

A DRAMATIST'S INTENT :
PERFORMATIVITY, RELATIONALITY & *BEING*

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ABSTRACT

Within the limitations of this document, written as supplement to the three portfolio texts developed in New York between 2007 and 2013 (*Desire Lines*, *Troyanne* and *A / The Biography of a Thing*), I have striven to achieve three things. Firstly, to contextualise the self (I) as dramatist in relation to the portfolio texts. Secondly, to contextualise the practice of Play Reading (as phenomenon), the dominant development strategy of the American (US) theatre ecology, and to chart my interest in that strategy to the point that it came to dominate my creative inquiry: for the reflexive text, *A / The Biography of a Thing* is a text about a play reading of *Troyanne* and the development of *Troyanne* through Play Reading processes. Thirdly, arising out of those development processes, I have, within the contextualising texts, identified key events that illustrate the performative intent and ideal spectatorship of the work resulting in a mode of enactment / reception I shall term *Being*. Indeed, this document could be considered in part a manifesto of *Being* necessitated by those who have insisted upon ‘normal directorial rights’ of my texts, and in so doing, have chosen to ignore authorial intent. This document is therefore both a revision of sorts and a blueprint for those who would engage both with the portfolio texts and the I dramaturgical meta-project within which the portfolio texts take their place.

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Candidate declaration

This is to certify that, except where specific reference is made, the work described in this thesis is the result of my own research. Neither this thesis, nor any part of it, has been presented, or is currently submitted, in candidature for any other award at this or any other University.

Signed

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'H. S. S.', written over a dotted line.

Candidate

Date

7. i . 2021

1.1. Introduction

‘One knows only *one* life, *one’s* own’

*August Strindberg*¹

I was sitting with the New York theatre director, Daniella Topol in a deli around 59th and 7th. We were discussing *Desire Lines*, the first performance text in the accompanying portfolio. It had been developed with the support of the Lark Play Development Center (known as The Lark) and had recently received its second public reading at The Lark’s old Play Reading room at 939 8th Ave. The development of that text had proved revelatory for, prior to that process, I had never participated in a sustained programme of text development without the promise of full production.

One must know that I come from Wales, a country that possessed, in the latter part of the twentieth century (during which I found my dramatic voice), a nascent theatre culture in which texts were written to be staged. They evolved pragmatically out of the agency of the rehearsal room and looming first nights rather than through protracted workshop processes that offered little prospect of production. In an article entitled, ‘Dramatic Entrapment in Reading Land’, a short critique of Play Reading, published in *Contemporary Theatre Review*, I wrote, ‘Play development in Wales has been a [...] process of intervention – a form of ‘tough love’ where ‘production is king’ (Rowlands 2011, 88). The culture of stage and be damned was, in part due to the fact that Welsh theatre in English – an ugly term, though it avoids the uglier and reductive epithet, Anglo-Welsh² – according to Simon Baker, ‘all but disappeared’ in the 1960s and 1970s (Baker 2007, 10). Taking up this line, Carl Tighe, in ‘Theatre (or

¹ Strindberg, August *Samalde Sgriffter 18*. Cited in Dahlstrom, C.E. (1930) *Strindberg’s Dramatic Expressionism* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor), 99. Sourced, Szondi, Peter (1987) *Theory of the Modern Drama*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 23

² For, as Homi K. Bhabha teaches us in *The Location of Culture* ‘to be Anglicised is *emphatically* not to be English,’ hence of secondary order [emphasis in the original] (2004, 125).

not) in Wales,' suggests a reason for this paucity. In comparing theatrical activity in both nation tongues, he posits that Welsh theatre in English was a poor relation to Welsh language theatre (largely sustained by a buoyant amateur scene) on three counts: owing to its marginality (from the English speaking metropolitan centres), audience apathy and the experience effect i.e. the lack of indigenous activity prior to the theatre investment programmes of the 1970s (Tighe 1986, 239-260) in Baker 2007, 10 - 11).³ Consequently, without a tradition, by the 1980s, Welsh theatre in English did not generate a critical mass of play texts that necessitated the implementation of Play Reading strategies. Whilst some of the works generated were raw and probably would have benefitted from further development, quality was almost of secondary concern. Of primacy was the performative act of voicing. For theatre in Wales in the inter-referenda years 1979 – 1997 (the two decades between the negative vote for devolution in 1979 and the positive vote for devolution in 1997) was radicalized, and the Welsh theatrical voice (in both nation tongues) was a means to consolidate communal identity during a period of sustained identity erosion.⁴ As Roger Owen informs us: 'Due to the relative democratic deficit, it was through cultural acts rather than political means that the Welsh [...] were universally identified as a group' [my translation] (Owen 2005, 1).⁵ Aleks Sierz was of the opinion that, by the nineties, state-of-the-nation and issue plays had fallen out of favour in Britain due to a 'crisis in liberal imagination,' out of which emerged theatrical brutalism (Sierz 2001, 237-238). However, I do not recall such a crisis of imagination in Wales. Politics might have ceded to the ethical upon the metropolitan stage, but it had not done so in the margins, and much of Welsh theatre, in both Welsh and English, remained oppositional. As the theatre

³ See also 'Chronology of Theatre in Wales' (Taylor, A-M, 1997, 174-175).

⁴ From a Community Arts perspective, Nick Clements wrote: 'The work in the early 1980s had been focused on preserving communities [...] by the 1990s, as Margaret Thatcher and her neo-Conservative government had hoped, community had radically altered if not disappeared, and our job was to try and recreate or invigorate those communities' (Clements 2016, 110) On a personal note, I assisted the Pioneers in a performance art event that took place at The Sherman Theatre, August 1982 : the summer after they had newly graduated from the Howard Gardens Arts College, Cardiff and immediately prior to enrolling as a drama student at The Welsh College of Music and Drama the following month. It was a formative event.

⁵ Whilst Owen's volume concentrates on Welsh language theatre, his thesis holds true for theatre activity in both nation tongues during that period.

maker, Mike Pearson, the director of the celebrated physical theatre company, Brith Gof, noted at the time, ‘things – identities – may actually be at stake here’ (Pearson 1997, 93). When things were a stake, things were written and staged in order to stake a claim to identity in the margins.⁶

I am product of that oppositional culture; a dramatist whose works interrogate the spirit of a nation; one that came into being following the performative utterance of the affirmative ‘Yes’ for Wales.⁷ For, on the 18th of September 1997 the Welsh people voted, by a slim margin, for the creation of a National Assembly; its first quasi-government for six hundred years. Adopting Slavoj Žižek’s definition, devolution was an event that proved to be ‘a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage it’ (Žižek 2009, 10).⁸ It was therefore as a devolutionary dramatist, if I may claim that epithet, that ‘I’ went to New York to participate in a development process under the aegis of The Lark. Had an alternative self undertaken a series of residencies there; one that had come into being following a second negative devolution referendum in 1997 (a result that would truly have written ‘*finis*’ to two thousand years of history),⁹ or one writing in anticipation of a future referendum, then that self

⁶ In the 1979 devolution referendum the Welsh voted four to one against devolution. However, after two decades of Thatcherism, on September the 18th 1997, six thousand Welsh people, in an act of astounding imagination given the reluctance of the Welsh people to imagine anything but their obeisance to the dominant mythology, tipped the balance. Devolution became fact and ‘initiated a process’ - the realisation of the historian Gwyn Alf Williams’s ambition for the nation - one ‘of continuous and dialectical historical development, in which human mind and human will interact with objective reality.’ (Williams, G.A. 1982, 200).

⁷ Seven out of the ten full length texts written between 1996 (when a second referendum became a prospect) and the present day are anchored to devolution in some way.

⁸ Žižek defines an event, in its purest and most minimal form, as ‘something shocking, out of joint, that appears to happen all of a sudden and interrupts the usual flow of things; something that emerges seemingly out of nowhere without discernible causes, an appearance without solid being as its foundation’; a material reframing (2009, 2). However, in juxtaposing the mediaeval concept of impetus (divine motion) with the modern concept of inertia (godless stasis), Žižek redefines an event, at its most elementary, as ‘not something that occurs within the world, but a change of the very frame through which we perceive the world and engage in it’; an immaterial reframing (Žižek 2009, 10). In *Blink*, the main protagonist, Si states, ‘I reckon the big moments, the important things that shape our lives could probably be squashed into a day. No; less than a day -a few hours. No, less than that even; just a few minutes. A few poxy minutes out of a whole life. All those bits of memory, like photograph’s on the mantle-piece. Never quite sure if they ever happened, always shagged from their effect’ (Rowlands 2008, 10)

⁹ After the failure of the first referendum, the historian Gwyn Alf Williams wrote, ‘the Welsh electorate in 1979 wrote *finis* to nearly two thousand years of Welsh history [...] they may, in the process have warranted the death of Wales itself’ (Williams, G.A. 1985, 295).

would have produced radically different works from those generated by the self who bridged the creation of the National Assembly for Wales in 1997.¹⁰

*

The American theatre lays claim to being a ‘writer’s theatre.’ However, as essayist Todd London rightly points out in his seminal critique of the effect of corporatisation upon American theatre, *Outrageous Fortune: The Life and Times of the American Play*, the power has been taken away from the writer and now resides within an institutional theatre that is increasingly serviced by the writer rather than serving the writer’s needs and vision; for, regardless of status, theatres now practice ‘bottom line thinking’ (London 2009, 4).

Indeed, the paradox of American theatre is that whilst it is reliant upon the writer’s vision (and prides itself on being the writer’s champion), it diminishes the writer, as London eloquently informs us in his sustained critique of the top-heavy ecology. This aspect was evinced in a keynote address delivered by Howard Shalwitz (director of Woolly Mammoth Theatre Co., Washington D.C.), in which he related an anecdote regarding a new play ‘convening’ when three or four playwrights ‘spoke about how helpful it is when theatres give them a great deal of control over the choice of their director and other collaborating artists [...] and they used this word “control” several times.’¹¹ Conceding their point, his retort to those playwrights that sought ‘control’ was that directors and designers could also ‘talk about their struggles to find a creative vision to lift up the play, but having to compromise to suit the needs of playwrights and actors’ (Shalwitz 2015, 16-17). Whilst his rationale was that collaboration produces ‘richness’, one can detect within his rhetoric the pedagogic privilege of the institutional director who ‘lifts up the play’ (or as London would term it, decrying the disrespect for dramatists in the corporate American theatre ecology, ‘fixes it’). Hence the institution justifies its own function and diminishes the writer’s vision.

¹⁰ On May 6th 2020, the Welsh Assembly was re-named Senedd Cymru / Welsh Parliament.

¹¹ The convening, ‘From Scarcity to Abundance’ (2011) was hosted by Arena Stage: <https://stage-directions.com/all/news/theatre-buzz/arena-stage-hosts-newplay-festival-and-convening-on-new-play-development/>

1.2. Cultural Context

Harold Clurman was once asked “Why don’t we have more good plays?” To which he replied, “Why don’t you ask why we don’t have more bad plays, because if you have more bad plays, you’ll have more good plays, because that feeds the ground. That’s the manure that makes things grow” (qtd. London 2009, 36). Whilst manure makes things grow, it also necessitates a disposal strategy. We learn from London that the practice of Play Reading began in the United States in the 1980s. Prior to that, in the era of the director, Joseph Papp, the academic, Herbert Blau and the dramatist, Sam Shepard, plays were thrown onto the Off-Broadway stages, ‘hot out of the type-writer’ (96).¹² In the 1960s and 1970s production *was* development; as it was in my formative years in Wales. The need for elaborate strategies that would subsequently serve to remove the American dramatist from the stage had yet to arise. That need, London informs us, only came about both with the consolidation of the not-for-profit theatre sector and the growth in MFA programmes that served to churn out dramatists by their thousands; most saddled with huge debts and little prospect of ever repaying them (London 2013, 14).¹³ The sudden glut of texts generated needed to be processed. Consequently, a filtering tier of dramaturges and literary managers began to be employed by the new not-for-profit institutions, as ‘buffer zones’ between the ever burgeoning mass of creative individuals that possessed little, if any health benefits but unlimited imagination, and the risk averse artistic directors that possessed health benefits but an imagination limited by the institutional culture they served (London 2009, 100-101). As London succinctly puts it, ‘Security, reinforces timidity.’ Thus evolved a bipolar model of American theatre where the historic umbilical between producer and playwright was cut (34-37). Having placed the dramatist outside

¹² For a brief overview of Joseph Papp’s artistic leadership of the New York Shakespeare Festival and The Public see London (2009, 7-10). London also writes eloquently on this in ‘What’s Past is Prologue: On Change and Mourning in the American Theatre’ (London 2013, 45-47).

