire – the thinking, self-interested head. Blake saw that even the waterway on which London's life and commerce depended had become "the charter'd Thames".[142] In one of his Poetical Sketches, "Gwin, King of Norway," Blake evokes an earlier time where armies fought

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[137] *Oedipus the King* lines 1163--77.
[138] For Creon's expression of Apollo's command, see *Oedipus the King* lines 108-11. For the Shepherd's acknowledgment of his pity for the baby Oedipus, see lines 1300-05.
[139] *Oedipus the King* lines 1306-10.
[140] *Oedipus the King* lines 1627-44.
[141] *Hamlet* 2.2.631.
[142] William Blake, "London," 1789, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1953) 46.

with swords and shields on an Earth that the poet conceptualises, not as an artefact of empire, but as humanity's sentient mother. Earth suffers when war makes her gorge on her own children's blood:

> Earth smokes with blood, and groans, and shakes
> To drink her children's gore,
> A sea of blood; nor can the eye
> See to the trembling shore![143]

Fattened on oil, contemporary war has added the groans of the working bulldozer to the sounds of its massacre-burials. The quixotically named earth-*moving* machine accords no sentience to the splattered humans or the torn earth. Yet we have taught our robots to "see" and photograph what we cannot. In his analysis of how war and its torture strip bare not merely the victims, but the body politic, Mark Danner points out a passing satellite might fortuitously snap a mass execution from space, as happened in July 1995 over Srebrenica, in the former Yugoslavia.[144] Serb soldiers under General Mladic had driven tens of thousands of Muslims from their homes. The soldiers snubbed the disarmed "blue helmets" of United Nations' Dutch peace-keepers, separated the men from the women and children, got drunk, raped women, girls and boys at will, blindfolded the men and took them by truck to their deaths.[145] A survivor tells his story:

> [. . .]. I heard all the bullets whizzing by and thought I would be hit . . . I also heard a bulldozer working in the background and became horrified . . . My worst nightmare was that I would be buried alive.
> I kept hearing people gasping, asking for water so they wouldn't die thirsty [. . .].[146]

As if those voices articulated the survivor's own defiance of death, he remembers their plea for water as more persistent than the sounds of the bullets and the bulldozer. Here was an idea for my play: in a nation at war, the chorus separate themselves from death by the sound of their voices crying out for water. That cry is

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[143] William Blake, "Gwin, King of Norway," 1783, *Selected Poetry and Prose of Blake*, ed. Northrop Frye (New York, N.Y.: Random House, 1953) 16.
[144] Mark Danner, "The Saddest Story: How Not to Stop a War," *Stripping Bare the Body: Politics Violence War* (Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc., an imprint of Schwartz Media Pty Ltd, 2009) 128. See also, 570, endnote 8, citing Danner's source, Michael Dobbs and R. Jeffrey Smith, "New Proof Offered of Serb Atrocities," *Washington Post*, October 29, 1995.
[145] Danner, *Stripping Bare* 125-28.
[146] Danner, *Stripping Bare* 127. Danner cites his source: *Bosnia-Hercegovina: The Fall of Srebrenica and the Failure of UN Peacekeeping* (Human Rights Watch/Helsinki), October 1995, 22-23 and 568-9, endnotes to ch. 2, nos. 3-6.

there too in the opera *Doctor Atomic*, by composer John Adams and librettist Peter Sellars.[147] Set in July 1945 in the desert at Los Alamos, New Mexico, while World War II was scorching to an end, the libretto is sourced from archival documents, interviews and memoirs, melded with borrowings from Muriel Rukeyser and John Donne, whose poetry gifts sentience to language.[148] The work, to borrow Donne's trope, batters the heart. Physicist J. Robert Oppenheimer and U.S. Army Commander General Leslie Groves, wrestle with ambition, personal relationships, moral conscience and the towering destruction of their task: the testing of an atomic bomb, so that the United States could drop death on Hiroshima and, insatiate, drop again on Nagasaki. *Doctor Atomic* closes with the resounding voices of hideously wounded survivors in the ruin of their city: "Water, give us water."[149]

By some transformation I do not understand, but trust as one might one's life for remembering to breathe without the need of our advice, as soon as I had set down on paper that borrowed cry, "Water, give us water," the words flowed into an opening scene. It was a rough draft, but it came with a place, an emotion and characters who begged to find out more about themselves. There, in the dungeon of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors, in a land that I later named "Stygia", a chorus of Waxworks Figures, a romanticised publicly displayed jetsam of centuries of horrors, were crying out for water. Trapped in the perpetual thirst of a state of war, the figures manifest their counterfeit life through a daily enactment of death for the amusement of the paying public. If they and their museum audience are to go on performing the hegemony that vouchsafes their existence, they must, like Oppenheimer, acquiesce in the battering of the heart that comes with the execution of their duty.

The new show the chorus are rehearsing is called "The Waterboarding of Cassandra". The reading I had been doing revealed horrors that confirmed my decision not to stage a mimesis of torture, but to find a way nonetheless to bear witness to its reality. In *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War*

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[147] Peter Sellars, libretto (drawn from original sources), *Doctor Atomic*, comp. John Adams, New York, N.Y.: Hendon Music : Boosey and Hawkes, 2010, c2005. Personal transcription.
[148] In *Doctor Atomic* the character of Oppenheimer sings Adams' setting of John Donne's sonnet, "Batter my heart, three-person'd God". The libretto includes "personal memoirs, recorded interviews, technical manuals of nuclear physics, declassified government documents, and the poetry of Muriel Rukeyser, an American poet and contemporary of Oppenheimer." See John Adams, "John Adams, *Doctor Atomic*: Opera in Two Acts (2004-5)." accessed 14 September 2011, <http://www.earbox.com/W-doctoratomic.html>.
[149] Libretto, *Doctor Atomic*, personal transcription.

to the War on Terror, McCoy reviews the more than two thousand year history of torture as a system of judicial interrogation in Europe and more latterly in the United States.[150] There are parallels between the "water question" methods of the Christian Inquisition and the modern waterboarding practised by the CIA.[151] Although both methods "forced fluids down the victim's throat to simulate a sense of drowning," the sadism practised by Church and State had different justifications of righteousness. The aim of the Church, McCoy writes, was "to purge evil with physical punishment", while the Central Intelligence Agency sought "to induce the survival reflex of a near-death experience and thus break the victim psychologically."[152]

How might one represent such torture onstage? I wanted comedy but I wanted it to have a serious belly too. The darkly parodic and gorily comic representations of toe-nail ripping and other tortures that Martin McDonagh brilliantly scripts for his play, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore* (2001), reveal torturer and victim performing an interlocked psychological and physical dance that builds such an unforgettably vivid intensification of horror it has to be interrupted from outside the scene with a theatrical coup that bursts onstage in the relief of laughter.[153] From Peter Weiss' *Persecution and Assassination of Jean-Paul Marat as Performed by the Inmates of the Asylum of Charenton Under the Direction of the Marquis de Sade* (1964) came the idea that I too could avoid mimesis of horror by using the inmates of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors to perform, in parody, horrific cruelties.[154]

If I could establish a framework within which Cassandra could bear serious witness to the psychological effects of being tortured, the waxworks chorus could be set free to exploit a comedy of horror through a parody of waterboarding for the entertainment of museum visitors. In a childlike distortion of the CIA's method of waterboarding, the player-torturer is provided with a vessel of counterfeit water, lest he or his fellow chorus try to slake their thirst. He pours a stream of blue ribbons over the face of the player-Cassandra, who feigns a drowning for the adulation of the crowd.

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[150] Alfred W. McCoy, *A Question of Torture : CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror*, The American Empire Project, 1st. (New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2006) 5-20.
[151] McCoy, *Question of Torture*, 5-20, 58-59.
[152] McCoy, *A Question of Torture* 59.
[153] Martin McDonagh, *The Lieutenant of Inishmore*, Methuen Drama, (London: Methuen, 2001). First performed 2001.
[154] See Weiss, *Marat Sade*.

Borrowing from *Hamlet*, I wanted the players to perform the vicious deed twice, first in dumb show and then with speech.[155] Where Hamlet gives himself the freedom and mobility of a chorus able to interpret the players' dumb show to the court, a figure from the waxworks chorus, Crone, would have the power to interpret the waterboarding show to the crowd. Having been ducked in the river Cam for a witch in the time of the clever Descartes, Crone is the only one who notices that while the counterfeit waterboarding is being performed onstage, the real water that they hear gushing behind the dungeon wall is the sound of the state's own torturer, waterboarding the living Cassandra. Begging for help to shift the stones and rescue Cassandra, Crone imagines the unseen captive as a turtle dove whose mournful voice warns of the death of peace. Like Hamlet, she has a truth to communicate, but nobody is listening.

My script had a beginning, but words are not always so easy to set free from their dam. Cassandra had been conjured, but had not yet appeared, nor had her antagonist, the President of the Republic of Stygia, Commander-in-Chief of its armed forces and proprietor of its Waxworks Museum of Horrors. He lurks backstage during the opening scene, monitoring the torturer at work and up-scaling his historic collection of ropes, hoods, racks, wheels, thumb screws, branding irons, tanks, tasers and guard dogs in case the waterboarding he has ordered for Cassandra fails to send a strong enough message to any other dissidents who might be planning acts of terror against the regime, the war and his plans to get himself democratically elected Emperor.

Although it was not yet clear what action the President of Stygia might take when he visits the dungeon to confront the soaked and half drowned but still thirsty Cassandra, I decided to make her his niece. The dream was to rock Stygia with tectonic passions, such as Sophocles generates in *Antigone,* where he grinds family relationships against the affairs of state.[156] This interpretation of Sophocles' text is my own contemporary one, coloured by my reading of the play as a source for material that could intensify the struggle between my own characters in *Hurricane Eye*.

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[155] See *Hamlet*, 3.2.146-280.
[156] See Sophocles, *Antigone*.

When Antigone's uncle Creon ascends the throne of Thebes, the city is still trembling in aftershocks from its heritage of violence: the killing of King Laius, the exposure and ruin of his son and murderer Oedipus, and the war for the succession, in which Oedipus' sons (Antigone's brothers) have slain one another.[157] The new order instigated by Creon is agonisingly modern, for he denounces any other potential ruler as "utterly worthless", promises to adopt the "soundest policies" and undertakes to put nothing, not even a friend, "above the good of his own country".[158] As proof of his courage and discernment, Creon grants a hero's burial for one of Oedipus' warring sons, Eteocles. The other son, Polynices, who led the armies of Argos against Thebes, is condemned as a traitor and his corpse left unburied, "carrion for the birds and dogs to tear, / an obscenity for the citizens to behold!"[159] Anyone who disobeys is disloyal. The penalty is death.

Creon's niece Antigone defies his edict. When she scratches at the road-dust with her bare hands to sprinkle what she can of the earth over the body of her beloved brother Polynices to give him burial rites,[160] she disturbs a turbulent ground, where the earthquakes are familial, political and ontological. (What, I asked myself, could my Cassandra do, in defiance of her uncle, that would carry such cosmic weight in a few grains of sand?) When Creon has Antigone arrested and brought before him, her testimony of affect slams against his principles of order. Metaphysical continents collide.[161] To sanction sentencing his niece to "the most barbaric death", Creon evokes a higher order of law and loyalty, with Zeus as his "Guardian" and corroborating witness.[162] To sanction her care of her brother's remains, Antigone appeals to the Justice that dwells with the gods beneath the earth.[163] Flinging aside Creon's edifice of law as a "moralizing" that "repels" her,[164] she evokes an intimacy of honour and love, "sacred to the gods":

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[157] See Creon's speech to his "countrymen", Sophocles, *Antigone* 67, lines 179-193.
[158] Sophocles, *Antigone* 67, lines 194-202.
[159] Sophocles, *Antigone* 68, lines 207-210, 229-31. For the Chorus' condemnation of Polynices for leading Argos against Thebes, see 65-66, lines 100-163. For Creon's dictum that the traitor remains an enemy, even after death, see 86, lines 588-89.
[160] For the sentry's report to Creon of the mysterious scatter of dust found on Polynices' corpse, see Sophocles, *Antigone* 7, lines 281-94. For Antigone's attempt to persuade her sister Ismene to help her put their brother's body in the earth, see 60, lines 26-43.
[161] Sophocles, *Antigone* 83, lines 555ff.
[162] Sophocles, *Antigone* 67, lines 205-6; 68, lines 232-35 and 83, lines 543-545.
[163] See Sophocles, *Antigone* 82, lines 499-508.
[164] Sophocles, *Antigone* 84, lines 557-58.

ANTIGONE. I was born to join in love, not hate –
that is my nature.

CREON. Go down below and love,
if love you must – love the dead! While I'm alive,
no woman is going to lord it over me.[165]

Affronted by Antigone's declaration of a subjective, connective and emotive law of nature, Creon erupts. He does not notice that his action throws the locus of his political authority from the putatively lofty to the personal and lethal. He proceeds to deliver his judgment, as if he were indeed the mouthpiece of a grand impartial law. Against his niece's living self whose vulnerability and openness to love and grief is as stark as nakedness, Creon pits a self that stands armed and armoured by a masculinity that is construed as the pinnacle of lordliness, backed by the force of the state and hallowed by a robust deity.[166] Creon wields his self-serving syllogism as if it were universal: "I am lord because I am lord because you are a woman." Seemingly innocent of the irony in his actions, he accuses Antigone of the worship of Death and the "defilement" of the city and condemns her to be immured, without water, friend or light, until she dies.[167]

In my fantasy, the President of Stygia invites Creon to lunch to lap up his advice on how to deal with his own insolent niece, Cassandra. Were Creon to whisper, over the dessert, that his cruelty to Antigone had been a mistake that lurched the whole family and the state into unthinkable catastrophe, his modern pupil would order another bottle of Riesling and scoff. Like the arrogant Creon when he first takes the throne, the President of Stygia sees his empire standing outside history. He endows himself with the exceptionalism that allows the United States of America to believe itself to be an empire "different from any before it – a benevolent giant working for democracy, human rights, and peace," while shielding itself from proper recognition of the adverse consequences of its use of military force.[168]

In my contemporary interpretation, Sophocles does not allow the state's use of force to mask itself in unfeeling anonymity. In the intimacy of the family, the acts of terror that Creon commits behind the mask of the state become visible as personal crimes.

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[165] Sophocles, *Antigone* 86, lines 590-93. For Antigone's honouring laws "sacred to the gods", see 63, lines 85-92,
[166] For Creon's extolling of his "principles" see Sophocles, *Antigone* 67, 194-7, and 68, line 232.
[167] Sophocles, *Antigone* 100, lines 870-78.
[168] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 6-7.

The death commanded for Antigone brings a concatenation of suicides: Antigone (Creon's niece); Haemon (Creon's son, betrothed to Antigone); and, Eurydice (Creon's wife). Where each intimate death in *Hamlet* frights the King into running further away from the truth, the deaths in *Antigone* fright the cover away from the King. Bared at last, Creon recognises himself as a murderer and a fool who shares with his victims "the heartbreaking agonies of our lives".[169]

The more I sought the "miraculous" metaphor that would bare the President of Stygia to himself, the more I saw him fashion his Waxworks Museum of Horrors as "the real thing" – a Thousand Year Reich, forever marketed, forever "new", forever "always".[170] Like Creon and Claudius he stands ready to kill anyone, even his niece Cassandra, if they do not believe in his illusion and consent to pay its price.

In his trilogy on the Nazi empire, historian Richard Evans contends that "Germans did not just have to acquiesce in the Third Reich, they had to support it with all their heart and soul [. . .]."[171] Any damage to the heart would have had to be roughly concealed and access guarded by spurious logic. From his study of records of Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss, including the autobiography he composed in prison in Cracow after the war, Evans demonstrates how the Commandant turned loyalty to Hitler and to the state's racist doctrines into personal imperatives.[172] To satisfy his staff that he would not baulk at the tasks he ordered them to carry out at "the biggest

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[169] For Creon's recognition of his guilt, see Sophocles, *Antigone* 124, lines 1392-1406, and 126, lines 1441-44.

[170] Any resemblance between the words in this sentence and advertising slogans used by Coca-Cola is pure coincidence and not to be taken as an endorsement of, or detraction from, their product. Nothing real was harmed in the making of this sentence. For some images where the text advertises Coca-Cola as "new", "always", or "the real thing", see Rachel Arandilla, "Coca-Cola Advertising through the Years." 1st Web Designer: Web Design Blog, accessed 28 October 2011, <http://www.1stwebdesigner.com/inspiration/coca-cola-advertising-history/>. For an account of Coca-Cola's actions in the 1930s to ally itself with the Nazis and with their youth rallies, swastika flags and 1936 Berlin Olympics so that the company could stimulate sales in Germany and counter Nazi accusations that it was a Jewish-American company run by Harold Hirsch, a prominent Atlanta Jew, see Mark Pendergrast, *For God, Country and Coca-Cola: The Unauthorized History of the World's Most Popular Soft Drink*, 1993, (London: Phoenix, 1994) 218-31

[171] Evans analyses the effectiveness of Nazism in "reshaping German society to its will" through a combination of methods: their use of propaganda and control over the whole sphere of culture and the arts; their use of the newest weapons and the latest technology; and their use of what they extolled as "a scientific concept" of race as the basis for their policies. Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich in Power, 1933-1939: How the Nazis Won over the Hearts and Minds of a Nation*, 2005, (London: Penguin, 2006) 16-17

[172] Evans comments that Höss "wrote a lengthy autobiography, inaccurate in many [unspecified] details but unconsciously revealing the attitudes, and beliefs that had made him the commandant of the largest murder factory in history." Richard J. Evans, *The Third Reich at War: How the Nazis Led Germany from Conquest to Disaster*, 2008, (London: Penguin, 2009) 743

murder factory in the history of the world", Höss made himself "look through the peephole of the gas-chambers and watch the process of death itself". Night and day, "hour after hour" he watched "the whole grisly, interminable business", the removal of the bodies, the cutting of their hair, the extraction of their teeth and the burning of the remains.[173]

It is striking that Höss recollects his adherence to duty as a performance: "I had to *appear* cold and indifferent to events that must have wrung the heart of anyone possessed of human feelings" (emphasis added).[174] Here was a model I might be able to use for some aspects of the President of Stygia – a character so obsessed with self-approbation for his skill at severing thought from feeling, that he insists that everyone else must admire his aptitude. The Nazi Commandant performs a nightmare disjunction between ethics and actions. While he extols heart-wringing feelings as an attribute, or even an essence, of being human, he appropriates for himself the pain of having to suppress those human feelings so that he and his staff may persist with the mass murder his Fűhrer makes the essence of the joyous nation. Like his swastika badge, Höss wears with pride his steeling himself against the self-imposed pain of watching the assembly line of death. Höss' performance and his pained retelling of it for posterity enable him to pretend that the true victim of the attack on human feelings is not the people mutilated and murdered, but himself. He performs himself as the one deserving of sympathy for having to witness the torture and murder he has made his profession.