¹³ In ‘Get a Real Degree’ (London Review of Books, September 23, 2010) Elif Batuman reviews Marc McGurl’s *The Programme Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing*. McGurl, we are informed, notes that the Programme (that came into being post GI Bill 1945), initiated a proliferation of creative writing MFA courses in American universities. It resulted in ‘a manifestation of ‘the American Dream of perfect self-expression’. In questioning McGurl’s analysis, vis a vis the ethos and efficacy of The Programme, Batuman writes: ‘The creative writing programme is not one of the evils of the world. It’s a successful, self-sufficient economy, making teachers, students and university administrators happy.’ Batuman concludes, when ‘great literature’ is replaced by ‘excellent fiction’, that’s the real betrayal of higher education.’

the institution and having created ‘ferocious gatekeeping’ as Rob Urbinati termed it, to regulate entry (Urbinati 2016, 186), Play Reading, as umbrella term for all manner of workshop practices, became what it is today, a manure shoveler that is, at best, the sine qua non route to production and at worst, ‘development hell’ where the play is always something to ‘fix,’ as London notes, through the intervention of institutional mandarins that are the arbiters of theatrical taste.¹⁴ Forty years on, where America and England led – for both, as noted by James Grieve in ‘Dramatic Entrapment in Reading Land’ have ‘parallel arcs of activity,’¹⁵ – Wales was to follow with its own workshop strategies (Rowlands 2011, 89). However, by the time development had become prevalent in Wales, I had forged a career of sorts without having once been subject to development strategies.

*

Between 1990 and 2000, serial Arts Council Wales project grants enabled me to experiment and stage texts without any prior development processes. I reflected upon this privilege in conversation with the theatre historian, Hazel Walford Davies. I acknowledged that I had been ‘immensely lucky’ to have gathered a company around me dedicated to realising my vision and for the work to have been consistently funded (Davies 2005, 231). My privilege was to learn on my feet; to mature as a writer through pragmatic realisation of vision and direct engagement with my audience. In Theatr y Byd, the project company I co-founded, I built a home.¹⁶ Without that home I would not have become the writer I am today, a product of the culture of trust that enabled me. Todd London, in his collection of essays *The Importance of Staying Earnest*,

¹⁴ ‘Theatres often act as though their job is to fix writers’ broken plays, even when those plays have already been produced’ (London 2009, 138).

¹⁵ When I interviewed Grieve (for the *Contemporary Theatre Review* article), he was co-Artistic Director of Paines Plough: “In the last few years, we have seen a ‘glut’ of new plays, but more does not necessarily mean better quality. More rehearsed readings have taken place as a product of this ‘glut’. But like New York, what we have created is a load of unproduced playwrights who have never had a full production. Culturally, we have slipped into a cycle of playwright development with rehearsed reading at its centre” (Rowlands 2011, 89).

¹⁶ For a production history of Theatr y Byd see (Rowlands 1999, 9-14 & 238-239). I believe that only two other dramatists in the 1990s were in receipt of serial grants from the Welsh Arts Council (now Arts Council Wales) to realise their works through self-generated vehicles; Ed Thomas and his well documented company, Y Cwmni (The Company) and Sera Moore Williams with her theatre company, Y Gymraes [The Welsh Woman] (Williams, S.M. 2020, 31).

asks how would the emerging O'Neill have fared in today's director led theatre where playwrights are 'held at bay'? Where would O'Neill's early years of 'explosive experimentation' have taken place without the support of Provincetown where, it was stated in the Player's constitution, that 'the resources of the theatre [...] shall be placed at the disposal of the author?' He adds, 'every writer must find her theatre' and her voice within it (London 2013, 35-37). O'Neill found Provincetown, I founded Theatre by Byd [Theatre of the World] within which I found my voice and a theatrical grammar. Regarding the quality of that voice, the influential Guardian theatre critic, David Adams, who championed pre and post-devolutionary Welsh theatre, remarked of my 'writerly' texts that they can be seen 'as an example of a genre of writing that tries to mediate cultural nationalism through a specific literary and theatrical style' (Rowlands 1999, 252). Writing in a syncreticised English was, and remains an attempt to bridge the linguistic schism that divides the Welsh people and to dignify the historically derided Welsh dialect of English self-deprecatingly termed Wenglish. Such appropriation of the oppressor's tongue was a political act separate to, but in parallel with the enactment of an evolving formalism, that I shall term *Being*, for which the contextualising essays are, in part, a manifesto.

It is well documented that the non-nationalist, Samuel Beckett famously turned away from his native language in 1945 for aesthetic gain. Beckett's criticism of English (unburdened as he was of the indigenous Irish language, though fluent in the 'great' languages of European literature) was that, as a literary lexicon, English had been 'abstracted to death' (Beckett 1961 [1929], 10).¹⁷ Accepting his critique, one is left with a choice, on both political and aesthetic grounds, either to reject the English language, as he did for a period, or undermine it with its very excess. In pursuit of 'an autonomous theatrical form, freed from the imperatives of representation' (Casanova 2020, 105), Beckett, the modernist, in turning to French, 'sought a means of boring

¹⁷ Beckett made this comment in 'Dante...Bruno... Vico... Joyce', his first published text (contained within *Our Exagmination Round his Factifications for Incamination of Work in Progress* (1929)), penned in defence of Joyce's syncreticised English that served to disassociate Joycean non-nationalism from Yeatsian nationalism and thereby placing the Irish exile (nicknamed the 'Dante of Dublin' in his youth), alongside his idol, the historic exile, Dante (qtd. Casanova 2020, 46-49).

holes in the silence, seeking not the apotheosis of the word favoured by Joyce, but rather something of the opposite. Beckett himself, in *Disjecta*, termed this, a “literature of the unword” (qtd. Gontarski 2018, 25). Though my formalism is quasi-Beckettian (as I shall detail), my rhapsody has been Joycean with bifurcated purpose. Firstly, in the service of ontological inquiry, where lexical superfluity steers its own ‘noisy overthrow’ of meaning that, according to Artaud in his ‘Theatre of Cruelty (First Manifesto)’, makes a ‘metaphysics out of a spoken language’ (Artaud 1958, 46 in West 2010, 54). And secondly, pace Joyce, as a means to appropriate the coloniser’s language through syncretisation, a conscious and well-rehearsed post-colonial strategy that abrogates the colonist’s culture, thereby disempowering it in the service of national discourse.

In *The World Republic of Letters*, Pascale Casanova, citing Jean Armouche, terms syncretists ‘thieves of fire’ (Casanova 2004, 262-263); their acts are Promethean, and arguably, a necessary theft in any post-colonial entity. Pertinent to this, Adams, in considering the linguistic play within my work, writes that, I had been taught, as had Caliban, an oppressor’s tongue, ‘and my profit on’t / Is, I know how to curse’ (Rowlands 1999, 253-254).¹⁸ A Caliban ability allows one to make language articulate a different authority – in my case, the authority of the ongoing process of devolution: the process of identity re-forging in a post-colonial entity. Much has been made, as the Welsh dramatist, Wyn Mason informs us, of the relationship between Prospero (as coloniser) and Caliban (as dehumanised colonised entity) upon the post-colonial stages of the world: ‘[O]f Shakespeare’s plays, it is *The Tempest* that has been adapted most for canonical counter-discourse’ (Mason 2020, 34). One of the historic reasons for this, as Mason demonstrates is the impact Octave Mannoni’s volume, *Psychologie de la Colonisation* (1950) (*Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization*) had amongst post-colonial

¹⁸ Note however that Gayatri Spivak, citing Roberto Fernandez Retmar’s ‘Caliban: Notes Towards Discussion of Culture in America’ (*The Massachusetts Review*, 15:1/2, 1974, 7-72), cautions post-colonials against adopting the role of the deformed Caliban, that ‘rude and unconquerable master of the island.’ One should rather play the role of Ariel, a child of the air (an intellectual) thereby avoiding further Orientalisation, through the ‘effacing of the “native” and stepping forth as “the real Caliban”’ (Spivak 2000, 118). However, both remain colonised entities, as Mason points out in relation to Aimé Césaire’s production of *Une Tempête* (1969). Whilst Caliban was a Malcolm X of sorts, Ariel was a Martin Luther King Jr. (2020, 34).

peoples. From the 1950s on, interpretations of *The Tempest* – often demonstrating Mannoni’s influence – were frequently staged, as part of national cultural strategies of resistance / re-education. For it is well documented that linguistic and cultural dominance were cornerstones of colonial order. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o wrote eloquently upon this theme in *Decolonising the Mind* (Ngũgĩ 2005, 16 -20). Syncretisation of colonial tongues by post-colonial peoples can therefore be considered Calibaneque acts of rebellion. For, as Gilbert and Tompkins note in *Post-Colonial Drama*, language ‘functions as a basic medium through which meaning is filtered, but it also acts as a cultural and political system that has meaning in itself’. Thereby, syncretisation can be part of a broader strategy to establish an oppositional system to historic cultural and linguistic colonisation. The post-colonial stage can act as a ‘principal arena for the enunciation of such a system’ (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 226). My enacted texts, have therefore been, in part, staged fireworks and curses. In toto, the systematic performative acts of a Caliban finding his voice upon the stages of a devolved (post-colonial) Wales.

Before proceeding, I acknowledge that claiming the status of post-colonial for Wales is problematic. Chris Williams, in his essay, ‘Problematizing Wales: An Exploration in Historiography and Postcoloniality’ states that such a claim would be ‘self indulgent and potentially offensive’ as the Welsh also profited from the British Empire; the oppressed turned oppressors in turn (Williams 2005, 10). That paradox lies at the heart of Mason’s essay, in which he discusses my devolutionary text, *Pacific* (2000) which deals precisely with the ‘*golwg deublyg*’, (double visioning, as Mason terms it) of Welsh identity. *Pacific* is a biographic monodrama about the life of Dr David Samwell (1751-1798), ship's surgeon on the Discovery – whose eye witness account of the death of Captain Cook on Hawaii in 1779 was, in its day, considered definitive – and who was also a Welsh Jacobin and close comrade of Iolo Morganwg, the radical architect of Welsh identity.¹⁹ In dismissing any claim to Wales as a post-colonial entity, Williams

¹⁹ Both the Welsh language version *Môr Tawel* and the English language version, *Pacific* were published (limited run) by Byd Books in 2000. The Welsh language version was subsequently re-published within a volume of collected monologues *Llais Un yn Llefain* (Rowlands 2002, 93-118).

suggests that Wales is, in fact, post-Imperial (whilst also, being simultaneously post-industrial and post devolutionary). However, in opposition to Williams' stance and, in a chapter contained within the same volume, Richard Wyn Jones declares: 'Welsh devolution is national devolution [...] It is the animating potential of a Welsh national discourse that gives devolved Wales the potential to be different. Wales may be walking backwards pace Walter Benjamin, towards a much more conventional post-colonial future – a national future' (Jones 2005, 36). In siding with Jones, I am not (and neither is he) comparing recent Welsh history to that of Africa, India or other nations brutalised, orientalist and fetishised by the European imperial project. And I am certainly not excusing the profiteering of the Welsh from the British Empire. Rather, it is through drawing upon Gilbert and Tompkins, that I claim (as would Jones) the privilege of post-colonial discourse:

[It] is frequently misunderstood as a temporal concept meaning the time after colonisation has ceased or the time following the politically determined Independence Day on which a country breaks away from its governance by another state. Not a naive teleological sequence which supersedes colonialism, post-colonialism is rather an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. Colonialism is insidious; it invades far more than political chambers and extends well beyond independence celebrations. It effects language, education, religion, artistic sensibilities and increasingly popular culture. (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 2)²⁰

The Welsh people have endured 'insidious' cultural colonisation for centuries, even post-devolution, ensuring the Welsh continue to nurture a 'characteristic series of sub-national deformities, or neuroses,' as Tom Nairn termed them (Nairn 1981, 129), re-

²⁰ Kirsti Bohata, in *Postcolonialism Revisited: Writing Wales in English*, asserts that there are countries such as Wales, 'whose early histories include conquest and colonization prior to the period traditionally addressed by postcolonialism, and whose subjugation or marginalization may indeed continue right through and beyond the eras of overseas mercantilism, colonization and imperialism. In these cases we find a long history of cultural assimilation and/or political co-option, yet also a persistent, self-defined sense of cultural difference and, later, of nationhood' (Bohata 2004, 3).

sulting in their overdetermination to the detriment of their self-determination.²¹

Gilbert and Tompkins add, 'A theory of post-colonialism must, then respond to more than the merely chronological construction of post-independence and to more than the discursive experience of colonialism' (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 2). It is in that spirit that I write my devolutionary texts that interrogate aspects of psycho-colonialism that corrupt the integrity of post-devolutionary Wales, ensuring that it remains, as Nairn would argue, colonised in mind beyond the material event of devolution.