Evans describes how Höss recalled that when he was at home on Sundays with his wife and children in their garden, "a paradise of flowers" where his children kept pet tortoises, the scenes from the gas-chambers "haunted" him.[175] It would seem that the ritual performance of coldness was not enough to repress all qualms. Höss, writes Evans, acquired a reputation for "bad temper" and used his drinking sessions with

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[173] Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 304-5 See also 799, endnote to chapter 3, no. 286, citing Evans' source: Rudolf Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz: The Autobiography of Rudolf Höss* (London, 1959 [1951]) 173.
[174] Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 305 and 799, endnote to chapter 3, no. 289, citing Höss 174.
[175] Evans, *Third Reich at War* 305-6 and 800, endnote 291, citing Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz* 175-6.

Adolf Eichmann to reinforce his anti-Semitic beliefs.[176] Those beliefs, Evans suggests, suppressed the Commandant's "doubts" and "bound" him to his job.[177]

That word, "bound", with its oddly contradictory connotations of restraint and advancement, fealty and destiny, servility and honour, made my mind leap to the myth of Prometheus. In Aeschylus' play, *Prometheus Bound*, Zeus sends his reluctant torturer-in-chief, Hephaestus, God of Fire, to nail Prometheus through his chest to a rocky mountain peak.[178] In his fight for total power over other gods, Zeus has been planning to annihilate humankind, but the daring Prometheus has saved humanity from "total death" by daring to steal fire and sharing with fellow humans the arts and science that fire makes possible.[179] As punishment for his compassion and generosity Prometheus is to be skewered on that rock of pity, for a "thousand years".[180] Bound, but unbowed, Prometheus persists in denouncing Zeus' tyranny, even when the tyrant threatens to send his "dark winged hound [. . .], the savage eagle," to feast each day upon the prisoner's liver. The torment will last until another god is found willing to take Prometheus' pain and death upon himself.[181]

It seemed important for my project to note that Zeus in his fury gives Prometheus the ultimate torture – a wound that will not heal. In Goethe's poetic version of the myth there is no eternal wound.[182] Zeus gets no right of the reply. The adult Prometheus withholds from Zeus the tribute that he paid him as a misguided bewildered youth, when he gave honour to the envious god in the false expectation of pity. Prometheus

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[176] Evans, *Third Reich at War* 305-6 and 799, endnote 290, citing Höss 174.
[177] Evans, *Third Reich at War* 305. The account Evans gives of Höss' responses to his interrogators at the Nuremberg War Crimes Tribunal reveals how Höss' unfaltering loyalty to his Nazi convictions led him, unrepentant, to bizarre logic that persisted in severing deed from consequence. Höss claimed that "the extermination of the Jews had been 'fundamentally wrong' because it had not only drawn down on Germany 'the hatred of the entire world' but also 'in no way served the cause of antisemitism [sic], but on the contrary brought the Jews far closer to their ultimate objective'". See Evans 743 and 837, endnote 243, citing Höss, *Commandant of Auschwitz* 195-201. Höss was convicted of murder and executed in 1947. See Evans 743.
[178] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, trans. Philip Vellacott, *Prometheus Bound; The Suppliants; Seven against Thebes; The Persians*, eds. Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1968 [1961]) 22, lines 53-65, and 23-24, lines 73-5. For Hephaestus' hatred of the cruel task assigned to him see 21-22, lines 42-48.
[179] For Prometheus' account of Zeus' tyranny and his own saving of humankind, see Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 26-28, lines 196-232. The words quoted are from line 237. For Prometheus' elaboration of his vast gifts to humans of culture and civilisation, arts, science, metalwork, animal husbandry, carpentry and medicine, see 32-35, lines 438-502.
[180] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 23-24, lines 72-75.
[181] Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 51, lines 1023-28.
[182] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "Prometheus," 1789, *The Penguin Book of German Verse: with plain prose translation of each poem*, ed. Leonard Forster (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1957) 201-03.

reminds not only the god, but himself and his own heart that it was not divine intervention that helped him overthrow the Titans [another cosmic family quarrel for some of the enemy were his brothers] but the inherent heat, holiness and humanity of his own body:

> Holy, glowing heart, did you not achieve all this yourself?
> [*Hast du nicht alles selbst vollendet,*
> *Heilig glűhend Herz*?][183]

Zeus is now irrelevant. There is a certain irony here. Apart from the stanza from which the above lines are quoted, Prometheus' apostrophe is not to his own sacred heart, but to Zeus. It is as if the freedom of Prometheus' enlightenment would be tenuous unless he made the god listen to his excommunication. In his final triumphant stanza (couched in the first person as throughout), Prometheus asserts human responsibility for the existence of the self, telling Zeus that he himself forms human beings in his own image, to suffer, cry, enjoy and be glad, and ignore the god, as he does.[184] The final line in German, *"Wie ich!*" [literally: "As I (do)"] gives the last word to the resounding first person nominative pronoun: "*ich* [I]*!*" How unfortunate the victory of the "I" might be for the commons, other humans, fellow creatures and the planet is not considered. Now that his "I" is its own planet, Prometheus dispenses with Zeus' power to send an eagle to eat out his liver. The suffering remains, of course, for Prometheus has separated himself from the everything and the nothing that is divinity. Goethe's imagery has rendered human actions and their consequences a human responsibility. For the scripting of my play, Prometheus' defiance of authority (though not his preternatural assertion of the "I" with its implied eschewal of the commons) offered qualities that could inform my character Cassandra in her quest to bring the President to Stygia to recognise responsibly for what his "I" is doing.

In the furnace of Nietzsche's mind, Goethe's poem becomes a portal through which Prometheus is elevated to hero of a sacred text. His story and "the Semitic myth of the Fall are accorded the status of "siblings".[185] The Promethean myth becomes "the indigenous property of all Aryan peoples", and Prometheus himself the "Titanic

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[183] Goethe, trans. Forster, "Prometheus," 202. Nietzsche does not cite this passage, but quotes Goethe's final stanza. His extrapolations are discussed in the next paragraph.
[184] Goethe, trans. Forster, "Prometheus," 203.
[185] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 48-51.

artist", the model of "the bold individual".[186] With his "superior wisdom" and his "profound Aeschylean longing for *justice*" (original emphasis), Prometheus "fights for his own culture and compels allegiance from the gods."[187] Nietzsche does not specify exactly which gods Titanic man now has "under his command". Perhaps they are Nordic ones, for the "defiant belief" of Prometheus has enabled him "to destroy Olympian gods".[188] The unnamed deities, whoever they might be, restore to the ancient Promethean myth the metaphysical penalty that Goethe excised from his story of enlightenment. Through Nietzsche's narrowing portal, taking control of fire from the gods appears as an act that "contemplative primitive men" regarded as "a sacrilege, a plundering of divine nature". It is "a severe idea", Nietzsche concedes, that "the offended divinities punish the nobly ambitious human race" but the atonement through "eternal suffering" confers "*dignity*" (original emphasis).[189] Although he has given the Promethean story and "the Semitic myth of the Fall" sibling status, Nietzsche claims that the Aryan version is distinguished by "the sublime idea of *active sin* as the truly Promethean virtue" (original emphasis). The individual "commits sacrilege and he suffers." The Semitic myth is viewed as attributing the origin of evil to "predominantly feminine attributes" such as "curiosity, mendacious deception, susceptibility, lasciviousness".[190] Confident his case is proven, Nietzsche offers a categorical peroration:

> Thus, the Aryans saw sacrilege as a man, while the Semites saw sin as a woman.[191]

For my Cassandra neither prospect appeals. For the President of Stygia both myths have their merits and a synthesis is ideal.[192] When he chains himself to the rock of his belief that his stolen fire-power entitles him to the quasi-divinity of dominion, Nietzsche's formulations of male acts of sacrilege and female acts of sin are wildly useful. When the job requires the President to suffer, he does so with the public dignity of a man. Any pain that results from his acts of sacrilege must be borne by others. The easiest way to do is to load them with original sin. Thus feminised, they can be subjected to acts of invasion aimed at maximum pain and the obliteration of

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[186] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 48-9.
[187] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 48.
[188] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 48-9.
[189] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 49.
[190] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 50.
[191] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 50.
[192] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 49.

dignity. Any aspects of the Promethean myth that would require the President to take upon himself any actual physical pain to atone for his success can be ignored. Like the Auschwitz Commandant Höss, the fictional President of Stygia only wants the symbolic pain that comes with the badge.

Bound to his noble destiny, Stygia clothes himself in Promethean daredevilry, idealism, munificence and suffering, so that below that fancy dress he can indulge himself in whatever malevolence and dross it takes to secure his empire. Arming himself with the world's greatest arsenal, a golden tongue and television pictures of terrorist targets burning, he offers himself to his people. Since libation is needed to ensure victory against his rivals, he submits his liver for perpetual sacrifice. It is not a bad choice. Each night his Promethean liver regenerates; each day he lets his ambition eat it out again. The champagne and revelry come with the territory and the public like to drink and watch the entertainment too. Besides, it is useful to open for worship a wound that will not heal. When he has to make the "tough decisions" of office, such as bombing other people's cities, or enshrining torture in statute, his grimace of steely pain can only help him in the polls.

There are echoes here of the steeling of the self that George W. Bush, then U.S. President and commander-in-chief, praises in himself and in fellow warrior, the then Prime Minister of Australia, John Howard, who had joined the coalition that had invaded Iraq:

> He's steady. It gets tough when you make tough decisions and we both made the tough decisions [to go to war on Iraq, March 2003] but there was never any doubt in his mind. He was steady under fire.[193]

Bush is a good model for a leader able to bend metaphor to his purpose. When his coalition was firing missiles at Baghdad, and when their own troops became targets in retaliation for the onslaught, both Bush and Howard had none of their troops' experience of being "under fire", but the trope usurps the troops' pain as their own. Bush does not acknowledge that the "fire" that he and Howard so magisterially survived came not from the vilified enemy whose land they had invaded, but from dissidents in their own ranks. Bush's supporters know what he means. They only

[193] AAP, "Bush Lauds Howard as 'Man of Steel'." 4 May, 2003, Crawford, Texas: Fairfax Digital, accessed 28 October 2011, <http://www.smh.com.au/articles/2003/05/04/1051987592763.html>.

need to hear his voice to applaud his confession of the pain of *being* the government that shelters them.

Like President Bush and Commandant Höss, the President of Stygia performs his suppression of weakness as an inspiration to his people, the better to endure their own mutilation. Where Commandant Höss blames all troubles on the "evil machinations" of the Jews,[194] and President Bush accuses the "terrorists who are fighting freedom with all their cunning and cruelty",[195] the imaginary President of Stygia teaches his people to blame their pain on somebody else. The pain that will not heal binds him and his subjects to his belief that whatsoever he steals and wheresoever he directs his fire, it is all for their own and their nation's good.

The heroism of sacrifice is visible in an early seventeenth century work by Flemish artists, Rubens and Snyders, *Prometheus Bound.*[196] The giant oil painting is a masterful depiction of the psyche of a Europe that was thriving on art, literature, science, gunpowder, torture and trade. It is coincidence, of course, but in 1619, a year after the painting's completion in Antwerp, a Dutch warship arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, carrying the black Africans who were the first to be traded as slaves to the white North American market.[197] Purchased by the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1950, *Prometheus Bound* is at home in the United States, in a cultural heartland of the new millennium's vast, eagle-badged, warring empire.[198]

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[194] Evans, *Third Reich at War*, 305 and 799, endnote 288, citing Höss 145.

[195] President G. W. Bush, Republican National Convention, New York, September 2, 2004, cited in Mark Danner, "Abu Ghraib: Hidden in Plain Sight," *Stripping Bare the Body: Politics Violence War* (Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc., an imprint of Schwartz Media Pty Ltd, 2009) 392.

[196] Peter Paul Rubens and Frans Snyders, *Prometheus Bound*. Purchased with the W. P. Wilstach Fund, 1950, 1612-1618, Oil on canvas. 95 1/2 x 82 1/2 inches (242.6 x 209.5 cm), Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, accessed 28 September 2011, <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/104468.html>.

[197] Colin Palmer, "The Cruelest Commerce," *National Geographic*. 182. 3 (1992).

[198] The eagle appears in different guises on the coat of arms of many empires, including the Great Seal of the United States of America, Ancient Rome and many manifestations of German territory, from the Holy Roman Empire to the German Empire of 1871-1981, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany and contemporary Germany. For a vision of the pride stirred by the eagle which grasps in its left talon a bundle of arrows and in its right, an olive branch (which could be read, I suggest, as representative of its history of simultaneously celebrating war and peace), see "The Great Seal of the United States." September, 1996, United States Department of State: Bureau of Public Affairs: 5, accessed 12 October 2011, <http://www.state.gov/www/publications/great_seal.pdf>. At date of writing, the United States of America has been at war with Afghanistan since 2001 and Iraq since 2003 and has an empire of military bases that Chalmers Johnson estimated in 2009 to cost $102 billion a year. See Johnson's essay, "Baseless Expenditures", July 2, 2009, in Chalmers A. Johnson, *Dismantling the Empire: America's Last Best Hope*, (New York, N.Y.: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2010) 129.

Filling the Rubens' canvas are two enormous bodies. A manacled, muscular, white-skinned Prometheus, naked except where luxurious white fabric conceals his genitals, tips onto his back, menaced by an outstretched, dark-plumed and savage eagle, light gleaming from its beastly head like a crown. The man's missing phallus – his mark of his animal origins and passion – is refigured as the eagle's beak. It penetrates the Christ-like wound it makes each day in Prometheus' side, drawing forth his vitality, on which it feeds.[199] With one set of talons the eagle grips Prometheus' forehead, tearing at his mind, his reason, while the other foot grips his loins and abdomen, controlling desire. The wounded, decorously sanitised, white man-god and his daemonic, black, be-feathered shadow tumble together towards the viewer as if they would escape from their frame. They gaze not at us, but at each other. Their mutual admiration of ferocity and pain turns the curving proximity of their bodies into an embrace. Horror and longing devour one another.

In my imaginary land of Stygia, the head of state delights in such an interpretation of empire. He paints himself as a hero whom the light of power has consecrated. He is Eagle and Sacrifice. He is Zeus and Prometheus. He is Hephaestus the reluctant persistent torturer and Christ the eternally wounded redeemer. In shock and awe at the vision of his vast power and suffering, his people gather, gape and worship. The bloody wound in his side that cannot be healed binds him to his job, keeps his masculine profile intact (decorously shrouded) and sanctifies his right to the giant canvas, the eagle appetite of empire and the myth of its honour.[200]

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[199] In some renowned images of Christ, depictions of the wound in his side from a soldier's spear bear a striking resemblance to the wound the eagle makes on the same side of the body in Rubens' *Prometheus Bound*. See Caravaggio, "Deposition from the Cross." c.1600-1604, Oil on canvas. 300 x 203 cm, Rome: Vatican Museums: Pinacoteca, accessed 11 October 2011, <http://mv.vatican.va/3_EN/pages/x-Schede/PINs/PINs_Sala12_01_049.html>, Caravaggio, *Doubting Thomas*. c.1602-1603, Oil on canvas. 107 x 146 cm, Potsdam: Stiftung Preußische Schlösser und Gärten, Sansouci, accessed 11 October 2011, <http://www.spsg.de/index_156_de.html>. Reproduced in Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998, 2000) 218-9. Peter Paul Rubens (after Caravaggio), *The Entombment*. c. 1612-1614, Oil on oak. 88.3 x 66.5 cm; 103.5 x 80 x 9.7 cm (framed), Ottawa: National Gallery of Canada, accessed 11 October 2011, <http://www.gallery.ca/en/see/collections/artwork.php?mkey=3915>.

[200] Crawford Luber notes that Rubens and Snyders collaborated to create *Prometheus Bound*.: Snyders painted the eagle. In commenting on the "many allegorical resonances" of the Promethean myth, Crawford Luber writes, "This complex painting could be regarded as the artist's commentary on either the struggles of creativity or the ideal of heroic spiritual suffering." I would argue that the idealism of this interpretation renders safe the myth of empire's honour. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, Accessed 28 September 2011, <http://www.philamuseum.org/collections/permanent/104468.html>. The website cites: Katherine Crawford Luber, from *Philadelphia Museum of Art: Handbook of the Collections* (1995), 174. The eagle appears in different guises on the heraldry of many present day and historic empires, including on the Great Seal of the United States of America and on the coat of arms of the legionaries of

As long as the citizens of Stygia believe the myth, they do not have to make conscious their understanding that their leader is their dark destructive eagle. That is the power of his myth – he celebrates the light of his own suffering and embraces the dark power that caused it, while displacing its evil, in the public's mind and his own, onto somebody else.