To return to Beckett, contrary to his 'aporetic art', inherited as it was from the early-twentieth century Modernists where both medium and meaning were in symbiosis (Gontarski 2018, 20), the stylistic 'intention' of my work, whilst also formalistic, is not as hermetic as the Beckettian model, where form and content exist in symbiosis. For whilst the content within my work, carries a political discourse, the intended form of my work carries an ontological inquiry. However, I would argue that form and content are not wholly contradictory. For both post-colonial discourse and ontological inquiry are exercises in identity formation. *Being* is the dramatisation of the self in split subjective positions; *I* in relation to *the* Other in the first subjective position (the ontological inquiry) and the self, *I* in relation to *an* Other in the second subjective position (the political). The latter relationship is, as Paul John Eakin terms it, one of 'relational identity', or 'relationality of identity' or, put simply, 'relationality.'²² Eakin, citing the writing of Mary Mason, informs us that this is a term of feminist pedigree, one that challenges the male notion of the subjective self in the model of patriarchal autonomous autobiography: 'Correcting the gender bias, [Mason] proposed an alternative model for women: identity through *relation*.' [My emphasis]²³ However, as Eakin

²¹ Here, I appropriate Jean-Paul Sartre's formula in *Anti-Semite and Jew* as discussed by Frantz Fanon: 'They [the Jews] have allowed themselves to be poisoned by the stereotype that others have of them, and they live in fear that their acts will correspond to this stereotype ... We may say that their conduct is perpetually overdetermined from the inside' qtd. Fanon 2008, 87).

²² Note, Eakin also employs the terms 'relational identities' (Eakin 2004, 8) and 'relationality of identity' (Eakin 1999, 44). Johannes Fabian in *Time and the Other* notes that Emile Benveniste termed this the 'correlation of subjectivity' vis a vis the relationality of first and second person. (Benveniste 1971 [1956] qtd. Fabian 2014, 85).

²³ Mason, Mary G. *The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers*. in Olney, J. (1980) *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princetown University Press: 207 - 208

states (in direct relation to the inadequacies of patriarchal autonomous autobiography, but one can broaden the scope), ‘men are also structured by patriarchal ideology’ and need to reclaim their own sense of relationality i.e. all is gendered by hegemonic subjectivity (sic, Eakin 1999: 47 - 49). Here, one could posit an intersectionality between feminist and post-colonial theory vis a vis the gendering of any colonised entity through objectification (the scopophilic gaze): the dramatic trope of the representation of a colonised entity as feminine or the depiction of the female as metaphor for colonised nation is a well rehearsed post-colonial strategy (Gilbert and Tompkins 1996, 232 - 233). The post-colonial project could therefore be framed as the re-gendering of a once feminised entity and its people (of both the represented exterior / landscape and the unrepresentable interior / psyche) through a new relationality whilst eschewing the perpetuation of any neo-patriarchal hegemony within any post-colonial entity. The theme underscores much of my devolutionary dramas, but lies outside the remit of this short contextualising text.

Berthold Schoene in *The Edinburgh Companion to Scottish Literature*, makes a case for the relational theory of the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray as the practical basis of any future sense of Scotland as nation (and I would claim it as a practical basis for any future sense of Wales). The post-Cartesian Macmurray ‘insists we view the self not an isolated individual [but as] a *person*, and that personal existence is *constituted* by the relations of persons.’ To Macmurray, writing in *The Self as Agent* (1969), the ultimate aim is to ‘set *man* firmly in the world which he knows, and to restore *him* to his proper existence as a community of persons in relation’ [my italics, Macmurray being a man of his time] (qtd. Schoene 2007, 11). It is in the relationality of persons and of nations, that the parallel inquiry runs: What am *I*? / What is Wales?, Who am *I*? /

Who is Welsh?, When will *I be?* (When will Wales be?)²⁴ Hence, both form and content are symbiotic. And it is to relationality that I shall return when considering the ethical issues arising out the acts of ‘life theft’ that, to varying degrees, generated all three texts written in New York.

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Upon leaving Theatr y Byd in 1999/2000, in order to troubleshoot the northern community theatre company, Bara Caws on behalf of Arts Council Wales (as Llyr Titus records in *Dathlu'r Deugain* - a publication to mark the 40th anniversary of Bara Caws; an anniversary it very nearly did not celebrate - Titus 2017, 90), I made a conscious decision to step away from realising my own vision in order to dedicate myself to realising the visions of others, as I noted in conversation with Hazel Walford Davies (Davies 2005, 243). Between 2000 and 2007 I led three Welsh language theatre companies: Bara Caws, Cwmni Theatr Gwynedd and Llwyfan Gogledd Cymru.²⁵ Whilst artistic director of each in turn, I remained true to the Provincetown commitment, to create a home for playwrights on playwrights’ terms. ‘Dramatic entrapment in reading land’ (as I coined it, being ‘development hell’) was neither something I would wish for myself nor impose upon others. It was therefore as an exponent of pragmatic ‘tough love’ that I took up the offer of a sabbatical at The Lark in 2007

²⁴ Here the reference is to pithy questions asked of the existential nature of Wales by several authors. *When was Wales?* was the title of Gwyn Alf Williams’ 1985 seminal history of the small reluctant nation. The title was originally a chapter title in an earlier volume, *The Welsh in Their History*, within which Williams wrote: ‘To the question when was Wales, it is possible to return several answers. [...] Wales never was. It is equally possible to say, with equal truth within equally narrow limits, that Wales always was’ (Williams 1982, 200). David Adams in *Stage Welsh* asked searchingly, ‘Where was Wales?’, arguing that ‘Welshness is so much a product of English oppression that it can have no true meaning’ (Adams 1996, 33). Dai Smith’s volume upon the nation was ambiguously and tautologically titled, *Wales! Wales?* (1984). The question ‘When will Wales be?’ was countered by the Herderian academic, Simon Brooks, who, in *Why Wales Never Was: The Failure of Welsh Nationalism* (2017) (a translation of *Pam na Fu Cymru*) – asserts that Wales lost its opportunity to realise its independence during the *sattelzeit* by embracing the British Imperial project to the detriment of its language and culture; the Herderian unifying factor.

²⁵ During that period, I wrote two full length texts: *Butterfly* (for Theatr y Byd. Dir. Chris Morgan. Parthian Books (2006)) and *Blink* (FAB Theatre in collaboration with The Torch Theatre. Dir. Steve Fisher. Parthian Books (2008)). Following a domestic tour, *Blink* was presented at 59E59 as part of the Brits Off Broadway festival in 2007. Its three-week run in New York coincided with my first residency at The Lark.

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The Lark, founded in 1994, is one of a select group of non-producing lab companies in the American theatre ecology, including The Playwrights' Center in Minneapolis, Z Space Studio in San Francisco and New Dramatists in New York, that dedicate themselves purely to play development (Play Reading) in its various forms (London 2009, 94 & 15-18).²⁶ Though The Lark began as a production company, within a year, we are told, it chose to specialise in workshop practices. Over time it has positioned itself as a bridging company; an enabler that also strives, in certain ways, to be a matchmaker; the lost link between dramatist and producer (lost in the corporatisation of American theatre). In the highly competitive New York theatre ecology, where resources are fought over, its unique remit makes it attractive to backers as the company's parameters of operation are clearly defined. By distancing itself from the constraints of the market place that dictate product, it works from the oppositional standpoint, 'process as product' with the playwright central to that benign and supportive process. John Clinton Eisner, its founding Artistic Director, described the The Lark as 'a creative incubator and a place where playwrights follow their own idiosyncratic lights, write courageously about what matters to them, take risks, form lasting collaborations built on respect and trust and establish influential careers.'²⁷ The Lark serves the need of the larger theatre community by developing writers and their texts for others to fully realise; thus the New York Lark soars solely by proxy. The model was alien to this writer who, as stated, espoused the value of production as development. Initial participation in the Play Reading process at the The Lark was unsatisfactory, as that process seemed unnecessarily tentative and without goal; it ran counter to instinctive praxis. It must be noted however, that my frustration stemmed from my ignorance at the time of the broader theatre ecology out of which The Lark had emerged as an oppositional force: as outlined by Eisner in his blog post *The Lark I Know and Love*.

²⁶ Todd London served as the Artistic Director of New Dramatists from 1996 – 2014.

²⁷<https://www.larktheatre.org/blog/lark-i-know-and-love/>

Khan and Breed, in *Scriptwork: A Director's Approach to New Play Development* (1995) distinguish between developmental rehearsal and production orientated rehearsal; the former is concerned with revealing 'the strengths and weaknesses of the script and conveying those discoveries to the playwright, whereas the latter masks weaknesses in order to create 'the best possible performance for the text' (Khan and Breed 1995, 84). Here we have the juxtaposition between indirect and direct development. An indirect development never reaches a conclusion for, by definition, the text under development will always possess weaknesses to be discovered: either by the director and cast (and conveyed to the playwright) within a development rehearsal (hosted by a production company or other), or by the playwright herself within The Lark's (or similar development company's) more supportive and benign processes that foreground the writer. The danger is, and with respect to The Lark (et al), as any process proceeds, in my experience, the development mindset will either consciously or unconsciously manufacture weaknesses in order to fix them; to entrap them in a quest for subjective perfection. Whilst, indirect development strives for an unobtainable idealised beauty, direct development (aiming for production) makes a virtue of ugliness.

In *America*, Jean Baudrillard cautions Europeans against exporting their 'aesthetic demands' to a place 'where they d(o) not belong'. To do so, according to Baudrillard, is the height of bad taste (Baudrillard 2010, 110). Whilst it is true that initially I was guilty of exporting my peculiar Welsh aesthetic to America, in the process of developing an old world text in the new world, an 'enthusiasm of practice' arose out of the dissensual disconnect between opposing cultures and senses. It was to be the very contradictions of the benign and alien development process that perpetually postpones fulfilment, both to the text and the writer, that generated an enthusiasm of practice that came to inform subsequent praxis and to frame this contextual document.

1.3 A first encounter with Play Reading

The portfolio texts were developed over a series of play readings conducted during periodic residencies at The Lark between 2007 and 2013. In New York I attended numerous readings and workshops of texts in development by other dramatists, both at The Lark and elsewhere. Those readings took several forms; from cold roundtable readings through staged readings in front of the ubiquitous music stands to fully rehearsed readings with limited sound and light; these happened both in public and in camera.²⁸ It was the sheer volume of frenetic Play Reading activity that came to simultaneously astound and enthuse me; and, in particular, the gulf between creativity and realisation.²⁹ New York seemed populated by so many creative and created entities suspended in a potential state; destined never to fully achieve their kinetic form. Drawing upon Alain Badiou, one could say that, in actuality, such texts, held in the state of perpetual potentiality, existed as non-theatre texts. For as he notes in *Rhapsody for the Theatre*: ‘Only that which has been, is, or will be *played* counts as theatre properly speaking. The event (the representation) retroactively qualifies the text whose written existence nevertheless anticipated it. A text *will be* part of theatre if it *has been* played. Hence: the theatre text exists only in the anterior future. Its quality is in suspense’ (Badiou 2013, 45). It was this very ‘non-theatre’ held in perpetual ‘suspense’ that came to occupy my creative inquiry.

²⁸ I list eight categories of Play Reading: (i) Reading for the development of a writer (ii) Reading for the development of a text for development’s sake (iii) Reading for the development of text as it nears production (iv) Reading for the visibility of actors (calling cards) (v) Readings within peer groups by practitioners for practitioners (vi) Readings to retain work in repertoire (vii) Readings to consolidate funding strategies on behalf of institutions - an exercise in compliance and (viii) Readings for backers / producers / angels / assets (Rowlands 2011, 90). Urbinati offers his own taxonomy. He defines nine categories: (i) Cold Reading (ii) In-house Reading (or Table Reading; equating to The Lark’s Roundtable reading), (iii) Staged Reading (iv) Script-in-hand Reading (v) Concert Reading (vi) Nondevelopmental Reading (vii) Industry Reading (viii) Workshop, Developmental Reading and (ix) Play Reading (or Reading) (Urbinati 2016, 9-11) Khan & Breed define merely four categories: (i) Rehearsed Reading (either cold or Roundtable) (ii) Minimally Staged Reading (public / with music stands) (iii) Exploratory Workshop (lab work held in camera) and (iv) Workshop Production (equating to The Lark’s Bare Bones production, the furthest point to which that company will develop a text) (Khan and Breed 1995, 79).

²⁹ As I was to later write in the foreword of *Historia*: ‘New York [...] seemed to me, to be a city of dramatists desiring to write themselves upon the City stage and yet, little of their writing (in real terms) finds release upon the stages of that city. Apropos this, Anne Norton remarks in the *Republic of Signs*, ‘Conscious of our limits in flesh. We [Americans] will ourselves to live beyond our bodies, in the nation and in our words... These literary selves, subject to different limits, endow with different capacities, become citizens, sovereign and subject, of the republic of signs’ (Norton 1993, 172).

In his analysis of the state of new writing in American theatre, London records the anecdotal comment one literary manager of a not-for-profit institution made to an un-named playwright (similar comments were also made to me during my research). ‘Of the eight hundred or so texts submitted in a year, fifty might have readings. Of that fifty, ten would receive second readings. Of that ten, three might be tabled against fifteen plays that the artistic director already has in mind; plays by dramatists the director knows personally or plays that have been suggested by board members etc. The numbers are not in the dramatist’s favour, especially if he / she is unknown and has to penetrate the ‘buffer zone’ of ‘ferocious’ gatekeepers who possess only the power to say “no”’ (London 2009, 99-100). And yet, New York dramatists write on. And in so doing, they willingly open themselves up to ‘development hell’; that ‘protracted and random journey’ around levels of reading programmes that can be ‘particularly destructive – both to the play and to the spirit’ (139).

During the development of *Desire Lines*, my interest in Play Reading began to eclipse my interest in developing *Desire Lines* per se. It struck me at the time that, for such an all-pervasive practice, little had been written about the nature and effect of Play Reading upon both playwright and text. Trawling the web in 2009, few posts critiqued the practice. This holds true even as I write (2020) where a search of the terms Play Reading, Staged Reading or Rehearsed Reading will yield only a relatively small crop of posts (other than adverts for a multitude of play readings) including an intriguing short play by the Minneapolis based dramatist, Max Sparber simply entitled, *A Staged Reading*; written, it would seem, in a spirit of retaliation.³⁰ As the article, ‘Dramatic Entrapment in Reading Land’ was a polemic based upon interviews conducted with stakeholders in the New York, London and Amsterdam theatre ecologies, apart from London’s seminal analysis, in 2009 I did not reference other texts. As a consequence, works such as Len Berkman’s essay ‘More Enterprise Walking Naked,’ that champions the aesthetics of Play Reading remained unknown to me (Berkman 2002, 89-93). And, it would be several years before *Play Readings: A Complete Guide for*

³⁰ https://pwcenter.org/sites/default/files/plays/scripts/A%20STAGED%20READING_Submitted.pdf

Theatre Practitioners by Rob Urbinati (2016) was published; a pedagogic volume that pedantically details process more than it does the impact of process upon creator and created. Urbinati's claim that his is 'the first book on the subject' and that 'the scope is narrow, but the attempt is to be comprehensive within the scope' (Urbinati 2016, xiii) is, I would suggest, unfounded, given that David Khan & Donna Breed's *Scriptwork: A Director's Approach to New Script Development* is as informative as Urbinati's work and was published in 1995; another text unknown to me in 2009.

My limited research into the practice of Play Reading (conducted in parallel with the development of *Desire Lines*) resulted in two articles. The first to be published was 'O'r Dudalen i'r Llwyfan' (From the Page to the Stage) that appeared in the Welsh language periodical, *Barn* (Rowlands 2010). That article sought to contextualise play development in Wales, juxtaposing new writing in both nation tongues, whereas the *CTR Backpages* article was more of a comparative analysis of Play Reading practices in New York, Cardiff, London and Amsterdam. The *Barn* article attempted to answer the perennial criticism Welsh language audiences have of their theatre: why does it lack quality? I argued that Welsh language theatre did not produce a critical mass of work necessary for quality to arise out of it; partly as aspiring talent tended (and still tends) to migrate to the media. My conclusion was, that if Welsh language theatre aspires to quality, it should develop more bilingual forms that would merge it with the English language provision, thereby creating a mass of sorts, out of which quality would arise through competition for resources.³¹ Thus, it reflected both Clurman's Darwinian comments and those Oskar Eustis, the director of the original production of *Angels in America*, made in Khan & Breed's volume: 'Script work benefits the American theatrical scene because it helps generate the critical mass of activity necessary to produce extraordinary dramatic art [...] every great theatre artist comes at the crest of a wave of healthy theatrical activity' (qtd. Khan and Breed 1995, xiv).

³¹ See also *Cenedl? Pa Genedl?* ([Nation? What Nation?] Rowlands 2018) in which I made a plea for the merger of both the national theatre provisions in Wales – Theatr Genedlaethol Cymru and National Theatre Wales – on the grounds of both unity and quality.

Whilst I championed crest of the wave excellence in Wales (legitimation of the newly devolved nation through the excellence of its cultural expression: of which, a bilingual theatre provision would act as a nation building device), my interest in the American theatre ecology did not lie in its excellence, rather, as stated, it lay in the ‘ordinary’ non-theatre that never realises its kinetic; the collateral damage of ‘extraordinary dramatic art.’ Whether the cultivation of a critical mass guarantees extraordinariness or not, what is incontestable is that it guarantees health benefits to Literary Managers and Dramaturges who perpetuate the culture of Play Reading for the benefit of the institution and to the detriment of the individual. Possibly playing devil’s advocate, Anne Cattaneo, Dramaturge at The Lincoln Center, makes a bold statement in *Play Readings*, ‘What would happen if we put a ten year moratorium on readings and commissions? It would force a change. Theatre people would have to rethink how plays are created. It would upend the process, which is in need of upending [...] perhaps we would do it in a way that would give writers more agency’ (Urbinati 2016, 20). Cattaneo’s recent challenge echoes her comments made two decades earlier in Khan and Breed’s *Scriptwork* (1995). The dysfunction of the bipolar theatre ecology – even in the early years of the evolving Play Reading culture – is made clear in her admission: ‘That’s been a real down side of our profession, that we have injured a lot of plays by giving bad advice to playwrights who have followed that advice to get a production. One has to be careful about that.’ And yet, despite her mea culpa, Cattaneo concludes her paragraph with an institutional tone, ‘The phrasing that I always use is “Here’s what I’m feeling about it, take it or leave it”’ (Khan and Breed 1995, 122). Here lies the paradox inherent in the persistent institutional practice; the compromise a dramatist faces; be fixed or be forgotten.

The veteran playwright, Richard Nelson decries institutional practices criticised yet implemented by Cattaneo et al, ‘The culture of readings and workshops, one unimaginable when I was a young playwright thirty years ago, [is] a culture of development. And this culture, more than being an activity, [is] a process, a mindset’. Note that he is talking of the early 1980s, merely fifteen years before Cattaneo recorded her initial thoughts in Khan & Breed. The development ‘mindset’ Nelson talks of, evolved, it

would seem therefore, over the course of a single generation. From a reading of Perry Anderson's *The Origins of Postmodernity* (2006), one could posit that it was the socio-economic shift that occurred in the United States following Reagan's 'creation of a new norm of neo-liberal development' in the early 1980s that impacted upon all aspects of American life, including, it would seem, theatre practice (Anderson 2006, 90-92). Thus, it could be conjectured that that seismic shift towards commodification of the American theatre, in conjunction with the mushrooming of MFA graduates (as previously noted), actuated the drift towards establishing the afore-mentioned 'bottom line thinking' within institutional American theatre; hence Nelson's timeline. Nelson continues, adding an analysis which overturns the traditional view expressed by many, that the US theatre is a writer led theatre and strikes at the heart of the institutional 'mindset' that perpetuates reading and development: 'What is really being said to the playwright by all the help? No matter how much he or she works on it... the play will ALWAYS not be right. Will ALWAYS need help. . . I have watched actors and directors approach classical plays that have massive contradictions, and address those plays not as works to be fixed but rather to solved. So I am arguing for a theatre where the mindset is not to fix new plays, but to solve them' [emphasis in the original] (London 2009, 32). The 'fix culture' or the 'culture of help,' that evolved in the 1980s proved to be a reductive practice both to the text and the dramatist and arguably, continues to be so.

The theatre maker, Katie Pearl commenting upon the 'fix culture' instituted by theatres that practice 'bottom line thinking,' noted, '(I)n our system the focus is on the market – on objects that can be sold. So, as artists, we have gotten used to thinking that our value is attached to our objects: our plays, either as scripts or as productions. That is our capital. That is how we participate in the free market system' (Pearl 2015, 61). Despite the concerns practitioners, such as Pearl, voice with regard to the immorality of a system that values plays as product and prioritises product over process (a market approach to theatre, contrary to the ethos of the Lark) the ever accruing power of the institutions would seem to militate against a return to, or progress towards an ecology where 'production is development,' where plays are to be solved

rather than fixed; questions posed rather than commodities to be sold. In the bipolar model of contemporary American theatre, the priority is not the dramatist and her work, rather it is ‘institutional survival.’ In the contemporary American theatre ecology, driven by the director not the writer (whom London would like to see re-positioned at the heart of theatre and prays that ‘they make it so again’) (London (2009): 16-17), it is a given that the mass endure. And it is with them, the dramatists that are the collateral damage of a brutal ecology, and their glut of texts that my interest lay in 2009.

1.4 The Portfolio Texts

In ‘What's in a Name?’, the end-piece to the volume *Historia*, I pondered upon the difference between America and the Old World. This was occasioned by comments made by Amanda Feldman, the producer of the final reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* in New York (2013). Prior to that reading, I considered naming the text *Historia*: a title I would later use for the volume within which the short text *Troy Story* and the two full length texts, *Troyanne* and *A / The Biography of a Thing* were published. Feldman’s response was that, as a title, *Historia* ‘might appear alienating to an America audience as any historical connotations might prejudice response to the work’.

Adding, ‘it might work in Europe but I’m not so sure about the US.’³² The short polemic that follows Feldman’s comment, drawing mainly upon Jean Baudrillard’s *America*, riffs upon the possible root of that prejudice. In his perceptive, partisan and pithy volume Baudrillard wrote, ‘The confrontation between America and Europe reveals not so much a rapprochement as a distortion, an unbridgeable rift. There isn’t just a gap between us, but a whole chasm of modernity. You are born modern, you do not become so. And we have never become so’ (2010, 77). Umberto Eco, in a similar

³² Regarding semantics, in *Troyanne*, Tory states ‘We are Trojan Women. We raise each other!’ In the original draft, it read “We are Trojans. We raise each other” until it was pointed out to me that, in the US, Trojan is a popular make of condom.

vein, identifies the historical present of Europeanness: ‘We no longer dwell in the Parthenon, but we still walk or pray in the naves of the cathedral. Even when we live with Aristotle or Plato, we deal with them in the same terms suggested by our medieval ancestors’ (1980, 68). It was as a palimpsestic dramatist, one that lacks the virgin page of a modern present and therefore doodles in the historic margins, that I undertook a series of residencies in New York. In that city, though indulged, I was truly an alien: not from outer space, but from another time. Whilst written in the city that, as Baudrillard comments has ‘something of the dawning of the universe’ about it (Baudrillard 2010, 24), my texts, *Desire Lines* in particular, had something of the twilight about them. Despite my desire for authenticity when writing *Troyanne* and *A / The Biography of a Thing*, they remained the anachronistic expressions of a time traveller from the Old World: as I shall detail in due course.

For, the American theatre, as it was explained to me by a fellow playwright during one residency at The Lark, is the theatre of the immigrant, a young theatre for a young nation and one that has provided the world with a neo-Symbolic order but has yet to be fully formed itself. Developing the metaphor, she stated, American culture is a teenage culture; one constantly testing boundaries (frontiers) and probing possibilities as all teenagers do. As an expression of a fractious and morphing adolescent evolving its own sense of self, American realism evolved as the ideal style with which to interrogate the ‘truth’ of the immigratory and evolutionary flux of the New World society that has, at its heart, ‘that non-stop negotiation between the American Dream and the small (and big) daily “nightmares” as the Romanian born dramatist and fellow Lark associate, Saviana Stanescu, termed it.³³ Stanescu’s play, *Aliens with Extraordinary Skills* (2009) is the story of a Moldovan clown from the saddest country in the world, who migrates to New York to ply her extraordinary skill – balloon animal making.³⁴ Stanescu arrived in New York in her 30s – a fortnight before 9/11 – and having

³³ On ‘Writing the immigrant experience’ see <http://saviana.com/lecturesworkshops>

³⁴ Initially produced by the Women’s Project, Julia Miles Theatre, September/October 2008. The New York Times described it as ‘A paean to New York... I’ve always believed that the special energy people talk about as New York’s essence comes from all those newcomers’ hopes and dreams in the air’ (Gates 2008).

pressed ‘reset’ on her life, embraced the role of the immigrant. Naturally, dislocation came to dominate her work: ‘I realize that all my plays are still about “outcasts” – immigrants, minorities, the abused, the oppressed, the different, the Others.’³⁵ Whilst neither Stanescu’s text nor its production by the Women’s Project (of which I attended its premiere) were to influence the two text Play Reading project I would subsequently undertake, I found Stanescu’s desire for assimilation within her host culture through the critical acceptance of her work by that culture of great interest, primarily as it was an exercise in collapsing distance between object and subject: the creation of *presence*. Stanescu’s ultimate goal, having committed fully to America, was assimilation through theatre, the very medium that, as Herbert Blau informs us, ‘brings us together *as alienated*’: each audience member being a de facto immigrant in an illusionary transient state (Blau 1990, 124).