Fettered in Stygia's dungeon, Cassandra is as much a scion of Prometheus as is its President, her uncle. Let me explain. In the lineage that leads from Rubens' Prometheus to the President of Stygia, each new generation of men purloins from Zeus the trick of Athene's birth.[201] Moulded in a crucible of steel, from hot air and phlogiston, fed on depleted uranium, phosphorus and kryptonite, the infant descends to earth from the skull of the father and lands like a missile with the weight of the law.[202]

On visiting the Acropolis in search of traces of Cassandra, Christa Wolf saw in "Pallas Athena", as sculpted by Phidias, a glorification of evil whose weaponry claims the left (the distaff) hand for its own and raises itself over the world of insight and

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Ancient Rome. The eagle has continuity as a mascot through many manifestations of German territory, from the Holy Roman Empire to the German Empire of 1871-1981, the Weimar Republic, Nazi Germany, the Federal Republic of Germany and post-unification Germany. Accessed 30 September 2011, <http://www.state.gov/#>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aquila_%28Roman%29>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coat_of_arms_of_Germany>; <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_symbolism>; <http://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/europe/germany/desymbols.htm>.

[201] For my reflection on the significance of the patriarchal birth of Aeschylus' Athene for her judgment in the case of Orestes' matricide of Clytemnestra, see Alison Lyssa, *Why Do Fat Chicks Have to Die? A Critical Reading of The Silence of the Lambs*, *Shrieks: A Horror Anthology*, eds. Bartlett, Joseph and Lawson (Sydney: Women's Redress Press, 1993) 182-97. For Athene's judgment, see Aeschylus, *The Eumenides*, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, eds. Betty Radice and Robert Baldick (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Eng.: Penguin, 1969 [1956]) 172, lines 733-41.

[202] Kryptonite comes from the fictional planet Krypton, birthplace of Superman, Man of Steel. The price of his journey to Earth where he enjoys super-man strength is a singular vulnerability: he suffers gross enfeeblement whenever he comes in contact with kryptonite, a piece of his planet. Such a weakness is a vital enhancement to the dramatic tension of Superman's struggle for truth, justice and the American way against un-American criminals who would otherwise be too readily defeated by the superhero. The creators of the character found in kryptonite an extraordinarily perceptive (and perhaps unintended) metonym for the displaced sentient self. Superman is allergic to the very thing that gives him life – his planet, his mother, his earth, his self. See Robert Benton, Tom Mankiewicz, David Newman, Leslie Newman and Mario Puzo, *Superman: The Movie (Based on the DC Comics Character of the Same Name) - Shooting Script*, dir. Richard Donner, Science Fiction and Fantasy Movie Scripts, 1978, accessed 28 October 2011, <http://www.scifiscripts.com/scripts/superman_I_shoot.txt> 224-26. When in 2003 the Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, proffered unequivocal support to US President George W. Bush for his war on terror, Howard earned the President's accolades, "a man of steel [. . .] and a man of heart". There was no report of Bush noting any paradox in his coupling of steel and heart. See AAP, "Bush Lauds Howard as 'Man of Steel'."

nurture, crushed beneath its detritus. Wolf describes the “colossal statue” of Athena [Wolf’s spelling] thus:

> [. . .] ivory and gold and armed with helmet, shield, spear and breastplate; with the miniature statuette of Nike, goddess of victory, in her left hand; powerful and cold. Motherless. An evil thought emerging with shield and spear from the head of her father, Zeus.[203]

The statue, Wolf writes, renders Athena “godforsaken and [. . .] remote from her nature.” Beneath the Acropolis, buried and filled with rubble lies the shrine that Athena replaces – that of the earth goddess Gaea.[204]

For the ruler of Stygia, the rewards of weaponry are huge, but the price of possession is gargantuan. The ruler must perpetuate the categories of righteousness that support his birth, keep the experience of women relegated to the nether regions, keep his own goods from others’ lack, save his whiteness from their blackness and hide his truth from their testimony. Like Rubens’ Prometheus, Stygia’s leader meets the eagle gaze of tyranny that mirrors his own and welcomes its wounds for the sake of its embrace.

Cassandra’s lineage is different: her ancestors embrace their distaff side. Like Aeschylus’ Prometheus, Cassandra meets the gaze of tyranny, feels its wounds, challenges its ruthlessness and refuses its seduction. Like Goethe’s Prometheus she seeks humanity’s acceptance of responsibility. Born of rainbow truth, Cassandra thrives in a weft and warp where an intricate interdependence of female and male, science and art, sacred and profane, east and west, north and south, weave ever-changing patterns of entropy and order, patterns that bring wounding and healing, patterns that bring death and mourning, chaos and renewal. Her elemental home is not a stark division that isolates humanity from a subservient, infinitely exploitable biota, but a conception of life as a reciprocal gift, a shuttle that moves through plant and animal, animal and plant, in a mutable dance of earth and air, fire and water, aether and matter, particle and wave, big and small, sorry and joy.

When the President of Stygia descends to his dungeon and stares Cassandra in the face, he sees a dangerous madness that can only foster the suicide bombers who

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[203] Christa Wolf, "Conditions of a Narrative," trans. Jan van Heurck, *Cassandra: A Novel and Four Essays* (London: Virago, 1984) 158.
[204] Wolf, “Conditions of a Narrative” 158.

target his freedom. He laughs at her belief that peace is not a matter of gripping the heart to forge it to steel, but of letting the heart go and allowing it to feel. He orders the shackles tightened.

To topple war and its Stygian Commander from the peak of their hierarchy of pretence, Cassandra would need to perform an action that stripped from war its power to depict itself on a canvas that glorifies its cruelty. Her miraculous metaphor, if one could be found, would need to direct war's gaze to a mirror in which it saw not a narcissistic dream of itself, triumphant in slaughter, but the stripping bare of its illusion that its tortures and murders bring benefit to itself.

Would the waterboarding of Cassandra be enough to bring the leader of Stygia to witness the truth of his own sadism? I did not think so. In the real theatre of war, the one where people are abominated and killed, waterboarding has acquired a chilling ordinariness. In *The Age of the Warrior*, under a chapter heading, "The Cult of Cruelty," Robert Fisk laments:

> For millions of Muslims, torture and 'rendition' have become the new symbols of the 'liberal' West. Electrodes, 'waterboarding', beatings, anal rape and murder have now become so commonplace in Iraq and Afghanistan that we are no longer surprised by each new revelation.[205]

In the fictional Stygia, the President reaches for a vocabulary of torture that he can toss like meat to the hungry voters and to the figurative sharks – the army of guards and soldiers he depends on to patrol his borders. His mentor here is not a Zeus-devoted Creon, but the seemingly rational Dick Cheney, former Vice President of the United States. Mark Danner cites pronouncements where Cheney expresses his conviction that the 2001 terrorist attacks made it imperative for the United States to carry out "the tough, mean, dirty, nasty business" of "keeping the country safe" from "evil people". Cheney's language transfigures torture into "enhanced interrogation techniques", promulgated as "absolutely crucial" for national security.[206] His

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[205] Robert Fisk, *The Age of the Warrior: Selected Writings*, 2008, (London: Harper Perennial, 2009) 281 For a study of the attempts by the U.S. military and the White House to continue "to preserve executive prerogatives of arbitrary arrest, unrestrained interrogation, and endless incarceration," while seeking to absolve themselves of responsibility for the conduct of U.S. soldiers revealed in photos from Abu Ghraib prison broadcast by CBS television on April 28, 2004, "showing Iraqis stripped naked and subjected to humiliation by American soldiers" see McCoy, *Question of Torture* 144-150.

[206] Danner quotes an edited extract of a speech by former Vice President of the United States, Dick Cheney, February 4, 2009: "If it hadn't been for what we did – with respect to the . . . enhanced interrogation techniques for high-value detainees . . . – then we would have been attacked again.

assertions override mounting evidence that the empire's use of torture, its secret operations and its martial activities have reduced, not increased, the safety of its citizens.[207] When questioned in 2006 about the waterboarding of prisoners, Cheney remarked: "It was a no-brainer for me."[208]

Cheney's glib dismissal of state authorised cruelty seemed so preposterous, I had to check *The Free Dictionary* in case I mistook the meaning of the slang, but no. Ice-cold on their surface, Cheney's words have death's chill in their undertow. A "no-brainer" is defined as: "Something so simple or easy as to require no thought."[209] Cheney was telling the world that not only had the land-of-the-free dismissed as irrelevant the agony they prescribe for others, but that thought – reason – had been rejected as not worth a jot in the framing of policy. Such a stance admits neither complexity nor redress, nor compassion nor remorse, nor justice under an impartial law, but only a polarity of belief. No presentation of evidence or testimony can readily change such a torturer's escape from the rigours of reasoned argument. Nor is there apparently anything in Cheney's intransigent world that opens his imagination to the experience of others, so that he might weep for the harm he has done, as King Lear

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Those polices we put in place, in my opinion, were absolutely crucial to getting us through the last seven-plus years [since September 11, 2001] without a major-casualty attack on the U.S. . . ." See Mark Danner, "Into the Light? Torture, Power, and Us," *Stripping Bare the Body: Politics Violence War* (Melbourne, Victoria: Black Inc., an imprint of Schwartz Media Pty Ltd, 2009) 521-23. See also 591, endnote 1, where Danner cites John F. Harris, Mike Allen, and Jim VandeHei, "Cheney Warns of New Attacks," *Politico*, February 4, 2009.

[207] For Danner's analysis of the reduction in the safety of the U.S.A. under the George W. Bush administration, see *Stripping Bare* 523. For a report on the evidence that the West's war on Iraq was increasing, not decreasing, the risk to the West from terrorism, see Kim Sengupta and Patrick Cockburn, "How the War on Terror Made the World a More Terrifying Place: New Figures Show Dramatic Rise in Terror Attacks Worldwide since the Invasion of Iraq," *The Independent*. 28 February 2007, accessed 2 March 2007, <http://news.independent.co.uk/world/middle_east/article2311307.ece>. For a pre-9/11 case study of "devastating imperial blowback" caused by the projection of ever proliferating American military and economic power around the globe, coupled with military support for oppressive regimes, see Chalmers A. Johnson, *Blowback: The Costs and Consequences of American Empire*, (New York, N.Y.: Metropolitan Books, Henry Holt and Company LLC, 2000) 11 For Johnson's report that "blowback" was a term invented by the Central Intelligence Agency for internal use. The term refers to "the unintended consequences of policies that were kept secret from the American people," see 8.

[208] See Danner, *Stripping Bare*, 519-20 and 591, endnote 50 ,where Danner cites his source: "Interview of the Vice President by Scott Hennen," WDAY at Radio Day at the White House, Office of the Vice President, October 24, 2006.

[209] Farlex, *The Free Dictionary*. accessed 14 October 2011, <http://www.thefreedictionary.com>.

does for Cordelia,[210] or Aeschylus' Hephaestus for the torture he causes Prometheus when he crucifies him according to the brazen commands of Zeus.[211]

Neurological scientist Damasio posits that the human mind is the creation of a complex interflow of cognition and affect.[212] That understanding of the mind as a creative interplay of instinct, discovery, sensation, experience and thought slaps against Cheney's term, "a no-brainer", which parks his government's policy on torture in a gated community to which the mind can have no access without a pass. In the land of the language of the theme-park, the brain and the heart do not need to know – must not know – what the tongue is saying. The President of Stygia does not want the common mind to question the empire-branded and factory-farmed metaphors that spew from the tongue, for where might it go looking for another vocabulary? He cannot let his own mind listen to the testimony of his body's experience, nor can he attend to the testimonies of the other thinking, feeling selves whom the empire excludes from its garden, or a conversation might begin … might run amok among the evidence … might trip his empire on a truth.

Nietzsche posits that in order to exist society imposes "the obligation to use the customary metaphors, or, to put it in moral terms, the obligation to lie in accordance with firmly established convention, to lie *en masse* and in a style that is binding for all."[213] In my imaginary land of Stygia those lies conceal a reality whose trajectory is catastrophe. As Emperor-elect, the President of Stygia dresses for success. He wears his high-end vampire smile, through which the malice of his war-on-terror flickers in and out of sight, officially unacknowledged but unmistakeable, a secret message from a torturers' troop leader to those who want tickets to the show. The delirium of that performance compels the senses and hides the emperor's nakedness that would be exposed were the army, the stock market and the people to remember Nietzsche's truth that their "truths are illusions". Nietzsche expresses this paradox as if the lie of a social order were inescapable: human beings "lie unconsciously [. . .] and in accordance with centuries-old habits – and precisely *because of this*

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[210] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 5.3.257-63.
[211] For Prometheus' monologue describing himself as having been "bound and crucified," see Aeschylus *Prometheus Bound* 24, lines 93-94. For Hephaestus' pity for Prometheus, and the danger he puts himself in when he weeps for an enemy of Zeus, see 22, lines 42-44.
[212] Antonio R. Damasio, *Descartes' Error : Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain*, (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994) 206-8.

unconsciousness, precisely because of this forgetting, they arrive at the feeling of truth" (original emphasis).[214]

There is a flaw in the character of the President of Stygia. In a branded world where failure swallows the under-renovated, the President stays invincible only if he purchases ever-fresh, ever-plastic, ever-infantilised, ever-disposable tropes that clone the premise underpinning his authority. The President of Stygia simply presses the "Refresh" button and the canon – simultaneously the cannon – of dead metaphors reloads itself with new ones. The President of Stygia asserts that he will not "cut and run" from his war on oil-rich Naphthastan, a war that is "keeping the nation safe". His "bottom-line" is that the nation must stay "alert but not alarmed.[215] Anyone who speaks against the war "plays into the hands of terrorists".[216] Enemies are "deconflicted", "degraded" and "attrited". These euphemisms for "murdered" are attributed by Don Watson in his *Dictionary of Weasel Words* to high ranking U.S. Army officers who, rather unsurprisingly, use their verbs in passive constructions that avoid assigning responsibility.[217]

In her analysis of "'Terrorism' and the Politics of Language", Jenny Hocking points to the "facile nomenclature" used by U.S. President George W. Bush's response to the events of September 11, 2001: Bush reduces global interrelationships to "the simplified depiction of 'terrorists' versus 'freedom-loving people', of civilisation versus barbarism".[218] Hocking writes that expressions used by the President, "'Operation

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[213] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*, trans. Ronald Speirs, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1873, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, N.Y.: 2001) 878.
[214] Nietzsche, *On Truth and Lying* 878.
[215] For Watson's definition of the politician's metaphoric use of "bottom line" as: "[. . .] The only thing that matters. Don't ask me about anything else", see *Weasel Words* 49. For the former Australian Prime Minister John Howard's use of "alert but not alarmed" in his 2004 public information campaign, *Lets Look Out for Australia,* which encouraged the reporting of potentially suspicious activity, see *Weasel Words* 26. Watson defines "alert but not alarmed" as: "Counter terrorist mind-set. Alert but relaxed and comfortable. Half-coiled like a spring. As the roe is before it sees the lion." Watson's use of irony exposes the antinomy in Howard's expression. See also *Let's Look Out for Australia*, booklet, authorised by the Commonwealth Government of Australia, PMP Print 2004, accessed 16 November 2011, <http://www.powerhousemuseum.com/collection/database/?irn=346590>.
[216] To "play into hands of terrorists" is one of the meanings Watson attributes to "cut and run", a term which he illustrates with a text from George W. Bush, November 2003: "We will not *cut and run* from Iraq." Other meanings Watson gives for "cut and run" are: "act in a cowardly fashion; commit treachery; [. . .] act in an *anti-American, un-Australian* way (original emphasis)." See Watson, *Weasel Words* 97.
[217] Watson, *Weasel Words* 100, 102. For Lt. Gen. William S. Wallace's use of "deconflicted" to mean elimination of an enemy force, see 100. For the use of "attrited" and "degraded" by Major General Stanley McChrystal, US Joint Chiefs of Staff, April 2003, see 102.
[218] Jenny Hocking, *Terror Laws: ASIO, Counter-Terrorism and the Threat to Democracy*, (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004) 6-7.

Infinite Justice', 'Operation Enduring Freedom', 'rogue states', 'Axis of Evil', the USA PATRIOT Act,[219] indeed the very notion of a 'war on terror' are a rejection of complexity, a denial of reason, a type of adult-American 'baby talk'".[220] One might add that the U.S. President's use of 'baby talk' is a highly skilful cooption of infancy's presumed innocence, cleansed of culpability. By tailoring his discourse to the vocabulary of a PlayStation® battle where the hero exterminates an evil invader, he pitches his war to his people as a game played with pixels.[221] His picture belies war's savagery and begs suspension of the self in a permanent adolescence whose pleasures shrink to the pressing of war's buttons.