Contrastingly, despite all attempts on my behalf to immerse myself within the New York theatre ecology, my texts were destined to remain the impressionistic works of a melancholic and cynical outsider. Maintaining the privilege of a cultural tourist who never committed to the Dream, I remained an European who could distance himself from his object at will; one who arguably, as James Pope-Hennessy remarked in *America is an Atmosphere*, ‘drew near to novelty with one fixed determination; not to be impressed’ (Pope-Hennessy 1947, 9).

Had I also *discovered* America in my 30s, in the years pre-devolution, then perhaps I would be writing these few reflections upon praxis from a foreshortened perspective. However, had I encountered Play Reading as an immigrant dramatist aspiring to assimilation, I would most probably never have evolved an ‘enthusiasm of practice’. It was only the novelty of distance – of ideological and political alienation – that enthused this dramatist; an alienation that was both a strength and a weakness. For though distance offers objectivity, it also engenders the European presumption (famously articulated by Eco – in works such as *Travels in Hyperreality*), Baudrillard cau-

³⁵ <http://www.ivpchicago.org/news/2019/5/23/interview-with-saviana-stanescu>

tioned against: a presumption that Stanescu was near the end process of negating through fictionalising herself and deploying the dramaturgy of an immigrant.³⁶ ‘What you have to do is enter the fiction of America, enter America as fiction’ wrote Baudrillard (Baudrillard 2010, 29). Unfortunately, as a post-devolutionary dramatist, I entered America as fact. Prior to 1997, Wales had, arguably, allowed itself to become a fictitious entity: having long since been absorbed into its dominant partner: a fealty re-affirmed with the devolution vote in 1979. The Atlantic dimension was therefore attractive to a young Welshman in search of freedom (both political and creative): I should have ‘discovered’ America then.³⁷ However, following the second devolution referendum in 1997, I ceased to share a desire for an ersatz Alaska, a distant undiscovered / undiscoverable frontier (as defined by Sam Shepard in *Curse of the Starving Class* (Shepard 1997, 163)). Post 1997, Wales became fact - a place to enact from within - and *Desire Lines*, the first text I developed in New York, beat its newly re-claimed bounds.

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Following this overview, and prior to the full text of *Desire Lines*, I will consider the development of that text, an ‘Old Europe’ text written in the New World through an alien Play Reading process that engendered an unexpected ‘enthusiasm of practice.’ In considering the evolution of *Desire Lines* from page to stage, attention will be given to its formalism, the evolutionary shift within my work from dialogic to polymonolog-

³⁶ Note that Stanescu and I contributed short plays both to *24 Gun Control Plays* (NoPassport Press, 2013) and *Where is Hope: An Anthology of Short Climate Change Plays* (Climate Change Theatre Action, 2017). In addition, her essay ‘Bills, Emotions, Manifestos’ proceeds my contribution, ‘Elliot Forgot the Reluctant Vampires’ in *Innovations in Five Acts* (Svich et al, 2015). Both *24 Gun Control Plays* and *Innovation in Five Acts* were edited by Caridad Svich who, likewise contributed to the *Climate Change Theatre Action* anthology and to whose collected plays, *The Hour of All Things and Other Plays*, I wrote the introduction (Intellect Books, 2018).

³⁷ In 1994, fellow playwright Ed Thomas remarked ‘I envy America for its space and the fact that dramatists like Sam Shepard can look at the American Dream, dismantle it and create another mythology... without a network of mythology, which for Wales needs to be a modern one, all things fall apart’ (Davies. H.W., 2005, 11). Contra Thomas, I saw devolution as a means to interrogate hegemonic myth that is, as Barthes informs us, a tool of the Right. Devolution was therefore, in my opinion, not a chance to create Welsh myth (a Welsh Dream) thereby perpetuating the Symbolic Order, albeit from a Welsh perspective, rather it was the chance to enact revolutionary promise: revolution being the only inoculation against myth: as Barthes suggests in *Mythologies*: for ‘myth economises intelligence; it understands reality more cheaply’ (Barthes 2000: 148-159) & see n.63.

ic (stemming from interaction with the work of the Quebecois dramatist, Daniel Darnis) and the dynamic between intent and effect.

In a second introductory essay, prior to the full text of *Troyanne*, I will detail the development of the Trojan Horse model suggested by Topol; the process that led to the creation of that text (the 'B' text) and its use as a means to gather anecdotal and experiential material that would inform the creation of an 'A' text, *A / The Biography of a Thing*: a text about the reading of the 'B' text. In chronicling the development of *Troyanne*, I shall make a case for performativity, selective relationality and reception (predicated upon distance) of my work that, in toto, constitute the state of *Being*: the realisation of a desired effect. Note that I shall qualify my appropriation and idiolectic use of the term *Being* in relation to a specific reading of *Troyanne* that took place at the New York Theatre Workshop.

The final introductory essay will chart the evolution of *A / The Biography of a Thing*. In so doing, I shall analyse the ethical issues surrounding the acts of 'life theft' that formed it; stemming from the adoption of the Trojan Horse model. Then, in acknowledging the conflicting registers within that 'uneasy' text, I shall detail the way in which, given further development, I would re-shape it and in so doing, align it with the ongoing formalistic and ontological intent of the meta-project. The final portfolio text, *A / The Biography of a Thing* will be followed by the short text, *Troy Story* which details my encounter with Troy, Ohio, out of which both *Troyanne* and *A / The Biography of a Thing* evolved.

1.5 'Awareness in Process'

After thirty years of working professionally in theatre I have, no doubt, amassed a bank of tacit understandings (embodied knowing). This document therefore constitutes a 'corrective' of sorts; both an audit of self and a manifesto. Due to its reflexive nature, it lacks a dialectic; rarely does it adopt an oppositional position; for I was not

schooled to be a sublator, merely an actor. In toto, both the critical overview and contextualising essays illustrate the eclectic nature of the processes undertaken. One could argue that, in a more positivist frame, this bricolage text would be ‘found wanting’: as Frantz Fanon noted regarding the polemic nature of his seminal post-colonial text, *Black Skin White Mask*, that precluded him from submitting it as his research thesis (Fanon 2008, 34). However, in the spirit of Practice as Research (PaR) – occupying a dissensual space between academic senses (the qualitative and quantitative)– it sets out a position stemming from an analysis of instinctive praxis. Being an heuristic document, written as supplement to the texts within the portfolio, it will be a tapestry weave of elements that will, as Mika Hanula posits in relation to PaR, ‘aim to create a reality for itself subject to its own laws’ (Nelson 2013, 156).

Kim Etherington, a champion of autoethnography, teaches us that the very act of forming a narrative requires us to order our experiences, and this act provides us with an opportunity for reclaiming our self and our history (Etherington 2004, 9). This document is therefore an exercise in reclamation; a semi-journaled contextualisation of practice, part *histoire*, part discourse. The setting will hopefully make a tentative claim for ‘new insights’ – as demanded of PaR research by Robin Nelson (Nelson 2013, 31) – into the praxis of a devolutionary dramatist abroad, ensuring its validity as a piece of performative research stemming from an ‘enthusiasm of practice’; the genesis point of all PaR as defined by Bradley Haseman (2007). What gravity this autoethnographic document possesses, stems from its nature as an archive of a life lived at a particular point in time and recorded in order to ‘challenge fixed notions of self and of subjectivity’ (Grace and Wasserman 2006, 17-21). I went to New York, this is what I wrote and this is what I came to know; accepting that the I that came to know, is not the I that writes the memory of learning, and that the *I*, itself is, as noted by John Paul Eakin, relational and ‘truly plural in its origins and subsequent formations’ (Eakin 1999, 43). For the self, as he posits, is ‘less as an entity and more as a kind of awareness in process’ (Eakin 1999, x). Such is this contextualising document, an ‘awareness in process’.

Desire Lines

Contextualising essay 1

Desire Lines: Devolution and the Evolution of Form

In this introductory text, I shall position *Desire Lines* within the continuum of an ongoing subjective I dramaturgy, a series of reflexive texts that obliquely chart the process of devolution, and ‘self’ (as both dramatist and subject) in relation to that process. Following this, consideration will be given to the formalistic intent of the work. For, whilst the content of my texts, as I shall detail, is slave to the form, the performativity of the content is the form. Hence *Desire Lines* attempts to interrogate aspects of both physical and ontological identity simultaneously. This bifurcation is realised in part through polymonologism, a form that draws upon my understanding of a Quebecois model that evolved as a means to performatively consolidate a separatist identity, and which I first encountered within the work of Daniel Danis. Finally, I shall consider the way in which ‘normal directorial rights’ can, and have compromised the formalism of my work. In doing so, I shall begin to outline the intention of my work, both of its execution and reception and I shall term that intention *Being*.

2.1. *Desire Lines* as exemplar of an I Dramaturgy

Desire Lines maps a journey one Man makes around Wales. It is a journey one can make around this small country in a day through a combination of buses and trains. It is also a life journey (a dramatic trope), an assemblage of repeating motifs and juxtaposing narratives that together chart an unremarkable life. The only thing that marks it out as a life of note is that it was lived at a specific moment in history. Were it not for devolution, then Man would be merely *a* man and *Desire Lines*, the journey of a Nobody.

Within *Desire Lines*, four narrative strands interweave. The principal monologic strand offers a selective account of Man's past life juxtaposed with the emergence of Wales as political entity in the last quarter of the twentieth century; a shift from subsumed non-historic Nation to that of 'a verspätete Nation, a late developer' (in Marxist terms), as the politician, Adam Price claims in his collection of essays and speeches, *Wales: The First and Final Colony* (Price 2018, 98). Though the principal strand of *Desire Lines* carries a post-colonial discourse it can bear a quasi-Freudian reading: as can several of the devolutionary texts. David Adams points this out in relation to the monologue *Marriage of Convenience* (Adams 2005, 198). It also holds true for *Blue Heron in the Womb*, *Blink* and *Water Wars*: the future exists beyond the reactionary paternal (male) order. In *Desire Lines*, it is Woman (Man's wife) and their son who walk towards the devolved future, not Man, who is dragged reluctantly into the process that will consume him. For the Theban Sphinx must be slain, or rather pass into history, if the future is to be enacted.³⁸ That is not to say that Man is actively anti-devolutionary and therefore wholly dispensable. He is however, indifferent to the idea of the evolving nation – innately resistant to change owing to the 'peasant residue' within that ensures his continued psycho-colonisation (Price 2018, 45).³⁹ At a time when indifference is tantamount to being regressive, passivity is not benign. The process of Devolution demands the active contribution of all if a 'republic of the mind,' as Price termed it, is to be eventually realised.⁴⁰ Man must embrace change for the Lacanian symbolic order, the hegemonic narrative must be countered if Wales is to emerge as a future historic nation. Note that whilst the event of devolution informs all action in *Desire Lines*,

³⁸ Andy Smith, in drawing attention to certain post-Thatcherite (neo-colonial) aspects of my work, notes that, 'The melding of personal lives with the social world imbues Rowlands' drama with a sense of urgency and passion about political systems and how people are used and oppressed by them. The abusive fathers of Rowlands' work signify much that is wrong with the normative values of late capitalism and they are just as much victims of the system as they are perpetrators' (Smith 2005, 248).

³⁹ 'Peasant residue,' as defined by J.J. Lee in relation to Ireland and post-colonialism, but equally as applicable to Wales

⁴⁰ As I write in 2020, Adam Price is the leader of Plaid Cymru (the Party of Wales). In *Wales: The First and Final Colony*, he wrote, 'An hundred years ago, politicians in Ireland, Australia and Canada built their independence from the once-mighty British Empire step by courageous step. They had the discipline and determination [...] we need to mirror their depth of character' (Price 2018, 216).

it barely breaks into the narrative, it merely anchors the life of Man to the ongoing ‘process’ that carries him along and eventually, goes beyond him.

Two further sub strands interweave the main thread: the dialogic memories of four key junctures in Man’s life – two conducted with his wife (their first date and a conversation prior to the birth of their son) and two with his son (after Man has left his wife and a conversation following her funeral) – and the juxtapositional polymonologic narratives delivered by Others, whose tangential journeys briefly converge with Man’s life journey. A fourth, minor strand threads through the text; the intra-scenic dialogue conducted between those in transit. The quality of that dialogue is functional and uncharged; the performance of self, where the self knows that what it says is meaningless yet is compelled to speak purely in order to seek audition; the nihilism is Beckettian. ‘Drama is dialectical in origin,’ Szondi stresses in his *Theory of Modern Drama*: ‘drama is possible only when dialogue is possible’ (Szondi 1987, 10). However, pace Szondi, dialogue between performative entities within my texts, has increasingly been purely a locating device, a cry for audition: thus echoing George Berkeley’s famous saying, *esse est percipi* where to be is to be perceived (*percipi*, rather than to perceive, *percipere*) (Casanova 2020, 68). I shall discuss this semantic shift in relation to performativity and split-subjectivity in due course. In crystallising the essence of Strindberg, Szondi also declares that, with the imposition of an epic *I* upon a text (an *I* dramaturgy), drama, per se, ‘ceases to be’ (25). I would and will (as no doubt Beckett would have) dispute this, for it is at that point, with the cessation of any meaningful intra-scenic dialogue and character creation stemming from interpersonal exchange, that my project lies.⁴¹

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Before proceeding, and being aware of the position outlined by Wimsatt and Beardsley in their influential paper ‘The Intentional Fallacy’ (1946), it would seem prudent

⁴¹ As I stressed in conversation with Hazel Walford Davies in 1999 regarding a theatre of ideas: ‘In my plays [...] I dealt with debate rather than with emotions and characters’ (Davies 2005, 230).

to clarify the parameters of my ‘intention’. Given the reflexive nature of this document and its manifesto quality, a chronology of the development of *Being* would seem necessary. However, such a chronology need neither be autobiographical per se nor offer a detailed analysis of the portfolio texts in an attempt to ossify meaning at the point of generation. For, as Wimsatt and Beardsley state, a poem, and by extrapolation any literary text, ‘is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond its power to intend about it or control’ (Wimsatt and Beardsley 1946, 470). As a theatre practitioner, I am well aware of the promiscuous nature of text in performance and its multi-signifying potential. And so, I would concur with Wimsatt and Beardsley et al, a writer cannot control the integrity of any signifier or set of signifiers and ensure that they remain true to his or her ‘intention’. However, I would question whether any text, once written is truly free of its creator and vice versa: free association is one thing, dis-association is another. It is this continuing umbilical that lies at the heart of *A /The Biography of a Thing*.

I state the above, for, whilst I do not seek control of the semiotic field (or the mise-en-scène), I do seek control of the form; that is my ‘intention’. And so, in this heuristic document I shall detail the catalogue of influences (both experiential and theoretical) that impacted upon the development of *Being*: the formalistic intention applicable to all I dramaturgical texts within and without the portfolio. I draw inspiration from Pascale Casanova’s maverick re-assessment of Beckett’s work, *Samuel Beckett: Anatomy of a Literary Revolution* (2020). In it, Casanova states that Beckett has been critiqued from an ‘ill seen, ill read standpoint’ by those that would make an oracle of him and his autonomous works, thereby obscuring the formalistic development of the work and its historic context. Casanova argues that ‘Beckett’s writing is not, as official criticism would have it, radically strange in kind – a meteorite abruptly and as if miraculously fallen from the sky, without precedents, referents or descendants. On the contrary, his greatness consists in his confrontation with the set of aesthetic issues and debates that were contemporaneous with him’ (Casanova 2020, 13). In essence, Casanova offers us a pedigree for Beckett’s formalism and, in so doing, historicises him; frames him as an

avant garde modernist and his works as products of their time. Casanova's project was to reconstruct the conditions of the emergence of Beckett's formalism 'step by step' without falling into the trap of 'retrospective illusion' (29). Taking Casanova's lead, this document aims to chart the 'emergence' of *Being*: the formalistic 'intention' of this post-postmodern theatre maker whose works were created in relation to the issues and debates of his time. In order to do so, it is necessary to return to an event that took place in 1984.

In that year, I chanced to meet an unemployed man outside a Rhondda dole (unemployment) office. Having been made redundant and subsequently divorced, the man railed against Thatcherism and the free-market economics that had destroyed his life. However, once inside the dole office, sitting in front of a plastic screen, he was cowed by the system. "Your name is Thomas", he was asked. "What Thomas?" "Dylan", he replied, "Dylan Thomas." That performative act of naming was evental.⁴² It would result, a decade on, in the first dramatic reconfiguration of the experiential; a nascent I dramaturgy. Prior to *The Ogpu Men* (1994) (Clark 1997, 253-271),⁴³ I had written three full length texts, *The Sin Eaters* (1992), *Solomon's Glory* (1993) and *Glissando on an Empty Harp* (1994)⁴⁴ none of which stemmed from experiential teleological events. In that Rhondda dole office, stripped of literary association, a Dylan Thomas was the embodiment of a subaltern nation's economic reality; my true cultural and social legacy. In naming himself, a Dylan Thomas unintentionally succeeded in negating the

⁴² 'Evental' could be deemed a neologism; an elaboration upon Žižek's definition of the agency of an event. However, Alain Badiou, in his introduction to *Being and Event*, uses the term 'an evental occurrence of being' in relation to his meta-ontological theory of Being (Badiou 2007, 14). He also writes of the 'evental site' being a site that is only 'evental' insofar as it retroactively qualified as such by the occurrence of 'an event' (188). In the introduction to that volume, the translator, Oliver Feltham writes of Badiou's conception of the 'evental site' (*site événementiel*) and regarding the translation of the term: 'The adjective 'eventful' is inappropriate due to its connotations of activity and busyness' (sic, Badiou 2007, xxxiii). He proceeds to note that he therefore adopted Peter Hallward's neologism 'evental' (coined by Hallward when he translated Badiou's *Ethics*). Considering Hallward's reasoning, I would offer that 'evental', as I term it, is both adjective and verb as it actuates a re-framing. Badiou also uses the term specifically with regard to theatre. In *Rhapsody for the Theatre*, he writes, in relation to the distinguishing quality of a theatre text: 'If a text belongs to the theatre because it is a text and is thus given over to the evental completion of the representation, any book can see theatre take hold of it, provided it first *undoes* it, detonizes it, punctuates it' (Badiou 2013, 46-47). Despite the precedent, the neologisation was synchronous.

⁴³ First published by Drama Association of Wales in 1994.

⁴⁴ Both *The Sin Eaters* (1992) (nominated for a Writers' Guild Award) and *Solomon's Glory* (1993) are unpublished. *Glissando on Empty Harp*, *Blue Heron in the Womb* and *Love in Plastic* are published in *Trilogy of Appropriation*.

bourgeois signification of his namesake and, in so doing, reframed notions of self in relation to the sign. *The Ogbu Men* is an elegy to *the* Dylan Thomas, in the way that Sir Walter Scott's novels, as discussed by Tom Nairn in the *Break-up of Britain*, were valedictory elegies to the Romantic past; a means to re-frame and move beyond the tyranny of redundant signs (Nairn 1981, 115). It would not be hyperbolic to claim that I, as dramatist, was formed relationally in the performative utterance of *an* Other in a dole office in Porth in 1984.⁴⁵

Apropos the above, in Anna-Marie Taylor's volume *Staging Wales: Welsh Theatre 1979 - 1997*, Gilly Adams, artistic director of Made in Wales,⁴⁶ in her essay 'Speaking to the Nation,' identified Laurence Allan, Alan Osborne, Dic Edwards, Ed Thomas, Tim Rhys and myself as a school of male working class writers from urban South Wales whose work 'is rooted in economic and cultural deprivations of the communities from which they come.' Though aesthetically divergent, Adams noted that the common aim was to generate an indigenous dramatic form that challenged neo-liberal Thatcherism. Whilst united in defence of dignity, each dramatist, Adams informs us, had a distinct voice 'characterised by a vivid, racy and poetic use of language' (Adams, G. 1997, 169). We were lyrical, predominantly anti-naturalistic, anti-materialistic and anti-colonial; our theatre was an "in-spite of" theatre (as Ed Thomas would say and re-say in conversation), defiant, irreverent and of shared purpose. Alan Osbourne, painter, teacher and arguably the proto-dramatist of the group stated, in conversation with Hazel Walford Davies, that the artist he most admired was Gustave Courbet for he created an alternative salon and fought against the Establishment: '(Courbet's) remarkable phrase is "the Monumentality of the Ordinary," and I love the power, the vigour that that represents. I love the richness, the courage

⁴⁵ Note however that the deliberate manipulation of the sign – in order to engender a crude emotional response (the desire of mimetic drama) – was considered an act of compromise at the time, as it undermined the Platonic intent of the Theatre of Ideas. However, as the text was written to be directed by Phil Clark (its production a collaboration between the Sherman and HTV), a compromise was made.

⁴⁶ Made in Wales, founded in 1981 was a 'writer-centred' theatre company dedicated to staging and developing new Welsh drama. In 2000, it ceased formal operation when Arts Council Wales merged the Welsh language provision, Dali-er Sylw with Made in Wales in order to create the new bilingual entity, Script Cymru. In 2007 Script Cymru itself merged with the building-based company, The Sherman Theatre (www.theatre-wales.co.uk).

of it.’ (Davies H.W. 2005, 222). In the inter-referenda years, we dramatists of old South Wales were, I would claim, aware of creating an ‘alternative salon’ that was vehemently anti-establishment. Whilst we could not all sit in the same room at the same time (personalities and politics of the socio-linguistic schism accounted for that), our works were all performative acts of fighting talk that challenged the political hegemony. We were, as previously noted, a generation of dramatists that attempted to maintain a sense of nationhood in a time of democratic deficit and identity erosion.

Being the proto-text, *The Ogpu Men* lacks the sophistication of subsequent I dramaturgies. Those full-length texts, inspired by key material events, juxtapose myriad devices (inspirations) in order to create reflexive texts, ‘hybrid histories’ as I termed them, that actuate a re-construction of, or ‘making’ of the self (Davies H.W. 2001, 242). However, being a one-act text, *The Ogpu Men* fails to gather juxtapositional devices around it within the frame of the action. For the event around which such devices would gravitate has already happened in the linear life of the unemployed Man; we are left merely with residual action; ‘empty time’ as Szondi termed it; ‘a time that can no longer be filled by an action, time that encompasses a pure space stretching out towards catastrophe and within which the individual is condemned to live’ (Szondi 1987, 56). As a consequence, though the text is dialogic, drama is arguably absent from the text, for there is no oppositional dynamic (a Szondian dialectic) at play. Both Man and text are slave to the material event that resists sublimation within the action. Consequently, the re-framing, stemming from the utterance of the name, happens beyond the limits of the text; for the text ends with the following stage direction ‘Alex has been listening to the conversation. At this point he is jolted by disbelief. He looks at his poetry, scribbles on it, tears it up, throws it into the bin and goes to look through the window. Lights fade.’ It is only in the blackout that a re-framing is actuated. Hence, one could argue that these few reflexive thoughts constitute a delayed post-evental reframing both of the experiential event and of *The Ogpu Men*.

Szondi termed the one-act text, the ‘drama of the unfree’, for the immanence of catastrophe inherent in the form limits subjective agency and dramatic invention in the classical sense vis a vis character development. Within a one-act text, the objective is displaced by the subjective thereby granting freedom for ontological inquiry. It is the metaphysical potential of the form, Szondi informs us, that made the one-act play appealing to Strindberg and his contemporaries creating at a point when writers sought to express the psychological crisis of the subject. Quoting György Lukács, Szondi states that the process of isolating figures generally brings with it an ‘abstraction and intellectualisation of their confrontations’ (Szondi 1987, 54-57), a crystallisation of subjectivity. With singularisation, a character is freed of the need to dialogue with *an* Other but slave to its own intra-personal duality (the dialogue between the self and *the* Other); this is the externalisation of thought or ‘monologue intérieur’, as famously exploited by modernist dramatists: an exemplar text being Eugene O’Neill’s *Strange Interlude*.

Following *The OGPU Men*, I began writing full length texts that were, in effect, compound one-act plays; coalescing subjectivities that evolved into the polymonologic enactments of ontologically isolated selves. In order to dramatise the subjectivism of ‘characters,’ I employed a circular narrative technique. From an event, situated at a point at the far end of ‘empty time,’ a narrative circles back around and into itself and then beyond the event towards transformation (an immaterial re-framing). It is important to realise that the model is not the convention of flashback recalled within a linear narrative. A circular narrative re-frames a life from a specific temporal point immediately prior to catastrophe or rather the compound catastrophes of all figures that have been re-framed by an event. All reflectivity (retrospective action) within texts that adhere to the circular model, is therefore re-framed by catastrophic immanence. The conceit being that dramatic time (theatre time) within the circular model is the expansion of a temporal instant; a re-imagining of life at a point of transformation when imagination dies (or comes into being).