The day I looked at the PlayStation® website, I was met by a muscled masculine monster, whose attributes are a mishmash of vampire-zombie-cyborg and dark-skinned, drooling, hairless, invading alien. His glittering robot eyes and his formidable gun were targeted somewhere off to the dramatic right of the frame, as if it was my future he was threatening. The accompanying text exhorted me to purchase the game: "Join the Resistance."[222] The gendered savagery of the image appalled. Its parallels with empire's racist depiction of its enemies as barbarous monoliths horrified. In *The Crimes of Empire: Rogue Superpower and World Domination*, Carl Boggs analyses patterns of racism and violence that accompany war "*on all sides* [emphasis added]".[223] The propaganda persists, argues Boggs, that the USA is a "benevolent" and "democratic" empire that resists the war crimes "committed by *others*" (original emphasis).[224] Boggs cites an example from John Downer's study of United States' military strategies in the Pacific Theatre of World War II: "The Western allies [. . .] consistently emphasized the 'subhuman' nature of the Japanese, routinely turning to images of apes and vermin to convey this…"[225] There was a

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[219] Hocking gives the full title of the USA PATRIOT Act, making visible its loyal acrostic: "Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism Act 2001", 259, endnote 21.
[220] See Hocking, *Terror Laws* 6-7 and 259, endnote 22, which cites P Williams in R Liverani, 'Mad law professor delivers Julius Stone address', *Law Society Journal*, September 2002, 23.
[221] *PlayStation® Network*. 2011, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe, accessed 15 September 2011, <http://au.playstation.com/srp/22044842/language/en_AU/content/index.html>.
[222] *PlayStation® Network*, accessed 15 September 2011.
[223] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 53.
[224] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 48.
[225] Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 53-54 and 264, ch. 2, endnote 8. Boggs cites John Downer, *War Without Mercy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1999), 69.

chilling parallel in the PlayStation® imagery, despite the irony of its creation by Sony, a Japanese company that began its life in May 1946.[226]

Stygian metaphors may shift their surface shape, but not the deep binary configuration of their roots. When Cassandra threatens that configuration, she threatens the state. One source for her character is found in Deleuze and Guattari's conceit that nature's taproot grows not through binary logic, but through "a more multiple, lateral, and circular system of ramification, rather than a dichotomous one."[227] To sustain his self-deception as truth, Stygia's President must cleanse his empire of Cassandra's new-born metaphors. He accuses her of conceit and of un-Stygian deceit. He cannot co-exist with a language that performs a contrapuntal yearning, an arousal of ambiguity, a violation of expectation, a co-mingling of breath, a complexity of contiguity, an orchesis of tongue, ear and mind, an aporia – evanescent, provocative, indecipherable, a polyphony of possibilities, a Dionysian exuberance, an ecstasy of transgression.[228] Furious at Cassandra's disruption of his order, the President flees the dungeon where he has her gagged and hooded as he would flee an infant whose cry discovers suffering and the succour of love. He hates Cassandra for intuiting that when he is alone with his newest woman he stifles the vertiginous music of her *jouissance*, lest it sing her body out of his orbit. He starves Cassandra's fellow prisoner, the Crone, to stop her threnody for peace and for the Earth. He fears the song of women. It names a fate for the Earth he can hardy bare to name, because the telling of its name might bring the over-heated sky down on his head. If only he could win Cassandra to his cause, he could put her on television. Her tongue could win him the war and the cornucopia that is its prize.

The myth of cornucopia is borrowed from William R. Catton who argues – heir to an aspect of the myth of Prometheus – that the success of humanity is its tragedy. For

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[226] *Sony Make Believe: Sony Corporate Info*. 2011, accessed 15 September 2011, <http://www.sony.net/SonyInfo/CorporateInfo/History/history.html>.

[227] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 1980, ed. Vincent B. Leitch (New York, N. Y.: Norton 2001) 1603.

[228] This evocation of Cassandra's use of poetry to explore what the Stygian antinomies may have in common has been inspired by Bernstein's study of musical language and its analogies with linguistics and poetry. Leonard Bernstein, *The Unanswered Question 1-6*, comp. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Ludwig van Beethoven, Berlioz Hector, Richard Wagner, Claude Debussy, Charles Ives, Maurice Ravel, Gustav Mahler and Igor Stravinsky, Lectures by Bernstein, Charles Eliot Norton Professor of Poetry, Harvard University, 1973, Label: Kultur Video, #: 1570, 2001, accessed 16 November, 2011, <http://www.arkivmusic.com/classical/album.jsp?album_id=75215>.

Catton, humans have used our ingenuity, creativity and skill to occupy the planet well in excess of the Earth's carrying capacity. When people are presented with facts that threaten to overturn a paradigm which hitherto has guaranteed success, Catton suggests we are prone to adopt a deep suspicion of "rationality, logic, analysis, and principles".[229] The severe constraints upon resources that are currently being felt around the globe are, Catton contends, evidence of an age of post-exuberance, where shortages are exacerbating a human propensity to fabricate illusions of rescue, whether by new technological marvels destined to be perfected, or a Cargo-cult faith in cornucopia, and / or by finding a scapegoat to attack and embarking upon war.[230] The protection of illusion against dissenters becomes paramount. (In my play the President of Stygia must discredit Cassandra and her unwelcome evidence that our ecosystem is not limitless and that war will not solve the problem.) It is, writes Catton, "as if the *fact* that the world was finite would not condemn burgeoning millions to a brutish existence, but *speaking the words* 'limited carrying capacity' would bring on the horrors that must not happen" (original emphasis).[231]

There is a parallel here with a character of Brecht's – the well-intentioned Curator of the University of Padua who guarantees to protect Galileo from the Inquisition as long as Galileo directs his scientific research to honing tools of commerce, navigation and war for the profit of his hosts, the Venetian Republic and its merchants.[232] The Curator cautions against speaking too loudly the name of Signor Giordano Bruno who, as Galileo well knows, was handed over to the authorities in Rome to be burned because he spread Copernicus' heliocentric explanation of planetary motion. These teachings are so threatening to the Church that the Curator takes care to declare them to be false. He reminds Galileo how risky it would be to go on complaining about how poorly he is paid by the University, because if he left the freedom of Padua for a princely state, "every ignorant monk of the Inquisition could simply forbid [his] thoughts". His rhetoric in the ascendant, the Curator warns:

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[229] William Robert Catton, *Overshoot: The Ecological Basis of Revolutionary Change*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1982) 17, 194.
[230] For "The Millenarian Response" and the dream of new technologies such as nuclear fusion, see Catton, 184-195. For Catton's reading of how the severe shortages of resources imposed upon Germany after World War One contributed to the appeal of Hitler to a despairing German people, an appeal with frightening ramifications for the erosion of humanity in the face of the depleted resources upon which a complex civilisation depends, see 220-224.
[231] Catton, *Overshoot* 195.
[232] Bertolt Brecht, *The Life of Galileo*, 1955 [*Leben des Galilei*], trans. Desmond I. Vesey, (London: Eyre Methuen, 1963) 27-31.

> No rose without a thorn, no princes without monks, Signor Galilei.[233]

Inspiration! It was clear that in the land of *Hurricane Eye* [Did I tell you I now had a title?] the President of the Republic of Stygia needs a Bishop with whom he can quarrel. Given the President's preference for the profane, it would be a thorny symbiosis, but the ruler needs someone in his gallery who can make everything sound as it is just as it should be.[234] In his "Marginalia", Auden offers a sharp sketch of the sylleptic tyrant who yokes all dis-parity to his service:

> He praised his God
> for the expertise
> of his torturer and his chef.[235]

To play his Bishop, his torturer and his chef, the President of Stygia appoints staunch euhemerists who will remain his friends only as long as they are prepared to deify him. Like Nietzsche's Prometheus, who has the gods "under his command,"[236] The President does not believe in an independent higher being who might dare to tell him what to do.

Most of all, the President of Stygia hates the maggots that writhe in the night-soil of his mind, for they splutter him from sleep in the galimatias of Cassandra – an unkempt babble of water-boarded terror, drowning cities, body parts, war, earthworms and compost, an apostatic knowledge that at midnight seems so terrifying it simply might be true. He has to shut Cassandra up or she will steal his power to stop his overheated citizens from looting, bring his never-ending war to end and save his bankers from sinking in their latest ship of debt. He bangs his head against the bed to shut the witness up and get his daring back.

Dori Laub writes of the hazards for the people listening when Holocaust survivors break their entrapment in the trauma they have suffered by bearing witness to their experience.[237] The psychoanalyst gave a well-researched catalogue of listeners'

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[233] Brecht, *Galileo* 29.
[234] Although the President of Stygia is very different from George W. Bush, there are echoes here of the former U.S. President's elision of freedom, divinity and the (implied) expansion of America. Watson cites an example: "You see, *freedom* is not America's gift to the world; *freedom* is the Almighty God's gift to every man and woman in this world," George W. Bush, 2003. See Watson, *Weasel Words* 143. Enjoy also Watson's entry on "free enterprise system of government" 142.
[235] W. H. Auden, "Marginalia," *W. H. Auden Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson, (London: Faber and Faber, 1976) 593.
[236] Nietzsche, *Birth of Tragedy* 48.
[237] Laub, "Bearing Witness," 69-74.

responses, offering a playwright many possibilities for adding nuance to the character of the ruler whose still alive victim will not be silenced. In summary, here is Laub's list of the listener's deflection of his or her own terror at hearing witness to an event that "although real, took place outside the parameters of 'normal' realty": paralysis; outrage and anger at the victim; withdrawal and numbness; awe and fear that keep the survivor at a distance by sanctifying her/him; a protective obsession with fact-finding; and, a hyperemotionality that floods the survivor with a demonstration of feeling that feigns "compassion and caring".[238] Were the listener not the sympathetic equal of the witness, but a person of power, or indeed the perpetrator himself, one might add Creon's response when faced with Antigone: reversion to reliance on a law that perpetuates the suppression of the victim's experience.[239]

To the President of Stygia, Cassandra's witness is as terrifying as Antigone's is to Creon, and the prospect of controlling it through his own control of the law is as enticing. The President of Stygia makes his world a mirror that will prove *he* is the gift his people need. He orders troops to quench the looters. His speeches rouse faith in the market and its freedom. He will move Stygia from Republic to Empire and crown himself its Napoleon. He forgets what happened to the real one. He remembers only the portrait by Jacques-Louis David, where he sees his own face in the hero, astride his white charger, alone and conquering the Alps.[240] He offers Cassandra his feigned "caring and compassion". Her refusal turns his resolution to revenge. He orders Cassandra raped.

Her suffering is much suffered.

Here, on the page, Cassandra's suffering surrounds itself with white space, so that its emptiness may give time to feel its presence. The script allows space for those moments that are so full of the inexpressible they have the power to silence speech. What comes next is not seen: the scene cuts itself before the rape of Cassandra begins. My motives here are complex. I began the playscript determined not to offer any simulation of rape to the gaze of the audience, nor to ask the cast to counterfeit

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[238] Laub, "Bearing Witness," 69, 72.
[239] Sophocles, *Antigone* 94, lines 750-61.
[240] Jacques-Louis David, *Bonaparte Crossing the Alps at the Great Saint-Bernard Pass*. 1800, Oil on canvas. 261 cm × 221 cm (102⅓ in × 87 in), Musées nationaux Napoléoniens: Château de Malmaison, Rueil-Malmaison, accessed 17 November 2011, <http://www.musees-nationaux-napoleoniens.org/homes/home_id25137_u1l2.htm>.

the action. It was not until I had written the scene that I realised something I had not anticipated: there were dramatic benefits from *not* scripting the rape. Euripides is a mentor here. *The Trojan Women* keeps offstage the battlefield that was Troy and makes present instead the suffering of the captured women and children, reduced to spoils because their warrior men have been butchered.[241] There is no enactment of the rape-within-marriage forced on one of Queen Hecuba's much loved daughters, the ancient "virgin-priestess" Cassandra, who appears onstage only *after* the god Poseidon reveals the dishonour she has already suffered:

> POSEIDON. Cassandra, whom the king Apollo left to be a virgin, frenzied maid, hath Agamemnon, in contempt of the god's ordinance and of piety, forced to a dishonoured wedlock.[242]

Euripides makes this unseen violation a prelude for Cassandra's articulate madness in which she mocks the marriage rites and tries to assuage her mother's grief by predicting that the marriage she will be forced to undergo with the hated Agamemnon will destroy him and his house.[243] For the character of my Cassandra, I seized upon this quality – the power Euripides gives his Cassandra to foretell the doom her attacker is bringing on himself. In *The Trojan Women,* the chief rapist of Cassandra, Agamemnon, is present only by Poseidon's report. In *Hurricane Eye* I wanted to force the rapist to face Cassandra onstage so that, in Euripidean frenzy, she could articulate the curse the rapist is inflicting on himself.

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[241] Euripides, *The Trojan Women*, trans. Edward P. Coleridge. 2004, eBooks@Adelaide, University of Adelaide Library, University of Adelaide, accessed 20 November 2011, <http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/e/euripides/trojan/complete.html>.

[242] Euripides, *Trojan Women* n. pag.

[243] Euripides, *Trojan Women* n. pag. Cassandra's fury in Euripides' play at Agamemnon's forcible possession of her reminds me of Ophelia's response to Hamlet's dishonouring of her and her expectations by his refusal to marry. For Hamlet's verbal assault of Ophelia, rejecting her for the "wantonness" that he perceives as the unwanted consequence of his (understated but unmistakeable) pre-wedlock sexual relationship with her, see *Hamlet* 3.1.123-158. The *Hamlet* produced by Schaubühne Berlin made explicit Hamlet and Ophelia's sexual knowledge of one another in a way that made sense of Shakespeare's text in a way I have not seen achieved by performances that imagined the characters chaste. *Hamlet*, by William Shakespeare, dir. Thomas Ostermeier, perf. by Lars Eidinger (Hamlet) Judith Rosmair (Ophelia), design by Jan Pappelbaum, first perf. 17 September 2008 (Berlin); 8 January 2010 (Sydney), Schaubühne Berlin, Sydney Theatre at Walsh Bay, Sydney, 12 January 2010. In that production a pot-bellied, muddied, stagnating and self-destructive Hamlet tumbles with Ophelia. They are about to have intercourse when he pushes her away, making sense of his line, "Get that to a nunnery: why wouldst thou be a breeder of sinners?". See Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.1.123-4. The performance of the sexual nature of their encounter makes much greater sense, too, of Ophelia's madness where her ditty tells of the maid who was "tumbled". See *Hamlet*, 4.4.49-56 and 4.4.59-66.

Whereas Euripides leaves the several rapes of Cassandra to the imagination, the Sydney Theatre Company's 2008 production of *The Women of Troy,* adapted from Euripides by Barrie Kosky and Tom Wright and directed by Kosky, made a rape present onstage, albeit with great restraint.[244] The rapist, one of Agamemnon's guards, forced Cassandra inside a metal locker that had been tipped on its side on the floor, part of a tower of pre-internet metal filing cabinets and shelves that formed the rear wall of the playing space.[245] Theatre critic Diana Simmonds saw the setting as suggestive of "the least comfortable of barracks or prison or Soviet era clerical establishment".[246] Inside a steel locker tipped on its side in the ruins of the totalitarian twentieth-century, Cassandra and her rapist were out of sight of the audience, except for a foot that was kept in view, jerking from the imagined act. The image haunts. My sensation was helplessness. Cassandra and the woman who played her (Melita Jurisic), had become for me one woman, every woman. I wanted to rush onstage and rescue her… end her torture and bring her back onstage again. I wanted to see the weight and substance of her physical presence so that I might know what she knew. What do I mean? Certainly not a desire to see the rape. I resisted witnessing even that metonymic, metronymic foot tapping the ordeal. I wanted to know, not the blow by blow *doing* of the violence, but the traces that the brutality had left. It was not until Cassandra came back onstage, tugging at her dress and trembling at her task of getting her body back inside the useless protection of her blood-soaked underwear, that I felt the great wave of fear and pity at witnessing horror made visible in its ordinariness. That experience may be, in part, what Aristotle meant by tragedy's arousal of "pity and fear" – a metaphorical knowing of somebody else's suffering, stripped of fantasy and exposed as commonplace, at once individual and mythic.[247]

Although I still did not have for my script the metaphor that would bring the perpetrator of the brutality to his purgation – his recognition of the fear and pain he caused the other, and his cleansing of himself in what Gaita calls remorse – I wanted

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[244] *The Women of Troy*, by Euripides, adapted by Barrie Kosky and Tom Wright, dir. Barrie Kosky, perf. by Melita Jurisic (Cassandra), design by Alice Babidge, first perf. 20 September 2008, Wharf 1, Sydney Theatre Company, Sydney, 24 October 2008.
[245] *Women of Troy*, adapted by Kosky and Wright, 2008.
[246] Diana Simmonds, "War's a Bitch and Then You die." rev. of *The Women of Troy*, by Euripides (adapted by Barrie Kosky and Tom Wright; dir. Kosky, Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 1, September 22-October 26, 2008), 26 September, 2008, Stage Noise, accessed 20 November 2011, <http://www.stagenoise.com/reviewsdisplay.php?id=273>.
[247] See Aristotle, *'The Poetics,' Sophocles' King Oedipus* 18-19.

to explore further how that might be achieved without any need to watch the excruciating cruelties that the President of Stygia commands his avatar to commit.