2.2 Monolingualism and Inclusivity

The transformation point (death of Man) possesses a physical coordinate in *Desire Lines*; a train carriage in the tunnel heading east out of Bangor train station (Bangor, North Wales; *Tabernacle* in the text). The lights do not work in the carriage where Man is seated; hence the opening lines, ‘In the darkness. / Cow gut darkness, / I wonder what a foetus dreams... / As it crouches there, / Wrapped up like a fist in a fuck?’ (Portfolio 48). Here, the metaphor, ‘cow gut darkness’ is an adaptation of the Welsh idiom, *du fel bol burwch* (as black as a cow’s stomach). Placed at the top of the narrative, it is an indicator that Man is Welsh speaking and, as we come to realise in the course of the text, so is his wife, (Woman / Old Woman) and Son. Had the text reflected the linguistic reality of the family it would have been naturally bilingual (as would be the case with several of the I dramaturgical texts).⁴⁷ Richard Pine, writes of J.M. Synge and his effect upon Irish consciousness in the early twentieth century, that his project was to create ‘a new country of the mind’ that was ‘conceived in English’ (Pine 1990, 36).⁴⁸ Such was / is my project, to create a new post devolutionary ‘country of the mind’; one unencumbered by the politics of the linguistic schism that, even post-devolution continues to hamper any sense of unified imagining within the nascent nation; a well-rehearsed debate beyond the realms of this discussion.⁴⁹

Despite the monolingual nature of the text, certain signifiers within *Desire Lines* and the devolutionary texts in general, might only be decodable by the Cymry (such as the translated idiom above). Such exclusive signification is not meant to alienate the non-Welsh speaking audience. Rather, its purpose is to anchor the texts in the cultural

⁴⁷ Including *Marriage of Convenience* (1996) *Blue Heron in the Womb* (1998) and *Blink* (2007).

⁴⁸ Writing of Irish theatre at the turn of the twentieth century, Richard Pine wrote ‘Yeats’s sense of otherness [...] led him to seek for a language and an imagery other than the ones which were available to him in the aesthetic modes of literary London’. The result, he [Seamus Heaney] affirms was Synge’s expression of ‘the life of Aran in the language of the tribe’: ‘A new country of the mind was conceived in English, the west that the poets imagined’ [my parenthesis] (Pine 1990, 36).

⁴⁹ On the linguistic binary, multi-lingualism and multi-culturalism, see Sheppard, Lisa Caryn (2015) *O’r Gymru ‘Ddu’ i’r Ddalen ‘Wen’: Darllen Amlddiwylliannedd ac Aralledd o’r Newydd yn Ffuglen Gyfoes De Cymru, er 1990* (From ‘Black’ Wales to the ‘White’ Page: Reading Multiculturalism and Otherness Anew in South Walian Contemporary Fiction since 1990) PhD essay, Cardiff University <http://orca.cf.ac.uk/73575/>

realm of the Cymry, ever sensitive to invasive Anglicisation, in order to signify that such texts, though written in English, are also rooted in their cultural experience. *Desire Lines* and all devolutionary texts are therefore exercises in inclusivity written in the lingua franca in order to limit oppositionalism and maximise inclusivity in post-devolutionary Wales. Lisa Lewis, in her volume *Performing Wales: People, Memory and Place*, employs a similar logic. In a political declaration of sorts, ‘Pam yr ysgrifennais yn Saesneg / Why I have written in English’, Lewis asserts, ‘I have chosen to write in English due to a desire to share the window on the world provided by Welsh language and culture as a natural part of being a Welsh speaker’ (Lewis 2018, ix - xii). Both intentions foreshadow a future Wales where the Welsh and the English languages are defused of their previous divisive charges; a Wales where all nation languages have parity. In such a Wales, the performative act of Welshness is simultaneously enacted in all nation tongues and with equal agency. The devolutionary texts, written in a syncreticised English are therefore expedient texts of their time; testimonies to the effect of the ongoing ‘process’ (of devolution) that demanded, and still demands to be chronicled for the whole of the nation; not part thereof.

2.3 Polymonologism and National Identity

Whilst Beckett’s project would serve as a model for monologism in relation to ontological inquiry, there is also a precedent for polymonologic text in relation to post-colonial discourse. In 1997 I directed *Lludw’r Garreg*, a Welsh language adaptation by Gareth Miles of *Cendres de Cailloux* by the Quebecois dramatist, Daniel Danis.⁵⁰ It is a lyrical polymonologic text about a father and daughter coming to terms with the murder of their wife and mother. Following their loss, they move from Montreal to the country in an attempt to start new lives. There they meet two young locals with

⁵⁰ *Lludw’r Garreg*, produced by Theatr y Byd, premiered in 1997.

whom their destinies entwine with horrific consequences. I chose *Cendres de Cailloux* for adaptation on two counts. Firstly, as its themes reflected contemporary Welsh concerns vis a vis identity and the dynamic between rural and urban life. Secondly, and most importantly, the very form of the text - a series of inter-twining monologues - was utilised, as Mateuz Borowski and Malgorzata Sugiera note, in order to re-configure memory and in so doing, 'direct energy into the future' (Borowski and Sugiere 2006, 37).

In the essay 'Everybody's Stories: Monologue in Contemporary Playwrighting from Quebec' Borowski and Sugiera use the term polylogus for a 'dialogue of independent monologues'. They suggest that the polylogus form evolved in Quebec after 1980 as an anti-colonial / separatists' strategy that strove to effectively turn the audience into a projected partner and co-creator of the theatrical event; a function that would assure the strengthening of communal bonds (Borowski and Sugiera 2006, 23).⁵¹ Theatre was a means to shape and consolidate identity in a period of cultural flux.⁵² From this, one can conjecture that such work was delivered extra-scenically (directly to the

⁵¹ In the same volume, Clare Wallace, in 'Monologue, Theatre, Solo Performance and Self as Spectacle' writes, 'The question of how to define monologue in anything more than the most basic of ways opens up the usual Pandora's box of problems attendant on generic criticism and also brings into view a number of contradictions' (Wallace et al. 2006, 3). Citing Patrice Pavis's typology of monologues in his *Dictionary of the Theatre: Terms, Concepts, and Analysis* (1998. Toronto: Toronto University Press, 218-219), Wallace merely concludes, monologue is 'a *genre*, albeit a multifaceted one' before proceeding to distinguish between two basic types: monologue drama and solo performance (predominantly autobiographic). With regard to the polylogus form of monologue drama, Wallace clumsily describes it as a form within which 'discrete units [...] may overlap or contradict each other' (4). Interestingly, Wallace writes of monologue as something that is delivered before an audience, sometimes directly and sometimes through an invisible character auditor. However, mention is not made of monologue delivered as intra-personal dialogue as per the intent of *Being* and as shall be detailed.

⁵² Note: the two referenda for Quebec independence in the late twentieth century, mirror the two referenda for devolution held in Wales in the same period. In the first Quebec referendum, held in 1980, of the votes cast, 40.44% were pro-independence whilst 59.56% were against (In the 1979 referendum for devolution in Wales, 20.26% voted for and 79.74% against). Then again, in 1995, the separatist Quebecois failed in their second attempt to create an independent state when, of the votes cast, 49.42% were pro independence whilst 50.58% were against. Independence was lost by the slimmest of margins. Thankfully, an even slimmer margin secured devolution for Wales in 1997 when 50.30% of votes cast were for devolution and 49.70% against.

audience) in order to connect and generate an empathetic response.⁵³ However, in my direction of Danis' text, I actively eschewed that extra-scenic link and shifted the polymonologic text into the intra-personal realm. This was possibly contrary to the original intention, thereby making me guilty of the sin I seek to mitigate against. Danis attended the premiere in Wales and in conversation, expressed his pleasure with the production. However, out of ignorance at the time, perhaps I asked the wrong questions.

Daniel Danis, frames the text of *Cendres de Cailloux* from the outset: 'the tragic events have already taken place', thereby echoing Szondi's comments on the one-act form that action is recollected from post-catastrophic 'empty time.' All four characters, who deliver their intertwining monologues, are present within the performance space throughout; united through the memory of events recalled from evental points both this and the other side of the grave. The opening and the closing scenes take place within a graveyard, yet they are oppositional; as if the circular journey of the text needs to be undertaken for the *Danse macabre* of the first scene to give way to the *Dancing with Life* in the final scene and, in so doing, all four characters attain transformations; the circular model I would subsequently exploit. Recounting events from a post-evental point of view, Borowski and Sugiera inform us that Danis was able to break free of naturalism and of the 'necessity of inventing any type of anecdotal fable and dialogues which would ceaselessly direct the characters and the spectators thoughts towards the event of prior action.' (Wallace et al: 36) This proposes a reverse dynamic to naturalism or realism where characters, mined from the subtext, drag their pasts into performance placing the Word in thrall to motivation.

⁵³ The terminology draws upon Hans-Thies Lehmann's use of the terms theatron axis (the line generated within a theatrical performance upon which performers and audience lie), the extra-scenic (the relationship between actors and audience) and intra-scenic (the relationship between interlocutors within the play). To the above, I add the intra-personal (the dialogue of *I* and *the Other*). In relation to postdramatic theatre, Lehmann states that it 'Theatrical discourse has always been doubly addressed; it is at the same time directed *intra-scenically* (i.e. at the interlocutors in the play) and *extra-scenically* [...] Postdramatic theatre has drawn the conclusion that it has to be possible in principle to make the first dimension [the intra-scenic] almost disappear in order to reinforce the second dimension [extra-scenic] and to raise to a new quality of theatre' (Lehmann, H. T. 2006, 127). My conclusion has been the opposite.

When birthed by the Word, entities have no history out of which they arise, for they are generated teleologically; at the points at which their narratives are given voice. As Jean Pierre Ryngaet comments in the 'Transparency of the Text: Contemporary Writing for the Stage' in relation to Danis' dramaturgy, 'every aspect of the player's speech is focussed on the urgency of the actual moment of its utterance [...] a shift from a theatre that makes character utterances into the instruments and vectors of a teleonomic development to a theatre where all attention is concentrated upon the act of speaking in the present' (Mounsef and Feral et al 2007, 24 - 25). The causality is almost biblical; the Word as genesis.

The majority of texts I wrote after directing *Lludw'r Garreg* are cyclical memory forming texts; 'dreaming back' in both Yeatsian and Beckettian fashion – the 'unravelling a life, while it is weighed in purgatorial balance' as Rosemary Poultney wrote in her critique of Beckett (Poultney 1998, 93) – but also dreaming forward. The form is not new, as Peter Szondi points out in *Theory of the Modern Drama* citing the expressionist manifesto *The New Standpoint* (1916): 'According to a popular saying, when someone is hung, he relives his entire life in the final moment. Now that's expressionism!' (Szondi 1987, 62). Given the manifesto element within this thesis, the cyclical model and my debt to Strindberg (to whom the expressionists were indebted, as Szondi notes), one could arguably term me an Expressionist; one who 'adopted Strindberg's station technique to give dramatic form to the individual, and his journey through an alienated world, rather than to inter-personal [intra-scenic] actions' [my parenthesis] (Szondi 1987, 64). Within my I dramaturgical and lyrical texts, as with *Cendres de Cail-loux*, action is reduced to the memory of necessary events birthed by the Word. In this way, motivation is negated, there is only memory enacted through the voicing of it; it is not residual, it is always emerging. All comes from the performativity of the Word: the vital component of *Being*, as I shall define it.

2.4. Intent and Effect

Turning back to process, two things that occurred in the course of the development of *Desire Lines* are of note as they both arose out of misinterpretation of authorial intent: I shall explore the dynamic between realisation and interpretation in relation to *Troyanne* and *Being*. Firstly, my intervention in the *Desire Lines* workshop process at The Lark (between the first and second public reading) that was necessitated by the actors' subtextual approach to the text. Secondly, Irina Brown's production of *Desire Lines* (Sherman Cymru, 2011), a declaration of a director's 'normal rights of interpretation' that caused offence, similar to that felt by Beckett following JoAnne Akalaitis' production of *Endgame* in 1984 (much referenced by theatre historians including Sarah West in her analysis of the performativity voice in Beckett, upon which I have drawn (West 2010, 238). Whilst the former intervention into the process of reading *Desire Lines* at The Lark serves to illustrate certain limitations of play reading non-naturalistic texts, the latter is a concrete illustration of the disconnect between authorial intent and perverted effect that arises out of the interpretation of the work by others who counter the intended formalism and in so doing, compromise both the ontological conceit and the event. That's all I ask of those who would approach my texts is that they adhere to the intent of *Being*. From the experiential, I have come to believe that freedom lies within clearly defined parameters of creativity. *Being* is defined by a performative geometry. When an interpreter strays outside the intended parameters, for whatever reason (be it for pedagogic edification, in a quest for empathetic response or to anchor the text or character in quotidian reality), he or she compromises the integrity of *Being*. The gripe, vis a vis authorial control is, I realise, the universal gripe of dramatists (whether Danis had reservations about my interpretation is unknown). As Sam Shepard commented in his essay 'Visualisation, Language and the Inner Library' (1977):

I feel like I've gone more than full circle in my search for the right environment, and more importantly, the right director for my work. Some-

times in this search I have gone so far as to allow a play to be totally dismantled and re-structured by a director or even to have sections of a play taken out of context and place in a revue... Except in rare cases I feel that all these attempts have failed to show me what I was looking for.