Simmonds writes that in the Sydney Theatre Company's production of *The Women of Troy* "[. . .] there is an unusual level of restraint for a Kosky work." Paradoxically, that restraint, which largely kept the acts of violence offstage, heightened the play's contemporary relevance to our age of violence. The restraint allowed the onstage visual allusions to such atrocities as "death camps" and "the abuse circus of Abu Ghraib" to be given a context in the audience's imagination:

> A rape is suggested rather than seen, beatings and other atrocities are, for the most part, not enacted but merely obvious by the injuries and bruises sported by each of the women. [. . .]. It's one of the many effective things about The Women of Troy –the relative moderation shown in the depiction of these historic horrors means imagination and memory can go into overdrive. Which is where the contemporary analogies arise.[248]

Rush Rehm's study, *Greek Tragic Theatre* corroborates the power of the audience to imagine violence without needing the onstage splatter.[249] Rehm writes of the "tragic clarity" in Euripides' *Bacchae* when a messenger uses direct speech to reiterate Agave's murderous attack on her son Pentheus and his final pleadings for his life. The messenger then reports the "grisly details" of Agave's dismemberment of her son.[250] Rehm demonstrates, however, with examples from Sophocles' *Ajax* and *Women of Trachis* and Euripides' *Hippolytus*, that the convention of the messenger does "*not* entail the mistaken notion that all violence in Greek tragedy takes place offstage" (original emphasis). Rehm's debunking of the dictum grants to the dramatist the choice whether or not to place a particular act of brutality on- or off-stage. Rehm gives excellent reasons for regarding the imagination as the active principle, the maker and destroyer of its own rules:

> What distinguishes the convention of the messenger speech is not the compulsion to avoid on-stage violence, but the absolute reliance on the audience's imagination to visualize and re-animate that violence in their minds' eye."[251]

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[248] Simmonds, "War's a Bitch". Simmonds includes particular praise to "hair wig and make up supervisor", Lauren Aproietti, for her "excruciatingly realistic yet somehow low-key work."
[249] Rush Rehm, *Greek Tragic Theatre*, Theatre Production Studies, ed. John Russell Brown, (London: Routledge, 1992) 62.
[250] Rehm 62, citing *Bacchae* 1118-21 and 1133-36.
[251] Rehm 62.

Here is the freedom of the dramatist, ancient and modern – an “absolute” trust in the imagination. As a seed sucks its moisture in a generous or a stony earth, imagination sends its roots to search its own and others’ crafted rules. Thus watered, it swells with life and splits the confines of its testa. I wanted to let the imagination feed on what Rehm calls the “visual richness” of spoken language. Rehm suggests that the messenger speeches in Greek tragedy are, as in modern radio drama, infused with that richness:

> “[. . .] language and imagination do the work that modern theatre and film have surrendered too readily to technical wizardry and special effects.[252]

In *Hurricane Eye*, the banishment of torture, rape and butchery to the other side of the wall freed me from the urge to compete with holocaustic screen and stage simulations of adrenalin pumping acts of violence, such as those to which Rehm alludes.

Cassandra’s words, if her words would ever come alive, might end the constriction of the throat, open the heart and speak the unspoken voices of butchery’s pain. Through their clarity and rhythm, the mysteries and ambiguities of their poetry, their vibrancy in performance, words might conjure the ineffable. Words might release the imagination in a visceral experience that the mind could feel: goosebumps, a sucking in of air, a shiver, tears, laughter. If only for that instant, an audience’s shared perception of anguish or joy might still the twenty-first century’s rush to conceal its existential terror, might eclipse the worship of apocalypse, might let the eye of the mind see the wholeheartedness of its own being touch the being of another.

I entered the game of finding words, a game of fortune – dashed between nowhere and despair – where each day is a riddle of life whose heart tries to keep together head, body and mind, with no certain answer:

> What words will move us to listen for the beat of our heart in the evening, when our body was severed from our head at noon, having been born at one in the morning without any words?

Let me tell you a story. I decided to give Cassandra a speech where she calls on time to stop so that the rapist who has been ordered to his task by the President of

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[252] Rehm 62.

Stygia cannot reach her, but must listen to her curse. I steeped myself in the ferocities of Medea, Electra, Racine's Phèdre and Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth.

Medea is discussed earlier in the first movement, "Re-membering the body politic." For an example of Lady Macbeth in imperative mood, see: "We fail! / But screw your courage to the sticking-place, / And we'll not fail."[253] For her famous apostrophe, prelude to murder, see "[. . .]. Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts! unsex me here, [. . .]."[254] "Be silent and dance" is the opening invocation Hugo von Hofmannsthal's Electra makes to the chorus as she urges them to join her manic and devastating dance in which she expresses "the burden of joy" that she bears having received the news that her brother Orestes has murdered her mother Clytemnestra in revenge for her murder of their father Agamemnon.[255] Phèdre turns inward to see in her own hands her eagerness of kill:

> PHÈDRE. I stink of incest and deceit.
> These murderous hands, so eager for revenge,
> Are burning to be drenched in guiltless blood.[256]

For weeks Cassandra's "Stop, Time" speech disturbed and eluded me, for reason kept fighting for its controlling role and when it wins the words are a political pamphlet, or dead. Besides, I wanted Cassandra's wildness not to express desire for, or celebration of murder, but resistance to an attack upon her that would mimic murder in its invasion and theft.

To escape from intention and argument, the imagination has to silence reason and remember it has power beyond the pale of argument. Milan Kundera celebrates:

> Kafka wrote the long story, 'The Judgment' in a single night, without interruption, that is to say at extraordinary speed, letting himself be carried along by a practically uncontrolled imagination. Speed – allowing for *the liberation of the subconscious from supervision by reason* [original emphasis].[257]

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[253] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.4.41-55.
[254] Shakespeare, *Macbeth* 1.7.59-60.
[255] Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Libretto, *Electra [Elektra]*, comp. Richard Strauss, trans. G. M. Holland and Ken Chalmers, London: Boosey & Hawkes Ltd, 1997, booklet accompanying recording by Deutsche Grammophon, conducted by Giuseppe Sinopoli, Decca, 1986, 156.
[256] Jean Racine, 1667, *Phaedra*, in *Andromache [Andromaque]. Andromache, Phaedra, Athalia*, trans. Tim Chilcott, 2003, *Tim Chilcott Literary Translations*, accessed 6 June 2011 <http://www.tclt.org.uk/translations.html> 275.
[257] Milan Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed*, trans. Linda Asher, (London: Faber and Faber, 1995) 116,

Spurred by the coffee that had got me on the train, I wrote Cassandra's speech one morning at Macquarie University, scrawling with pen and paper and fellow writing postgraduates for company in the English Department meeting room, riding word after word as if I really could, in far too great a summer heat, because I had a meeting scheduled with my supervisor Marcelle Freiman at two that afternoon and must take something with me, do or die.[258] And there it was: the pen was chasing words across the page and I was touching tears. Here is the speech, almost as originally written:

> CASSANDRA. Stop, Time. Don't let him take another step.
> Don't make me be this piece of meat, this hole,
> this heat that draws his cock to break my day.
> Make my flesh as ugly as the corpse
> that farts to chase the robbers from her tomb.
>
> He does not turn his nose; he's lost all sense.
> Savaged, hollow, now he sniffs his meal.
>
> Hack off my hair and frog my face with warts;
> Cast boils across these breasts and blow with flies
> my secret lips that cannot speak their pain.
>
> Shriek, nether lips, hatch out your unheard voice
> and split his ear with shrieks that keep on shrieking.
>
> He stops.
>
> I breathe myself a moment's life
> for what will happen next will never be
> the same again.[259]

My body understood what its words imagined. Goosebumps. A feeling of energy, galloping. And then, exhilaration. A freedom of body and mind to know each other, in Camus' sense of testimony to the flesh, not to the law.[260] Body and mind find an image in a character's words – "this black thread I'm spinning across the page" (Atwood).[261] In that web of words the body catches its own imagination and responds. If *Hurricane Eye* moves onto the stage, it may move others. I do not know. But I felt it in that moment of writing, a moment one never wants to forget.

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[258] Adapted from my journal entry, 8 December 2009.
[259] See *Hurricane Eye* sc. 13.
[260] Camus, trans. Felman, *Le Témoin de la liberté* [Freedom's witness]", cited in Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 108-9.
[261] Atwood, *Blind Assassin* 345.

It is a speech that calls the audience to listen through its patterns of simple images, strong, monosyllabic verbs and nouns, recurring sounds and rhythms that repeat and break and build and change their pace with each moment by moment shift in Cassandra's power to stop the rapist's advance. The speech takes time.

The value of theatre that takes time to immerse itself in dialogue – a slow-food for the mind that stirs in the body – appears confirmed by research into the "neural underpinnings" of particular emotions conducted by Mary Immordino-Yang, Antonio Damasio and others.[262] Working from the premise that "[t]he ability to empathize with another person's psychological and physical circumstances is a foundation of sociality and moral behavior", the team exposed participants to "narratives based on true stories designed to evoke admiration and compassion in four distinct categories: admiration for virtue [. . .], admiration for skill [. . .], compassion for social/psychological pain [. . .], and compassion for physical pain [. . .]."[263] Using brain-imaging equipment to measure participants' neural responses, the research showed that activity in "the anterior insula", a part of the brain known to be involved in compassion for physical pain, "peaked more quickly and for a shorter duration during [compassion for physical pain] than during [compassion for social/psychological pain]"[264] These findings led the researchers to posit that it takes time "to transcend immediate involvement of the body to engage the psychological and moral dimensions of a situation."[265]

Excitement grew as I read on, marvelling at how ancient playwrights, such as Sophocles and Aeschylus, in giving time for their characters' inner pain to register and to express itself, intuited what modern science now begins to measure. The data led the research team to make the following suggestion:

> [. . .] emotions about others' physically painful predicaments co-opt neural mechanisms for personally experienced pain most efficiently and directly, whereas emotions about the psychological pain of others build on these same neural mechanisms but may work less efficiently and directly. [. . .] [I]n order for emotions about the psychological situations

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[262] M. Immordino-Yang, A. McColl, H. Damasio and A. Damasio, "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, USA*. 106. 19 (2009): 8021-26. Antonio Damasio is director of the Brain and Creativity Institute, University of Southern California, Los Angeles.
[263] Immordino-Yang, "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion" 8021-3.
[264] Immordino-Yang 8021, 8024.
[265] Immordino-Yang 8025.

> of others to be induced and experienced, additional time may be needed for the introspective processing of culturally shaped social knowledge. The rapidity and parallel processing of attention-requiring information, which hallmark the digital age, might reduce the frequency of full experience of such emotions, with potentially negative consequences.[266]

Here was confirmation of Aristotelian faith in the expansion of human experience through a tragic action that needs to unfold through time if it is to bring its live audience to the experience of "pity and fear" that purges those emotions.[267] The fact that more than two thousands years of tragic purgation in the theatre have prevented neither the recurrence of egregious cruelty nor its ideologies of self-protection, does not mean that the tragedian's project is impossible, only that it might take a bit more time:

> For some kinds of thought, especially moral decision-making about other people's social and psychological situations, we need to allow for adequate time and reflection.[268]

We cannot re-run history to prove it, but in the absence of staged tragedy perhaps things might have been worse. Damasio points with concern to "the abrupt juxtapositions" of contemporary news broadcasts that preclude time for reflection:

> When it comes to emotion, because these [neural] systems are inherently slow, perhaps all we can say is, not so fast.[269]

Like Damasio, Immordino-Yang sees cultural significance in their research:

> If replicated, this finding could have important implications for the role of culture and education in the development and operation of social and moral systems [. . .].[270]

Characters who take time to recognise and bear witness to unpleasant truths may have to bear the additional suffering of knowing that there are those whose existence depends on not noticing. As Tiresias says of his own suffering when Oedipus begs him to what he knows:

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[266] Immordino-Yang 8024.
[267] Aristotle, *Poetics,* trans. Yeats, 19.
[268] Immordino-Yang, quoted in "Twitter and Facebook Could Harm Moral Values, Scientists Warn," *The Telegraph*. 13 April, 2009, accessed 27 November 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/5149195/Twitter-and-Facebook-could-harm-moral-values-scientists-warn.html>.
[269] Immordino-Yang, "Twitter and Facebook Could Harm Moral Values, Scientists Warn."
[270] Immordino-Yang, "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion" 8024.

TIRESIAS. How terrible – to see the truth
when the truth is only pain to him who sees![271]

In *Agamemnon*, Aeschylus dedicates significant time and care to the elaboration of Cassandra's truth – her crossing of the boundary between self and other.[272] The modern neural researchers suggest that compassion for another's suffering is "often associated with a sense of heightened awareness of one's own condition and its moral implications."[273] In Aeschylus' play, Cassandra's heightened awareness is demonstrated not only by her actions, but by dialogue that specifies her perception of her own psychological and physical agony:

CHORUS. She is inspired to speak of her own sufferings.
The prophetic power stays with her even in slavery.[274]

Having prophesised the murders that Clytemnestra will soon commit, Cassandra experiences Agamemnon's death as an elision of his pain and her own:

CASSANDRA. O fear, and fear again!
O Pity! Not alone
He suffers; with his pain
Mingled I mourn my own?
Cruel Apollo! Why,
Why have you led me here?
Only that I may share
The death that he must die![275]

As an onstage synecdoche for the pain of the offstage deaths that have occurred and are about to occur, Aeschylus' Cassandra makes herself the active voice of that pain. She suffers, as does Tiresias, from the pain of knowing – pain that connects the self with fellow human beings. Her speech pulls into the tormented bath of the present the horror that is about to happen and the horror that has already been.[276] Having flooded time from its relentless channel, Cassandra swims its multiple currents, even while she cannot stop them reuniting to swirl her to her death. From the moment of her arrival at the "fearful house" that once was Atreus' palace and now belongs to his son Agamemnon, Cassandra lives its egregious history. She lives the experience of the children of Thyestes when his vengeful brother Atreus cooks them and serves

[271] Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 176, lines 359-360.
[272] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*.
[273] Immordino-Yang, "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion" 8024.
[274] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 79, lines 1083-4.
[275] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 82, lines 1136-40.
[276] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 81, lines 1118-23 and 1136-43.

them to their devouring father.[277] With the approach of Agamemnon's own death at the hand of his wife Clytemnestra, Cassandra lives the terror of the "bloody ravening pack" of Furies who are "thirsting still":[278]

> CASSANDRA. [. . .].
> The victim bleeds: come, Fiends, and drink your fill![279]

Through a lens which magnifies Cassandra's inner hurt in a form that can be visualised, the Chorus evoke a world of men dying in war. Their gift of imagery and bodily detail extends the time during which the audience may notice the distorting rhythm of Cassandra's breath and share the intimacy and vastness of her pain:

> CHORUS. What fiends are these you call to bay at Death?
> Your ghastly hymn has paled your cheek; and pale
> The blood shrinks to your heart, as when men die
> Sword-struck in battle, pulse and vision fail,
> And life's warm colours fly;
> See, how her utterance chokes her laboured breath![280]

In her next speech, Cassandra's "laboured breath" quickens into the clamour of her "nightmare" vision as she lives what has not yet happened, Clytemnestra's personal act of war against Agamemnon, netted and butchered in his bathtub. Cassandra lives the failure of the citizens to respond to her calls for his rescue; she lives the malice of Clytemnestra; and, she lives the pain of the slaughter. Cassandra's culminating words are a cry of alarm to the Chorus and audience to pay attention:

> CASSANDRA. Listen! It is treachery, treachery, I say![281]

Offering salient reasons to repudiate the testimony of oracles, the Chorus declares that Cassandra is "insane, poor girl, or god-possessed."[282] This interpretation may paradoxically aid the citizens watching beyond the scene to receive the tumult of Cassandra's breath as an expression of their own dissenting voice. After all, the action of the play will prove Cassandra right and the Chorus wrong. The Chorus does not, however, need to believe Cassandra to convey its intimate and compassionate observations of her distress.[283] By offering to the imagination words that are able to

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[277] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 80, lines 1084-5, 1087-1102, and 84-5, lines 1214-1222.
[278] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 79-88, lines 1068-1329.
[279] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 81, lines 1121-23.
[280] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 81, lines 1124-29.
[281] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 81, lines 1130-35.
[282] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 82, lines 1140.
[283] For example, Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* 82, lines 1140-5.

describe from the outside the intimacy of Cassandra's own performance, the Chorus may prompt an audience to align its breath and pulse with her imagined turmoil, and with that breath and heartbeat each member may perform for her or himself a bodily experience of what Immordino-Yang calls "heightened awareness of one's own condition" and compassion for another's pain.[284]

In the writing of *Hurricane Eye*, the character of Cassandra emerged very early. Like Aeschylus' Cassandra, Sophocles' Antigone and Dorfman's Sofia she feels her own pain and that of others and resists capture even in captivity.[285] Inspired by those outstanding models, I wanted my Cassandra to turn her experience of pain into a truth that she speaks to a violent state whose representatives find salient reasons for making her suffer. The search was on to create and structure a dramatic trajectory where the pain and fear and pity surging inside Cassandra would bring her to an action that would call the perpetrators of war to look at themselves and what they have done. The hope was that the performed actions, spoken and unspoken, would move the currents of an audience, mind and body, to feel a "heightened awareness" of self and of other.

As the work of *Hurricane Eye* grew, so did the possibility that the foundational horror story of the house of Atreus – the cooking and serving of a brother's children – could become the action that would fire the major crisis. In early plans for the play, it seemed that this ghastly dinner, whose devotion to vengeance had haunted me for years, could be one of the living tableau that the President of Stygia, as Director of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors, would stage for the pleasure of visitors. Once introduced to the set, however, war's devouring of its children, like the waterboarding of Cassandra and the guillotining of Charlotte Corday, kept demanding a greater share of the plot. Then, one glorious day, out of the chaos of my reading and thinking and scrawling and crawling, on and on, into the unknown land of smouldering intentions, the play's climactic scene met me headlong in a burst of children's song like gunfire:

ORPHANS. Welcome to war's table
Eat while you are able
Raid store and sty and cradle

[284] Immordino-Yang *et al.* "Neural Correlates of Admiration and Compassion" 8024.
[285] See Sophocles, *Antigone*, Dorfman, *Widows*.

The feast is on the table.

War has set the table
Spread it with abundament.
Peace, that foolish fable,
Gets stuck up its own fundament.[286]

A counter voice arrived, in a different rhythm, wafting a lyrical defence of a deity whose rubric cradles war and prays for it to stop:

CHOIR BOYS. The heavens declare the glory of God;
and the firmament sheweth his handywork.[287]

RIOT SQUAD. You'll have pepper with that?

Crack.

CHOIR BOYS. Agnus Dei,
qui tolis peccàta mundi,
miserère nobis
dona nobis pacem.[288]

BISHOP. Lamb of God
you take away the sins of the world.
Have mercy on us
Grant us peace.

CRONE. Spare a crown
for a common crone.

RIOT SQUAD. You want pepper with that?

Whack.[289]

In the Republic of Stygia, bankrupt from war and profligacy, there could be no feast without a Riot Squad to secure the perimeter. In War's banquet of its own children, *Hurricane Eye* had found its performable metaphor for war's jealousy, deception, cruelty and greed. While war was holding its feast of horror around her, Cassandra would put her metaphoric fist in war's own maw to interrupt its gorging and make it

[286] See *Hurricane Eye*, scene 27, "The Banquet: War devours its children."
[287] Psalm 19, v.1. Bible, King James Version, accessed 13 August 2010, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/k/kjv/kjv-idx?type=citation&book=Psalms&chapno=19&startverse=1&endverse=> .
[288] Latin Liturgy Association, *Text of the Latin Mass (Both Rites)*: from *New Roman Missal* (1962), trans. Rev. F. X. Lasance, Rev. Francis Augustine, accessed 12 November 2009. <http://www.latinliturgy.com/id18.htm>.
[289] See *Hurricane Eye*, sc. 27.

taste, smell and recognise what it was eating. Her action would precipitate a crisis that would snap war's chain of vengeance.

Having turned the President of Stygia into a contemporary rendering of Atreus, I needed to endow him with a brother he could hate – a Thyestes whose spoilt little brats he could cook. A younger, more agile man than the President, my Thyestes is a General, who struts the field wearing the lion cloth loin-cloth of Heracles, that he pins with medals from his never-ending war on terror, in the faraway land of Naphthastan. Since boyhood, the General has rivalled his brother for mastery of the game, the state and the bedroom. If he valued the life of his sons, he would stay at the front and make decisive engagement with the enemy to generate favourable images for his brother to feed to the media, but there are too many body bags and not enough reinforcements. The flailing warrior flies home to grab hold of the state and make himself emperor.

The President and the General were in need of names. While I had borrowed from Aeschylus Cassandra's name whose euphony is not lost in translation into English, Atreus and Thyestes do not so readily pass from ancient Greek into contemporary English. To preserve a trace of their ancient origin, I needed the President of Stygia to have a name starting with the same letter as Atreus, and the General to take his initial letter from Thyestes. "Tungsten" came swiftly for the General. Metal. Hard, hard metal. But, where was a name for the President, that would start with the opening syllable of Atreus: "At"?

I put the question to my precious *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. The word it revealed to me moments later was so unexpected and so apt, it brought with it te jubilant goosebumps, as if I were channelling Cassandra. Here is the entry:

> **Attercop.** [Old English āttorcoppe, f. āttor (venom) + -coppe head.]
>
> 1. A spider - 1691.
> 2. *in figurative use.* A venomous person 1505.[290]

Cassandra's uncle, President of Stygia, now had a name: Attercop, the corrupt and poisonous politician. His brother General Tungsten, hardened for victory, became Cassandra's father. His two little children who are destined to be cooked became her

[290] Attercop [entry edited for brevity], *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary .*

brothers. Shortly after my seemingly uncanny discovery of the word Attercop, I encountered a passage by Christa Wolf on her journey to Troy that testifies to the power of the mind, not to bend coffee spoons, but to persist not only in looking but in learning to see what is there:

> It's witchcraft. Ever since I took up the name Cassandra and began to carry it around like a sort of credential and watchword; ever since I entered these realms where it now leads me, everything I encounter seems to be related to it. Things that in the past were separate have merged without my realising it. a little light is falling into previously dark, unconscious rooms.[291]

From the earliest moments in my construction of *Hurricane Eye*, I wanted Cassandra to be part of the family of the President of Stygia. While Cassandra makes herself an outsider to his construction of the world, relationship to him as his niece means that he has difficulty constructing her as an alien and morally lesser being. He cannot contemplate taking revenge upon her without being personally conflicted, even though he has centuries of misogynist history that authorises him to confound her powers of perception with witchcraft or madness.[292] Cassandra's relationship with her father Tungsten is conflicted too. Like King Priam of Troy, General Tungsten who controls the Stygian Army has merely decorative and nuptial ambitions for his daughter and will do whatever he can to prevent her spruiking to the public her prediction that his war will end badly. Robert Graves writes of Priam's sabotage of his daughter Cassandra's insights that would, if followed, have avoided war and have saved their city:

> To avoid scandal, Priam locked her [Cassandra] up in a pyramidal building on the citadel; the wardress who cared for her had orders to keep him informed of all her prophetic utterances.[293]

The ancient Cassandra of Aeschylus attributes her gift of foresight to "Apollo, god of prophecy".[294] The Cassandra of *Hurricane Eye* learns her trade – her skills of observation – from a secular rational and sentient Cassandra, one created by Jean

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[291] Wolf, "Conditions of a Narrative," 277-8.
[292] My understanding of the historic confounding of women's knowledge and understanding with witchcraft has been informed by, for example, Brian Easlea, *Witch-Hunting, Magic and the New Phi8losophy: An Introduction to Debates of the Scientific Revolution 1450-1750*, (Brighton, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1980).
[293] Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths*, Pelican, 1955, Introduction by Rick Riordan. (New York: Penguin, 2012) 631, section 158.r. For alerting me to this I am indebted to Wolf, "Conditions of a Narrative: Cassandra" 220.
[294] Aeschylus, *Agamemnon* p. 84, line 120.

Giraudoux in *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* [literally, *The Trojan War will not take place*].[295] First performed in Paris in 1935, with the Second World War rumbling less than four years away, the play was later translated into English by Christopher Fry, entitled *Tiger at the Gates*.[296]

In the Troy of Giraudoux, the blissfully pregnant Andromache convinces herself that her husband Hector, the great Trojan prince, has had enough of war and will prevent another one by making his younger brother Paris give back to the Greeks the Helen that he stole. From the "cocksure statements" of her fellow Trojan men and women, Cassandra discerns a different outcome, perceiving that the metaphoric tiger of war "stretches himself [. . .], lick his lips [. . .], and starts to prowl.[297] None of this power of discernment comes to Cassandra from otherworldly presences:

> CASSANDRA. I see nothing. I prophesy nothing. All I ever do is to take account of two great stupidities: the stupidity of men, and the wild stupidity of the elements.[298]

The Cassandra of Giraudoux is lucid, not raving. It is those around her who cannot see what they are becoming, and cannot see their madness, for their discourse marks them, in one another's eyes, as sane. In the actual world, on the weekend of 15 and 16 February, 2003, six to ten million people in almost 60 countries rallied in public streets in an effort to prevent the war on Iraq.[299] These people did not need supernatural gifts to comprehend that if the Coalition of the Willing went ahead with its plans for invasion, the result would not be the gift of democracy of which its leaders boasted, but the chaos and terror of a war that would gorge not only on their victims and their children, but on their own as well. For those millions who took care to notice, the USA's George W. Bush, the United Kingdom's Tony Blair and Australia's John Howard employed the skills of Joseph Goebbels to justify their invasion.[300]

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[295] *La guerre de Troie n'aura pas lieu* [*The Trojan War will not take place]* by Jean Giraudoux, first perf., Théâtre de l'Athénée, Paris, 22 November, 1935.
[296] Jean Giraudoux, *Tiger at the Gates [*La Guerre De Troie N'Aura Pas Lieu*]*, trans. Christopher Fry, (London: Methuen, 1955, 1967)
[297] Giraudoux, *Tiger at the Gates* 1-3.
[298] Giraudoux, *Tiger at the Gates* 1.
[299] These figures are the BBC's estimate. "Millions Join Anti-War Protests Worldwide." 17 February, 2003, BBC News World Edition, accessed 20 July 2009, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/2765215.stm>.
[300] For analysis of the skilful fraud enacted by the administrations of President Bush and Tony Blair in their use of the media to make "increasingly lurid disclosures" of the threat supposedly posed to the world by Saddam Hussein's arsenal, a putative threat discredited by the evidence of Hans Blix, chief

In 2013, in the sorrow of counting a decade since the war began, with Iraq continuing to suffer chaos, terror and death, Margaret Swieringa offered a critical analysis of the Australian Prime Minister's decision to ignore advice and take the nation into the war. Her words are a reminder of the problem confronted by the Cassandra of Aeschylus and Giraudoux:

> There are none so blind as those who will not see.[301]

Where the leaders of the actual world build their public theatre of real war on the preposterous proposition that prosperity and security depend upon their not seeing, the theatre needs preposterous action to shock the eye into unlearning its skill of disregard.

In *Hurricane Eye*, at the height of War's banquet, I imagined the preposterous scene taking form. I saw Cassandra tell her father General Tungsten that the dish his brother sets before him is the flesh of his own sons. He looks at his daughter and sees nothing but his own hatred.

He raises his spoon to his mouth. He realises how much he hates his little boys. He hated them alive. Dead, he hates them worse, for they have filled his spoon with the death of soldiers, just like him. He sees what is on his spoon and is afraid.

John Berger observed the fear racking those who saw themselves as winners in the War in Iraq, whether soldier, general or president:

> The victors, with their historically unprecedented superiority of weapons, the victors who were bound to be victors, appeared frightened. Not only the gas-masked marines, dispatched to a problematic country and undergoing real desert storms, but faraway spokespeople in the comfort of the Pentagon, and, above all, the Coalition's national leaders, appearing on TV or conferring, conspiratorially, in out-of-the-way places.[302]

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weapons inspector from the United Nations, see Danner, "Lost in the Forever War" 434-444 – text quoted in this footnote is from 441-2.

[301] Margaret Swieringa, "Howard Ignored Advice and Went to War in Iraq: The Government's Justification for War Was Not Supported by Any of Its Own Agencies' Intelligence.," *The Age*. 12 April, 2013, Melbourne, accessed 14 April 2013, <http://www.theage.com.au/comment/howard-ignored-advice-and-went-to-war-in-iraq-20130411-2ho5d.html>.

[302] John Berger, *Hold Everything Dear: Dispatches on Survival and Resistance*, (London: Verso, 2007) 53.

In *Hurricane Eye*, Cassandra sees the General's fear. She covers her father's mouth with her hands. To eat his sons, he must bite his daughter out of the way. He hurls her from him to her death. His self-control shatters. His fury shocks the metaphoric masks from his own and his brother's faces. He digs his spoon in the bowl again, but he can no longer lift to his mouth.

His brother the President scoops a handful from the dish and offers it to the General like a sacrament of death.

The General pushes Attercop's hands into his (Attercop's) face, smearing the stew across his mouth. The fight is on. Youths once more, they wrestle, fight hard; the weaker brother changes the rules and fights dirty. In the heat and grab of their bodies, they forget where they are, who they have become, or why they have to fight; they only know they wrestle for their lives.

The members of the Chorus tug and strain at the air as they form a living ring around the four-limbed body of the wrestlers whose raw selves flow into theirs through the intensity of watching.

According to Roland Barthes, "the real wrestling [*Le vrai catch*]", as distinct from the regulated indoor sport, is an open air spectacle comparable with Greek theatre or bull-fighting –

> [. . .] a light without a shadow plays upon an emotion without a fold [*une lumière sans ombre élabore une émotion sans repli*.][303]

In *Hurricane Eye*, through the heat and press of their struggle, the wrestlers strip the costumes willy-nilly from their own and one another's bodies. Knowing nothing but the tension and desire of their hatred, their bodies slough all self-pretence. They wrestle with a slow, deliberate ferocity that could make the world end – naked.

In my mind the grappling bodies would serve a dual dramatic function. Through its power to strip emotion of the recesses in which it hides (Barthes), the wrestling would free the characters from the mask of the beliefs that shield them from seeing what they do not want to see. At the same time, the act of wrestling would itself become a mask in Peter Hall's sense of the term – a form which allows the emotion to be

performed without its becoming so hysterical, repellent, indulgent or improbable that it could not be received:

> Form contains the emotion and makes its expression acceptable.[304]

In *Hurricane Eye*, the ring of spectators seethes with every movement of the wrestlers' blended body as it wrestles the hellish hatred War exudes as it strains to un-do life. The stronger man, the one who was once the General, pins to the floor his elder brother who was once the President. The watching Chorus amplifies the grunts of triumph and the gasps of fear. Their eyes, like those of the now immobilised wrestlers are ovens where War burns without a shadow or a fold where it can hide.

The man who once ran the army could break his flabby brother's neck. No-one dares to move. No-one knows what will happen next.

Barthes writes that the public at the wrestling match does not care to know whether the combat is rigged or not, for the spectators give themselves over to the primary virtue of the spectacle, which is to abolish all motives and all consequences:

> [W]hat matters to the public is not what it believes, but what it sees [*ce qui lui importe, ce n'est pas ce qu'il croit, c'est ce qu'il voit*.][305]

The quality Barthes describes – the primacy of seeing rather than believing – was a gift that I sought, so that I might script it for characters whose players might one day offer that gift to an audience. I wanted to endow the wrestling brothers with a sentience so raw they would let go of ideology – the belief with which they dye their libation to war – and *see*, simply *see*, what war is doing. Stripped of belief, the body staggers from the loss of its imperative to choke or poison the other. No longer willed by revenge, the freed breath startles from the gullet the promise-crammed air that fogs the banquet of empire.[306] No longer able to cloud from view the shadow side of itself and its demand for dominion, the mind sees the horror of the feast it has made

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[303] Roland Barthes, "*Le monde où l'on catche* [the World Where One Wrestles]," *Mythologies* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1957) 13. Personal translation.
[304] Peter Hall, *Exposed by the Mask* 38.
[305] Barthes, *Mythologies* 14. Personal translation.
[306] The concept of being forced to "eat the air, promise-crammed" comes from Hamlet's metaphor for the falsely jovial treachery of Claudius and Gertrude. Shakespeare, *Hamlet* 3.2.98-100.

from “the funeral bak’d meats” of its enemies.[307] With no shadow and no fold in the emotion, warrior and politician pin each other into a pose of such terror at the proximity of their bodies, the prickling of their naked skin and the torment of their breath, they are forced to look in one another’s eyes and recognise who they are.

My model for crafting the play’s major crisis as a stillness where two men simply look at one another and see what is there was W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman’s libretto for Stravinsky’s opera *The Rake’s Progress* (1949). Its climactic scene takes place in the churchyard on a starless night, a year and a day since Tom Rakewell abandoned his intended bride Anne Truelove and let his newly-acquired servant Nick Shadow beguile him to London, firm in the belief that the city would make him a rich man. Tom’s fortune lost, Nick Shadow has now brought him to the edge of a freshly dug grave and is claiming his wages:

> RAKEWELL.
> Shadow, good Shadow, be patient: I
> Am beggared as you know
> But promise when I am rich again
> To pay you all I owe.
>
> SHADOW.
> ’Tis not your money but your soul
> ’Tis not your money but your soul
> Which I this night require.
> Look in my eyes
> Look in my eyes and recognize
> Whom – Fool! – you chose to hire.[308]

Shadow’s words scupper Tom’s fantasy of the restoration of riches. Often, in the struggle to shape my own play, Shadow’s lyrics with their simple words, repetition, rhyme and relentless rhythm sounded in my head with Stravinsky’s music like the clangour of a bell. As that knell rang, I knew that what mattered most for *Hurricane Eye* was to find a way for War to look in its own eyes and recognise itself.

When *Hurricane Eye* stages itself in my mind, I see recognition shudder through the brothers. The younger brother, the one who used to think himself a Heracles, helps

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[307] The allusion here is again of course to Hamlet who confides in Horatio that his mother and uncle have, devoid of feeling, turned his father’s funeral into their own marriage feast. Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, 1.2.180-181.

[308] W. H. Auden and Chester Kallman (Libretto), *The Rake’s Progress*, comp. Igor Stravinsky, dir. John Barker, perfs. Alexander Young, tenor (Tom Rakewell); John Reardon, baritone (Nick Shadow), Sony Classical, 1991, 134. The lyrics quoted include the performed repetitions.

his elder brother to his feet. The elder brother, the one who used to think himself an Emperor, staggers and grips his brother's proffered arm to stop himself falling. Neither knows where to look or what will happen next but the shock has undone their tongues from the trick of thrust and victimhood that guards the self from truth:

> PRESIDENT ATTERCOP. I lost my footing.
>
> GENERAL TUNGSTEN. Get him some water.[309]

Leviathans beached in blazing sun, their chests convulse from the expiration of hatred that belches away in steam. Emptied of hate, life gulps at the mists of solicitude and vulnerability whose drops condense in sweat upon each brother's naked skin.

With cautious optimism, Atwood argues that faced by the urgent contemporary need to recognise that greed and its allies of war, terror, debt and poverty are killing not only fellow humans and other creatures, but the Earth, people may learn to change perception.[310] Changing the way we construct our language and the way we measure ourselves, and the resources that we take from others and the Earth inside and out, would enable us to see the real costs and consequences of our actions.[311] Part of that changed language, Atwood suggests, is a changed response to the other, a change that could bring the "liberating effect" of clemency:

> [. . .] the desire for revenge is a heavy chain, and revenge therefore leads to a chain reaction. Forgiveness cuts the chain.[312]

In *Hurricane Eye*, each exhausted man struggles to stay in reach of his brother's breath. Each clasps the other, for alone he can bear neither the unaccustomed lightness of being without his burden of vengeance, nor the gathering heaviness of knowing who he is and what he has done. As motes in currents of air, their eyes meet and whirl away and meet again. Their clasp of recognition is uncertainty and pain. Their heaving breath portrays the madness, chaos and grief of a world they worked to make in their own image, only to see at last the ruin they have made of everything they've touched. Could the play come to an end in the terrible, ambiguous and discombobulated breath of the naked wrestlers, clasped to each other in the

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[309] See *Hurricane Eye* script, sc. 27.
[310] Atwood, *Payback* 160-1; 193-4.
[311] Atwood, *Payback* 203.
[312] Atwood, *Payback* 160.

terror and relief of succour, where the slow subsidence of their breath turns them into wax?

If the play were to end there, what would happen to Cassandra, given that playwright had deliberately forgotten to kill her? The play was supposed to be a tragedy. if Cassandra is allowed to live, how then could self-recognition and its longed-for cathartic power come to her antagonists: her uncle, the maker of laws, and her father, the maker of wars?

In Aeschylus' *Antigone*, Creon embodies a state based on a sacrosanct patriarchal and hierarchical law whose very existence demands violent suppression of its enemies, whether living (Antigone) or dead (Polynices). Because that law accords the ruler the right to attribute nefarious motives to anyone whose mind conceives a different law, Creon is too well protected to recognise his own wrongdoing until forced to do so by the proximate deaths of his wife Eurydice, his son Haemon and his niece Antigone.[313] Until he receives the shocks of the death of love he cannot see the truth that Tiresias makes plain:

> TIRESIAS. You're the one who's sick, Creon, sick to death.
>
> CREON. I'm in no mood to trade insults with a seer.
>
> TIRESIAS. You have already, calling my prophecies a lie.
>
> CREON. Why not?
> You and the whole breed of seers are mad for money.[314]

Maligned for having prophesied the louring disaster that would have been obvious to anyone who cared to look, Tiresias departs.[315] Left to the law of kingship, which must proclaim its conquest of every action or thought that might forebode its un-crowning, Creon saves the crown by causing the death of his world. It would be pointless for Tiresias to return to the now abject king and claim, *I told you so*. The catalyst for the poetic, dramatic (albeit temporary) purification of Creon's world is not Tiresias, but revenge itself. The inherent violence of the state grants the complicit Creon a glorious (albeit temporary) command of its path. Its inexorable trajectory returns him to the metaphoric crossroads where he chose the path of the crown, a crossroads

[313] Sophocles, *Antigone* 122-8, lines 1344-1465.
[314] Sophocles, *Antigone* 113, lines 1168-70.
[315] Sophocles, *Antigone* 115, lines 1064-90.

where he is forced at last to notice the bodies of his family whom his actions have destroyed. Their deaths achieve what their lives could not – the avenger's humiliation, self-recognition and remorse.[316]

Without the death of his beloved daughter Cordelia, the simplicity, humility and sadness of King Lear's self-recognition could not be imagined:

> LEAR. And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
> Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
> And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never, never!
> Pray you, undo this button: thank you, sir.
> Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
> Look there, look there! [*Dies.*][317]

Throughout the crafting of *Hurricane Eye*, I had told myself that if the work were to be taken seriously it had to be a tragedy in which Cassandra, like Antigone and Cordelia, would die. I had convinced myself that her death would implement Barker's epigrammatic advice:

> Since no art form generates action, the most appropriate art for a culture on the edge of extinction is one that stimulates pain.[318]

Why then, was Cassandra refusing to let me write her murder? I returned to the dénouement of Barker's *Victory*, which, as already discussed, does not bring redemption through the sacrifice of the protagonist. Instead, the widow Bradshaw lives to defy the pain inflicted on her. She brings herself, her roped rapist and their newborn child to the relative safety of a house where her grown-up daughter Cropper is active in the metaphoric and practical perpetuation of life, perception and subversive thought.[319] Barker's "Theatre of Catastrophe" posits that an audience is honoured, not by "the desperate ache for the message [which] denigrates the experience of art", but by the exposure to pain, complexity and illegitimate thought.[320]

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[316] For Creon's remorse, see Sophocles, *Antigone* 127, lines 1459-65. For Oedipus' remorse, with which there are parallels with Creon's, see Sophocles, *Oedipus the King*, 241, lines 1474-1480.
[317] Shakespeare, *King Lear* 5.3.306-13.
[318] Barker, *Arguments*, 19.
[319] Barker, *Victory*, 83-5.
[320] Barker, *Arguments,* 79, 82.

Barker's honouring of an audience repudiates formulas. I had to decide for myself whether or not my Cassandra could bring the state's perpetrators of crime to an understanding of their wrong-doing, without having to be killed.

But, soft, I did not want to kill Cassandra. There had been too many deaths. Brecht's twentieth century Saint Joan dies from pneumonia at the age of twenty-five in the Chicago stockyards – her disease a metonym both for the out of control invasion of capitalism that impoverishes and sickens the workers, and for the workers' own army of preachers lambasted by Joan with her dying breath for the false hope they proffer in the name of an invisible and useless God.[321] Unforgettable too is the anonymous Girl in Griselda Gambaro's *Information for Foreigners* (1992) whose putridly avuncular torturer shoots her on behalf of the state because she rejects the debauchery of the pistol that he puts in her lap to prompt and facilitate her suicide.[322]

In the real world, the unredeemed real deaths go on and on, such as that of the Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, shot dead on 7 October, 2006. There was terrible irony in Politkovskaya's murder having taken place on the birthday of Vladimir Putin, whose leadership of the new Russia and whose punitive war with Chechnya had been targets of the journalist's meticulous scrutiny.[323] Many deaths go unnamed, such as those dubbed "collateral damage" in the wars of the American empire.[324]

As has been noted in the Introduction, the Chilean playwright Dorfman creates for his characters Sophia and her grandson, the trope of the "hand in the stone" whose imagined touch endows a mythic resilience that refuses to accept their deaths as isolated, disappeared and futile.[325] In ancillary text, Dorfman, who saw great suffering under the regime of Pinochet, sets his country's experience in a world context:

> [. . .]. Torture, disappearance, censorship – and above all rebellion, are not faraway experiences that I have added to the sauce of my work in order to enliven it: this is what has constituted this life of mine for far too many years and that even now, when the dictatorship is over and we are negotiating an arduous transition to democracy, continues to visit and damage every citizen of my country.

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[321] Bertolt Brecht, *Saint Joan of the Stockyards*, trans. Ralph Manheim, *Brecht, Collected Plays: Three*, ed. John Willett (London: Methuen Drama, 1997) 308. Original publication, 1932.
[322] Gambaro, *Information for Foreigners* 90 and 106-7.
[323] "Anna Politkovskaya," obituary, *The Economist*. 12 October, 2006, accessed 30 September 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/8023316>.
[324] See, for example, Boggs, *Crimes of Empire* 52-88.
[325] Dorfman, *Widows*, 73.

> Yes, Chile is what forced me to write these plays. To make sense of what it meant to live in a time when life could be snuffed out – just like this, with the snap of a finger, the snap of darkness.
>
> Though it is not only about Chile that I write.[326]

Suddenly, my decision regarding the ending of *Hurricane Eye* seemed easier. I would let the people who knew the cruelty of the state at first hand give me permission to show its horror through the death of a fictional Cassandra.

The late Václav Havel, dissident Czech playwright and, with the fall of totalitarian Eastern Europe in 1989, his nation's first elected President, had suffered in the years following the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 from the banning of his plays and from several periods of imprisonment on such fabricated indictments as "disturbing the peace", with his longest term from 1979 to 1983.[327] Informed by his experience of the cruelty of the state, Havel held to his understanding of the power of theatre to mirror, in its unique way whatever is essential in its time, and to do so in a way that brings each member of the audience to be the hero of the work, the one "who participates and cocreates (sic) the catharsis, sharing with others the liberating delight in evil exposed."[328]

> Even the toughest truth expressed publicly, in front of everyone else, suddenly becomes liberating. In the beautiful ambivalence that is proper only to theatre, the horror of that truth [. . .] has finally been articulated out loud and in public.[329]

The fate of Cassandra in *Hurricane Eye* was decided. When she puts her hands around the mouth of her father General Tungsten to stop him eating the stew made from the flesh of his sons, he hurls her from him to her death, so that he can put the spoon in his mouth.

To write at all one needs to believe that whatever one is looking for is worth the search though the treasure be one whose nature is unknown. In Janet Frame's *Owls do Cry*, narrator and protagonist Daphne (another Cassandra) touches the truth of her experience, while those who hold her captive and declare her mad are able to

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[326] Ariel Dorfman, Foreword, *The Resistance Trilogy*, by Dorfman (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998) ix.
[327] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace : A Conversation with Karel Hvízdala*, 143. See also ch. 4, "Public Enemy" 119-62.
[328] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* 200-1.
[329] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* 200-1.

find in the world only a reflection of their own tight-governed lives. Here is Daphne's gift:

> If I travel a hundred miles to find treasure, I will find treasure. If I travel a hundred miles to find nothing, even if I bring money with me, to lay it down in exchange, I will find nothing.[330]

If treasure is the telling of a story that may light the telling of another, I had found treasure. If *Hurricane Eye* were to find itself on stage, I like to think it would light further stories and a conversation.

Hurricane Eye has an epilogue that aims to light possibilities beyond War's murder of Cassandra, its devouring of children and its wrestling match for control of its spoils. Although the wrestling bout would end in naked ambiguity where the exhausted politician and general search each other's face and skin for common purpose in the madness, chaos and grief that mark the collapse of their war-like state, I did not want the play to end in despair. I felt unable to reproduce the mood of Thomas Bernhard's *Heldenplatz [Heroes' Square]* where Professor Robert's penultimate speech alludes to the "unbearable stench" of neo-Nazi politics in 1980s Vienna, and proclaims:

> PROFESSOR ROBERT.
> This tiny state is one gigantic dung-heap."[331]

Bernhard's characters offer no redemption from pessimism in what Professor Robert calls "a completely destroyed / unbearably ugly [. . .] and thoroughly stupid world", a world where he would rather not wake up anymore.[332] With an ominous banality that makes present the inanity that facilitates destruction, the late Professor Josef Schuster's housekeeper irons and folds shirts, exactly as he had instructed her, even as she laments his death.[333] One imagines her precision at work in the 1940s – an obedient housekeeper preparing for immaculate duty the garments of Auschwitz Commandant Rudolf Höss even though sentience fled his body long before, with every order that he gave.[334]

An evening in the theatre pondering the ugliness iterated in Bernhard's brilliant and compelling drama might have given Schopenhauer a smile in the morning, for

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[330] Janet Frame, *Owls Do Cry*, (Melbourne: Sun Books, 1967, 1973) 145-6.
[331] Bernhard, "Heldenplatz." 405-6.
[332] Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* 358.
[333] Bernhard, *Heldenplatz* 317-319.

Schopenhauer had alerted Europe in 1818 to the paradox of despair behind the mask of its privileged consumption of the world's resources that state sanction violence against others drew to its coffers:

> We others [who are spared the slavery of growing sugar and coffee, or labouring from the age of five in a factory making cotton] can be made perfectly miserable by trifling incidents, but perfectly happy by nothing in the world. Whatever we may say, the happiest moment of the happy man is that of his falling asleep, just as the unhappiest moment of the unhappy man is that of his awaking.[335]

In crafting the epilogue of *Hurricane Eye*, I did not want to curry hope in the sense of a wishful refuge from the ugly reality reported by Schopenhauer and Bernhard's Professor Robert, but hope in the sense in which it may be discerned in the final scene in Barker's *Victory* where Bradshaw's widow and her daughter Cropper persist in an active living that takes account of thought and heart and consequence.[336]

Václav Havel saw hope, not as optimism, but as a quality with an indefinable "transcendental" inner root:

> Hope, in this deep and powerful sense, is not the same as joy that things are going well, or willingness to invest in enterprises that are obviously headed for early success, but, rather, an ability to work for something because it is good, not just because it stands a chance to succeed. The more unpropitious the situation in which we demonstrate hope, the deeper that hope is.[337]

An extraordinary work of hope comes from one of those ugly places of European history whose cruelties haunt. The concentration camp of Terezín [*Theresienstadt*] in north Bohemia was both a transit point from which Jews from Central Europe were sent to gas chambers in Auschwitz and a site for the promulgation of propaganda, for the Nazis presented the Terezín camp to the world as a "model ghetto" where

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[334] See earlier discussion of the role of Höss, in which I drew on work of the historian Richard Evans.
[335] Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation*, vol. 2, (New York: Dover Publications, 1966) 578. In our contemporary world the labour and slavery has been largely exported to the world we designate "developing" in blindness to our complicity in the exploitation of the most vulnerable. See, for example, Shibly Sadik, *Child Labor in Bangladesh*. 2008, Blog at WordPress.com, accessed 20 January 2009, <http://shiblysadik.wordpress.com/>.
[336] For the connection between Bernhard's play and the philosophical work of Schopenhauer, I am indebted to Paul Sheehan, "Thomas Bernhard, *Heldenplatz*," Lecture to undergraduates, Department of English, Macquarie University, Sydney, 26 October 2005.
[337] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 181.

cultural events were encouraged and the Red Cross invited to hear concerts.[338] The incarcerated composer Viktor Ullmann and librettist Peter Kien wrote an allegorical chamber opera, *The Emperor of Atlantis, or Death's Refusal*, that depicts fascism's denigration of life, but after seeing the final rehearsal in 1944, an SS delegation quashed any further performance and dispatched most of the artists to their deaths in Auschwitz.[339] In Harlequin's lullaby, the child will wake in the morning to find that during the night happiness has been mown down and is withered away. The effort of resistance is made all the more poignant and necessary through the irony of the great odds against survival:

HARLEQUIN. Sleep, child, sleep,
I am an epitaph.
Your father has fallen in the war,
your mother stuffs her red mouth,
sleep, child, sleep.
It's late, child, it's late,
the man in the moon is making hay.
He mows down happiness,
leaving none behind,
and by the time the sun rises
it's all withered away!
So put on your little red dress,
and sing the song once more.[340]

At the close of *Hurricane Eye*, Crone sows the field of war with pumpkin seeds while orphan refugees gather around her. The Bee appears. He is Cassandra's lover, Galateo, a Bee, who has returned to the stage in magic form, for he died when he stung Cassandra's father in an attempt to stop him killing her. The Orphan Boy wants to kill the Bee to save them all from stings, but Crone will not let him. Now the bees are back, she will not have to pollinate the pumpkins with a paintbrush. An apple tree grows from the grave of Cassandra. Bee dances, undoing the idea of conquerors.

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[338] Paula Kennedy, "Viktor Ullmann: The Emperor of Atlantis, or Death's Refusal," (Booklet accompanying CD recording, *Ullmann: Der Kaiser von Atlantis*. Decca: Entartete Musik; Co-Production with RIAS. Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne., 1994) 11-12.
[339] Kennedy, "Ullmann," 12-13.
[340] Peter Kien (librettist), *The Emperor of Atlantis, or Death's Refusal, Op. 49*, comp. Viktor Ullmann, Composition and first rehearsal: Nazi Concentration Camp, Terezín, Czechoslovakia, 1943-1944, trans. Paula Kennedy, Decca: Entartete Musik; Co-Production with RIAS, Mainz: B. Schott's Söhne, 1994, 67.

Unsettling the dungeon – the staging of *Hurricane Eye*

This essay has reviewed the major challenges encountered in the writing of *Hurricane Eye* and the crafting decisions made in response, including the decision to eschew revenge and create an open ambiguous ending. Extreme violence, including rape, has been kept offstage and alternative stratagems devised in order to represent terror and potentially retain the power to confront an audience with what Grehan describes as "the call of the other."[341] In this coda I want to explore an allied aspect of the crafting of the play – the use of "contradictory juxtaposition" within its layered texts that may have the power to keep an audience unsettled throughout the performance.[342]

The play's setting in the Dungeon of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors in the Republic of Stygia, creates a space imagined as nowhere, somewhere and everywhere. Were *Hurricane Eye* to be performed in an ancient arena, the playing space could rouse echoes from the catacombs. Were *Hurricane Eye* to be produced, as might be more likely, within a contemporary "black box" theatre, the perimeter of the staged Dungeon could mirror the walls of its host. Whatever the venue, the performance is scripted as a game that plays with the structure, purpose and stability of theatre.

The Dungeon is itself a cognate of theatre. Within its walled, patrolled and ordered space, the Waxworks Figures of the Chorus perform spectacles for the relish and political advancement of Attercop, the President of Stygia. Others of the Chorus play the visiting "public", who are allowed to pay to watch, as long as they behave themselves. If they attempt to breach the border between entertainment and the "reality" of their assigned roles, the Riot Squad takes rapid action to restore order.

When members of the Chorus adopt their fake personae to rehearse a new show, "The Waterboarding of Cassandra" (scene 1), or to stage their repertory performances of "The Waxworks Museum of Horrors Stomp" (scene 9), and "The Guillotining of Charlotte Corday" (scene 12), the artifice is obvious.[343] In the play's

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[341] Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 59-60. Grehan cites Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Duquesne University Press: Pittsburgh, 1998) 6.
[342] The term "contradictory juxtaposition" is borrowed from Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 29.
[343] The concept of "artifice" used here draws upon Grehan's analysis of *Tragedia Endogonidia Br.#04* Grehan, *Performance, Ethics and Spectatorship* 59.

first scene, where “The Waterboarding of Cassandra” is being rehearsed, the Chorus coerces one of its number, Charlotte Corday, to transform herself into a fake Cassandra and be mock-tortured for opposing Stygia’s war on Naphthastan. Were it taking place in the actual world, waterboarding would cause the victim the pain and terror of almost drowning, but in its game of simulation the Chorus uses no water. Instead of liquid, a kitchen jug tips cascading blue ribbons over the mouth and nose of the fake Cassandra. The board to which she is strapped recalls a see-saw in a children’s playground. The plank tips her repeatedly up and down, taking her and her shrieks of pleasure and fear away from, and back into, the stream of pretty blue.

Each time Charlotte Corday is tipped backwards, the ribbons tickle and flick at her face and her neck, which must have been pretty once, but is now lurid with scars and stitches. Every day the blade of the guillotine severs her neck. Every night, as depicted in the play’s opening tableau, Crone cradles Charlotte in her lap while she sews the young woman’s head back onto her body, in readiness for her next performance as the celebrity princess of pretence.

When she is forced to play the fake Cassandra and jolted on a see-saw between a pretence of pain and a pretence of gleeful release, Charlotte Corday must also perform her own denial of suffering. Bound to the board in a mock denial of sadomasochistic longing, Charlotte performs her awareness of her own body under the gaze of the Captain and the Soldiers as they perform upon her their fantasy of torture. Aware, like Charlotte, of the erotic tow of her body and the stirrings of their own desire, the Captain and Soldiers force the motion of their fantasy upon her – up and down, up and down. Charlotte’s performance and vocalisations struggle to mask the depth of her suffering . Were her anxiety to be noticed by the others, it would compromise her success as the sexually attractive star of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors. The Dungeon permits pain only as denial, and “real” torture is not something that the President of the Republic of Stygia could possibly permit.

Charlotte Corday’s performance both co-opts, affronts and denies not only her own subjectivity, but the very existence of the “real” Cassandra – the classic speaker of truth to power who is being waterboarded out of sight behind the Dungeon wall. The denied torture suffered offstage performs itself onstage in traces that drift through the dungeon wall as the alluring gurgle of running water. Alone in marking the truth of

those sounds, Crone, who loves the “real” Cassandra as if she were her own daughter, keens onstage for her pain.

In the imagined and never stable enactments of *Hurricane Eye* that run in my head, Charlotte Corday on the grotesquely see-sawing instrument of fanciful torture performs cruelty and suffering as an erotic game of power where she swings between a longed for and painful pretence of sexual surrender and stardom. The waterboard is a metonym for the Dungeon. The see-sawing motion marks the earthen ground of Stygia’s subterranean cavern with its game of illusion and denial.

Charlotte Corday’s “unresolved contradictions”, (Ubersfeld)[344] are not the only ones that mark the earth. The unstable Dungeon ground beneath the bare feet of the performing Waxworks Figures takes its identity moment by moment from whatever and whoever is performed upon it. The always shifting identity of the performers is decapitated, stolen, masked, rehearsed, re-stitched, enacted, interrupted, strutted, fretted, waterboarded, sleep-walked, danced, cradled, sung, beautified, dressed, blessed, shod, burned-at-the-stake, electric-shocked, embraced, bludgeoned, drunk, tasered, betrayed, castrated, drugged, raped, renovated, suicided, mocked, copulated, murdered, leashed, crowned, devoured, stripped, wrestled, turned-into-wax and sown as pumpkin seeds into the ground.

One moment, the action concentrates the space into the literal narrowing that is the confinement and death of the torture chamber where Attercop orders the rape of Cassandra (scene 13). We are in a place bleached to a “nowhere”, whose screeches echo everywhere, for the traces of cruelty mark the ground and the psyche, like the blood that drips from the waiting guillotine.

Another moment and the action wields props of a putative solidity, such as the feigned innocence of a beauty salon chair that will whisk the “real” Cassandra away from the torture chamber and into the fakery of compliance (scene 16). For the climatic scene, the prosthetic sanctity of war’s banqueting table possesses the space, commanding it as “somewhere”, with the wealth and power to exclude all undesirable others (scene 27).

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[344] Ubersfeld, *Reading Theatre* 29.

Another moment and the fantasy of the perpetual exclusion of otherness is disturbed by the entry of the Bee who dances a methektic expansion. He traces space as if it were a familiar and personal “everywhere” – a ground that seems to dance with him in his love for Cassandra, the pumpkin flowers and the earth. For the Dungeon is not only the colonized world of a torture chamber. It is also a “psychic place”, in Tompkins’ sense of the term, where a “multivalent” subjectivity performs repressed or displaced or imagined counter identities.[345]

Whether the “contradictory juxtaposition” (Ubersfeld) of layers of psychic and spatial illusion, fantasy and denial that I have attempted to craft in *Hurricane Eye* will “unsettle” an audience I cannot tell, but I hope that they may.

[345] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 132.

Fourth Movement:
Subverting closure

– *finale sognando* [dreamlike conclusion] –

> An intellectual is always at odds with hard and fast categories because these tend to be the instruments used by the victors. [. . .]. Yes, to a certain extent the intellectual is always condemned to defeat. He's like Sisyphus in that regard. [. . .]. And yet in another, more profound sense the intellectual remains, despite all his defeats, undefeated, again like Sisyphus. [. . .]. His position, therefore, is ambiguous. [. . .]. Sometimes – paradoxically – I find myself slightly horrified at how bound I am by my undefeatedness and therefore by the extent to which I do not fit into the victors' histories.
>
> Václav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace*, 1990.[1]

The fourth and final movement of "Terror on Stage" is designated "*finale sognando* [dreamlike conclusion]". Two Australian tragedies of the new millennium have been interrogated in this thesis for their representations of a female protagonist who counters a physical and psychic terror being inflicted upon her by a male antagonist in a context where race, gender and space are patrolled categories inimical to her survival. Against that terror, Medea in Wesley Enoch's *Black Medea* (2005) and Clarice in Stephen Sewell's *The Gates of Egypt* (2007) pit a subjective and affective perception of self. For each of these women, her own subjectivity is vitally connected with a methektic landscape, one that gives each woman the power to pass through the borders of the space that traps her. Each draws her familiar space to the centre of the stage. I use the word "familiar" in an extended sense that embraces the uncanny and the psyche as well as kinship and community. Tompkins writes:

> Psychic place actively resists – even if temporarily – 'real' space. Only in theatre is such psychic place able to be performed and thus actualized, particularly in its relationship with the 'real' world of the narrative (whether collaborative or conflicting).[2]

In *Black Medea* and *Gates of Egypt*, the conflicted and conflicting 'real' world has power to map space as its own political and powerful landscape, one that I have called a landscape of annihilation. Although the power of this landscape brings tragedy in each play, the protagonist colours perceptions of that power and its

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[1] Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* 167.
[2] Tompkins, *Unsettling Space* 132.

sources by performing her landscape as the centre of the stage, however "temporarily". To use Phelan's terms, these are "moments of clarity". The clarity reveals what the monolith of power would conceal, before that moment itself must vanish and a new negotiation begin with the new relations that emerge.[3]

In Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, an apparent political need of the playwright "solves" the racist and sexist tensions within the protagonist's family and the wider Australian nation by melting to nothing the male aggression despite that aggression having been powerfully established in the opening scenes as the catalyst for Clarice's fatal journey to Egypt. Following Clarice's murder in Egypt, the implausible vanishing of the racist and sexist tensions that had rocked her family weakens the effectiveness of the play's critique of Australian politics.

In Enoch's *Black Medea*, Medea's sacrifice of her Child and of herself ruptures the patterns of the racist and sexist landscape that have kept them trapped and would have destroyed the boy's life through a replication of his father's alcoholism and violence. In the crafting of my own script, *Hurricane Eye*, my decision to make the work a tragedy in which the protagonist Cassandra would die was greatly influenced by the power of the tragedy of Medea as scripted by Enoch.

Where a neat, but fantasised, political closure, such as that represented in Sewell's *Gates of Egypt*, may send an audience away relieved, the false hope undermines the disruption that has "unsettled" (Tompkins) the audience earlier in the play. In her review of Enoch's *Black Medea*, Croggon brings together the play's refusal of false hope, its equal imperative not to make a "moral judgement", and its exposure of "the wider injustice" of the situation faced by Australian Indigenous people, whether living in traditional or urban cultures:

> It's a startlingly bleak expression of the conflict between traditional and urban indigenous cultures, offering no chink of hope. Perhaps what makes this story genuinely a tragedy is that there is no hint of moral judgement: Medea and Jason are trapped in the tension between conflicting imperatives which are both, on their own terms, in the right. The spiral towards catastrophe unravels from the wider injustice of their situation.[4]

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[3] Phelan, *Reading Theatre* 174.
[4] Croggon, rev. of Wesley Enoch, *Black Medea*.

My study of Enoch's *Black Medea* taught me that I could give myself permission to let go of the feather of false hope, such as the one that closes Sewell's *Gates of Egypt* when it drops to the floor of Australia after Clarice's death in Egypt. Having now written *Hurricane Eye* as a tragedy, my concluding task is to review the play's subversion of closure.

Hurricane Eye is crafted to reclaim nightmare and dream as performed metaphors that bear witness to the experience of body, heart and mind. The imagined performance, like the "undefeatedness" of Havel even in defeat, refuses to be *framed* (i.e. tricked and enclosed) by "the victors' histories" and their "hard and fast categories".[5]

Hurricane Eye opens with an tableau that draws inspiration from the paintings of Carravaggio. Its stillness performs an image that is both nightmare and dream. In the Dungeon of the Waxworks Museum of Horrors, Nemesis pauses as she hoists the dripping blade of the guillotine back up to the top. Her gaze, like that of the Chorus of Waxworks Figures is fixed on the central figure of Crone who sews the severed head of Charlotte Corday back on her body. The stillness forces history's onward rush of horror to pause. Except for the flicker of the flame in Simple's lantern as he lights the stitches on Charlotte's neck, nothing moves. With no movement to catch the eye and no spoken or written text to direct it, the eye must decide where to look and what to see. Drawn to the central figure of Crone by the lamplight and the gaze of Nemesis and the Chorus, the eye may detect within the victors' landscape of annihilation an act of perpetual healing of horror. It is a movement that must be imagined in the stillness of the tableau – the movement of Crone's big curved potato sack needle with its brightly coloured thread as she enacts the dream of the perpetual and painful re-stitching of a life that is daily being severed from itself.

In Caravaggio's *Doubting Thomas* the dynamic centre of the frame is given to the horror of acts of bodily invasion – the sceptical discipline probes with his finger the open wound the soldier's spear has already made in Christ's side.[6] In *Judith and Holofernes* a frowning Judith leans away as she carves the blade through the

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[5] Terms borrowed from Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* 167.
[6] Carravaggio, *Doubting Thomas*, c.1602-1603. Reproduced in Catherine Puglisi, Caravaggio (London: Phaidon Press, 1998, 2000) 218-9. The resemblance of Christ's wound to that of Prometheus was noted earlier.

agonised Holofernes' neck.[7] The opening tableau of *Hurricane Eye* shifts the instrument of horror – the guillotine – to the periphery and makes the central action the healing of horror. The movement that must be imagined in the stillness of the tableau is not the probing finger or the carving blade, but Crone's big curved potato sack needle as her painful stitches reconnect what once had been whole.

In Michelangelo's *Pietà*, the Madonna who cradles the dead body of her son in her lap is the utterly passive emitter of what could well be the western world's most famous, most revered and poignant expression of compassion and sorrow.[8] In the opening tableau of *Hurricane Eye*, Crone cradles Charlotte with a compassion that expresses itself by taking an action that even in stillness evokes movement, but it may nevertheless be possible for the figures of Crone and Charlotte to allude to Michelangelo's sculpture. Were the actress playing Crone to cradle Charlotte in her arms as the Madonna cradles Christ she would not have her right hand free to put the stitches in Charlotte's neck. But Crone could be left-handed – a subtle reminder of the presence of the distaff side and its sinister emotional and creative power. The weight of Charlotte's buttocks and legs would not need to be on Crone, but could be supported in some other way. The *Pietà* could be echoed in the relationship between their bodies, the flow of Crone's garment and the placing of their limbs – particularly the right arm of Charlotte that could hang, inert, waiting for reanimation, as does the right arm of Christ in Michelangelo's sculpture. I find myself wondering whether the right arm, the arm of power and of rational thought – the arm that smites and writes – needed not only to be stilled, but to be seen as stilled, for compassion to flow.

That stilled right arm has captured the imagination of other artists. As Catherine Puglisi points out, Caravaggio's painting *Entombment*, which depicts Christ being lifted into his burial chamber, alludes to that hanging right arm.[9] The arm is there too, dangling outside the bath, in David's painting of Charlotte Corday's victim, *Marat Assassiné*.[10]

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[7] Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Judith Beheading Holofernes*, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Rome, c. 1599, Oil on canvas. 145 x 195 cm. Reproduced in Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio* (London: Phaidon Press, 1998, 2000) 136-7.
[8] Michelangelo di Lodovico Buonarroti Simoni, *Pietà*, St. Peters, Rome, 1498-9, Marble, height 175 cm. Reproduced in Puglisi, *Caravaggio* 175.
[9] Catherine Puglisi, *Caravaggio*, (London: Phaidon Press, 1998, 2000) 175. Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, *Entombment*, Vatican Museums: Pinacoteca, Rome, 1602-4, Oil on canvas. 300 x 203 cm. Reproduced in Puglisi, *Caravaggio* 174.
[10] David, *Marat Assassiné*.

There is a crucial difference between the Madonna of the *Pietà* and the Crone of the (as yet only imagined) opening tableau of *Hurricane Eye*. Madonna's powers of healing are dependent upon the grace that is the heavenly answering of prayer. Crone's powers in *Hurricane Eye* are those of the activist, whose performed prayer is the action of the needle as it sews life together in the opening scene, and in the Epilogue, the action of both of her hands as she sows pumpkin seeds and plants an apple tree over Cassandra's grave. Like Barker's plays, which he sees as a kind of prayer, there is no closure for the action of sowing, however one spells the word, for its prayer is unanswerable except through continued effort. Or, to borrow Havel's vivid image of Sisyphean labour, the "undefeatedness" of Crone, even in the defeat that comes to her with the murder of Cassandra is an act of subversion.

The script for *Hurricane Eye* has resisted the temptation to allow an un-knotting where the former conquerors, President Attercop and General Tungsten, might perform a neat transformation of their lives, or an outpouring of grief and confession that would take them, blinded, to a satisfying and restorative exile and death. Instead, they enter a wrestling match with one another that pares them of belief. Naked, they are paralysed in a gaze of chaos, madness and grief. It is a different gaze from that of Prometheus and the eagle in Rubens' *Prometheus*, for it is no longer a gaze that worships tyranny and its perpetual wound.[11] Instead, as the brothers' gaze into the eye of the catastrophe of terror and war that each has inflicted on self and other, each grasps the other more tightly. In that gaze and that grasp each no longer wants to kill but to have the company of the other in the tumult of seeing what they have done. They become their own sculpture in wax.

If the actors who play Attercop and Tungsten were able to create a wrestling pose they could hold long enough, their tableau, could remain present during the Epilogue. The closing landscape of the heart does not pretend that the dream of reconnection that it performs is a romanticised parable of rescue. I do not want to create a theatre of wishful thinking that gives the passive spectator (Ubersfeld) the illusion of being lifted away from the ground of annihilation, while the categories of conquest either remain unchallenged. Nor did I want a catharsis whose purgation of conquerors and their spectators leaves the stage and the earth cleansed of torment, so that a new set of conquerors may claim its putative emptiness for their own.

The experience of the performed dream bears witness to a truth of the flesh (to return to Camus).[12] It is a truth of seeing rather than believing (to return to Barthes).[13] Freed to see itself for the first time, the experience of the wrestling bodies is a dream that recognises its coexistence with the nightmare that Jungians call the shadow side of the self (to return to Attwood).[14] The dream that bears witness to nightmare exposes to view the trauma caused by the racist, sexist and classed male aggression that is suppressed by the fantasy of Australian multicultural and feminist goodness (to return to Rutherford).[15] The fantasy of goodness is not confined to Australia but commanded by empire itself. The metaphoric explosion that destroys war's banquet in *Hurricane Eye* seeks a revolutionary border-crossing (to return to Müller).[16]

The end of *Hurricane Eye* performs a landscape of the heart, but the presence of the guillotine, the wrestling figures turned to wax, the overturned banqueting table and its gruesome meal, and the bloodied effigy of the child soldier with which Cassandra washed the walls of the Dungeon persist. When Crone and the children plant new life they subvert the landscape of annihilation (echoing the action of Cropper at the end of Barker's *Victory*).[17] Their action represents their "undefeatedness" even in defeat (Havel). While Petal wrestles to remove the conqueror's gift, the red shoes whose torturous heels prevent her from running, Bee dances, undoing the idea of conquerors.

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[11] Rubens and Snyders, *Prometheus Bound*.
[12] Camus, trans. Felman, *Le Témoin de la liberté* [Freedom's witness]", cited in Felman, "Camus' *The Plague*," *Testimony* 108-9.
[13] Barthes, *Mythologies* 14. Personal translation.
[14] Atwood, *Payback* 150.
[15] Rutherford, *Gauche Intruder* 11.
[16] Interview with Müller, *Der Spiegel*, 9 May 1983: 200. Quoted in part and trans. by Weber, "Pressure of Experience," *Hamletmachine* 14.
[17] Barker, *Victory* 85.

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