If one corrupts the intended formalism through directorial interpretation, one corrupts the reception of the hermetic form as ontological meta-sign (a material event); and it is the integrity of the material event that I chose to defend. My desire as a dramatist, whilst relinquishing control of the signifying system, is to limit reciprocal play (in defence of the integrity of the formalism as embodiment of the ontological inquiry) within, what Erika Fischer-Lichte terms the 'autopoietic feedback loop.' That relationship between presences – the dichotomous object (performer) and the subject dynamic (audience) – has lain at the heart of the postdramatic project since the performative turn in the 1960s. Fischer-Lichte, drawing upon Mersch, wrote: 'Those who argue for an emphatic event concept today, wish to develop the aesthetics of the event in opposition to the aesthetics of the *mise-en-scène*. Their argumentation casts the aesthetics of the event as a remnant of the notion of the sanctity of art as religious substitute. This notion sees a divine, numinous dimension in the encounter with art. As we have seen, there is little space for such a conception in the aesthetics of the performative' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 189). Pace Fischer-Lichte, I would substitute the term presentational for performative in the above for reasons I shall detail in distinguishing between both dramatic (representational) and post-dramatic (presentational) forms and (performative) *Being* that seeks to negate co-presence. Having accepted the relationality of all entities. I fully realise that a contradiction lies at the root of such an oppositional perspective. However, whilst we may be relational, socially constructed and culturally determined entities (our public selves in the second subjective position), the *I* in the first subjective position exists in isolated tyranny. My aesthetic is the aesthetic of paradox; the antinomy of absent presence. Without God and without absolute meaning, the abyss, within all moderns (post-postmoderns) remains, and we play,

each in our own isolated ways, into it. I shall explore the dynamic between presence and absent presence when considering distance in relation to *Troyanne*.

Following two roundtable readings held at the Lark in 2008 (led by Suzy Fay),⁵⁴ *Desire Lines* was to undergo a studio retreat i.e. 39 hours of rehearsal followed by two public readings on April 23rd and 24th, 2009. This process was to be directed by Sturgis Warner (later, model for the director in *A / The Biography of a Thing*). In an email sent prior to the workshop, I informed him that I did not intend to sit in during rehearsals as ‘I do not want to trample upon your process.’ ‘However,’ I added, ‘to save time, I could give you the Cardiff staging in order that you can concentrate upon performance. It’s quite simple, involving a few chairs, no music stands and the actors sharing the stage directions as opposed to having a designated stage direction person.’ The reading that had taken place in Cardiff in January 2009, was the culmination of a week-long workshop process directed by Irina Brown. It was one in which the text had been treated as a thing to be solved; even though, at the time, Sherman Cymru had yet to agree to full production, there was a tacit intent to stage. As a consequence, the process in Cardiff had been an exercise in direct development. It was therefore a retrogressive step to revert to ‘indirect development’ in New York. And yet I willingly participated in the process for process’s sake.

The first Public Reading of *Desire Lines* was laboured. Schooled in the *Method* (or like system), the actors, true to their training, and in my absence, had begun to mine the text for subtext. However, it appeared to me that they were reading a text, for which they had little socio-political context: Wales possessing little cultural capital in *The World Republic of Letters* nor political capital in the physical world. In addition, it was written in a lyrical style that left them exposed; for it lacks a realism to which mimetic characters can be anchored. My overall feeling was that the cast were implementing a form of damage limitation. Though it was not protocol, I asked whether I could lead

⁵⁴ They took place at The Lark in May and September 2008. As previously noted, the May visit coincided with a run of *Blink* at 59E59. That production also suffered from the extra-scenic delivery of the polymonologic text, contrary to the intent.

the rehearsal the following afternoon prior to the second reading. In that session, I appealed to the actors to stem their desire to anchor characterisation in subtext and to treat all monologic monologue as intra-personal dialogue (monologue intérieur), to adhere to the structure of the written text (an orthography of performativity designed to dictate desired rhythm) and finally to trust in their instinctive unfiltered responses to the Word. In essence, *to be*, not to act. Possibly because I was an alien, I was indulged. That second reading of *Desire Lines* was a significant event. The cast, led by the accomplished John Doman, having committed to the Word, did not strive for objective clarity (in the internal monologues), they strove for subjective effect; they allowed their responses to be instinctive - *to be a posteriori* (to become through the Word), not to act proleptically (in anticipation). *Being* on the Word realised within them a near essential truth, unmasked and un-representational. I had neither asked them to place themselves as actors in Hamlet's place (according to the Method school) nor to 'create and think Hamlet's thoughts' (according to Sam Kogan's Science),⁵⁵ I had asked them *to be* Hamlet through unfiltered response rather than psychological recall or 'complex' forming (Kogan 2010, 19-20). Whilst the first reading was clear yet un-invested with passion, the second was vital and raw. After the reading, I approached the actress who had read the Young Woman. "That was the most uncomfortable thing I have ever done." she said, "To be on stage without a character." "But you were great." I replied; released of the need to represent and re-present, she had *come into being*.

In 2011, I sat in the auditorium of Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff ready to witness the dress run of *Desire Lines* directed by Irina Brown (following on from her promising workshop of the text). Whilst the actors that had taken part in the Cardiff workshop

⁵⁵ Kogan stresses that his Science differs from Lee Strasberg's Method. Whilst the Method asks 'how would [actors] behave, react or feel if they were in a character's situation', in the Science of Acting, the 'I' is ever present. 'If 'I' am playing Hamlet,' Kogan writes, 'I would not need to think, 'I am Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark', I just need to be Hamlet's thoughts' (Kogan 2010, 156-157). Thought, and the generation of thought being key to Kogan's Science: 'When we create character we are creating the invisible thinking of that character' (36). Interestingly, Kogan stresses the importance of Events: an event being 'intensified thinking in anticipation of and the dissipation of thought following an event'. Kogan writes, 'You see it's not the flying brick that's the Event, it's the thinking about the brick that is' (46). In *Being*, I would suggest that it is neither the brick nor the thought of the brick that is the event, it is the word that generates the response to the impact of the brick.

in 2009 were largely cast by me from those who were familiar with my aesthetic intent, the cast of the full production, assembled solely by Brown, were not. My hope that Brown would respect the integrity of the formalistic intent was dashed within the first few utterances: ‘In the darkness, / Cow gut darkness, / I wonder what a foetus dreams / As it crouches there / Wrapped up like a fist in fuck?’ The delivery of the ‘I’ in the third line was key and telegraphed the extra-scenic intention of Brown’s direction from the outset. It crossed the theatron axis without any awareness of the split-subjectivity of self and the paradox of a duality brought into being by the utterance of the Word. The ‘essential’ truth of the intent was compromised by interpretation. The lyrical text was never meant to be delivered naturalistically as quasi-soliloquy to an Other (the audience). Indeed, when delivered so (and as stated in relation to the play reading at The Lark) monologic lyricism can appear self-consciously overburdened with meaning easily dismissed as the onanistic writings of a playwright rhapsode. Only performativity realises the true potential of my lyrical I dramaturgical texts, and it is to performativity that I now turn.

*

Having outlined the evolution of an aesthetic in this essay, in the next, I shall briefly consider the development of *Troyanne* (initially envisaged purely as a *mise en abyme* but was to claim a life of its own. Concentrating upon a particular reading of that text given at New York Theatre Workshop which was, whilst only a reading, an exemplar of performativity, I shall proceed to offer a tentative definition of the nature of *Being* – a definition purely in relation to my work, fully realising that the term *Being* is contestable as are many terms in relation to I dramaturgy and monologism⁵⁶ – of

⁵⁶ With regard to *Being*, Badiou in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* writes: ‘Tragedy speaks to us of: Being and Time, *Sein und Zeit*. It asks us to think where we stand in historical time, with respect to being’ (sic Badiou (2013): 85). Here Badiou references Heidegger *vis a vis* ‘(t)he condition of man is to be there’ (Heidegger 1978, 41). Apropos this, and in relation to Beckett, Laurens de Vos notes: ‘Alain Robbe-Grillet attributes Beckett’s characters with nothing but the Heideggerian quality of presence, *Dasein* (...) Everything that is, is here; off the stage there is nothing, non-being. Without language, Beckett’s characters would be nothing.’ (qtd. Wallace et al 2006, 122). Accepting that I claim kinship with Beckett, with regard to hermetic performativity, one could draw a line between Heideggerian being and *Being*. However, as I shall outline, *Being* eschews theatrical presence dependent upon a shared temporality. For *Being* aspires both to be simultaneously present and absent: to be both there and not there.

which performativity is a component part, along with ideal spectatorship of that work predicated upon a specific relationality and distance.

Desire Lines

11th draft (pre-publication)

A NOTE ON PERFORMANCE:

[from published text]

Thoughts tumble – they are not considered. They have yet to pass through the filter that checks the spoken word. They are the subtext – a wild ride upon a runaway train! Ride each word.

The thoughts are also, at times, simultaneous – layered dialogue. Also note, the ‘real time’ dialogue spoken on the journey is minimal, and that which is said is, in the main, mundane.

The overall effect should be one of an atmosphere / almost musical in its composition and minutely choreographed / conducted to the last movement / note.

On casting – Man plays himself in all the scenes where thought ‘shifts’. Old Woman does not double.

DESIRE LINES

FIRST TRAIN

A TRAIN TRAVELS THROUGH THE TUNNEL IMMEDIATELY AFTER TABERNACLE STATION. THE LIGHTS HAVE FAILED IN THE CARRIAGE. IN THE DARKNESS WE HEAR THE RHYTHMIC SOUND OF WHEELS TRAVERSING THE TRACK. A WOMAN SINGS A LULLABY. OVER THIS, A MAN SPEAKS. THERE IS FEAR IN THE DARKNESS!

MAN

In the darkness,
Cow gut darkness,
I wonder what a foetus dreams...
As it crouches there,
Wrapped up like a fist in a fuck?
Does it have nightmares;
Little unformed nightmares,
Irrational fears?
No...
How can it!
It doesn't know what day is.
It can only know night;
One, long, wet night.
You've got to know day to fear the dark.
You've got to know loss before you cherish hope.
No nightmares...
Not yet!
Not yet, little baby, not yet...
Lightmares maybe.
Fear of the no-dark...
Fear...
Of the dry, no dark something or other.
An eye blinding fear;
Fluorescence, cracking open the black ...

THE TRAIN HORN SOUNDS. THE TRAIN EMERGES FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT. WE SEE A TRAIN CARRIAGE. SEATED ARE AN OLDER MAN AND TWO WOMEN – ONE YOUNG WOMAN THE OTHER OLD (SHE IS THE SINGER, WHO HAS NOW STOPPED SINGING). WE ALSO SEE A GUARD (A MIDDLE AGED MAN.

MAN

Fiat Lux!
Fear begins with light;
A slapped arse,
Unwelcome pain.
Then the thought,
'Let me back in!
Let me crawl back into the black.
Please, it scares me.
Don't like this light thing!'
Fear, a seed,
A cuckoo chick growing;
Slowly at first, growing until a whole life is eaten by it.
Born to be eaten,
Born to fear..
To know the pain of loss...
Of light...
Of hope...

BEAT

MAN

My eyes! My eyes!
That kid shouted.
The one dressed as Dracula in that kid's party..
Wait... (STOPS HIMSELF)
It was your party, wasn't it? (UNCERTAIN)
Was it?
The one when I hired that awful entertainer and his fat son;
'Doc Norman and his protégé';
Mouthing along to all the songs,
All flapping arms and enthusiasm.
Sons like that should be drowned at birth
And fathers like that, shot for having them!

OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER

GUARD

Welcome aboard this 'first light' train
from Ferryton to Bastion

MAN

'My eyes' you screamed.
And you wouldn't open them,
You wouldn't open your eyes whilst your Vampire cape was on,
just in case...
... in case the light'd blind you;
Dissolve to dust.

Remember?
Remember, my little champion?
Oh, my son...
My little son...

OVER THE LOUDSPEAKER

GUARD
If you've just joined us at Tabernacle,
We will be stopping at
The Junction
Bluerinse Bay
Chavton
Poverton
And arrive at Bastion, our final destination,
In good time for whatever you have to do.
First stop, the Junction,
We'll be there in a bit now...

BEAT

MAN
There in a bit now, bit, bit, bit
In a bit now, bit, bit, bit...
There in a bit now, bit, bit, bit
In a bit now, bit, bit, bit...

THE BEAT OF PASSAGES SUCH AS THE ABOVE,
ARE SPOKEN WITH THE RHYTHM OF A TRAIN
TRAVERSING TRACK.

TRAIN HORN BLOWS. THE OLDER WOMAN GLANCES
AT THE MAN. HE LOOKS AWAY.

MAN
Would pain die with us on this train today?
If, for some reason,
Some Andromeda strain,
Everybody died in the world,
Just died whilst we were riding this train around this small country.
If a virus'd wiped out everyone,
Apart from us,
And we were the only ones left on this earth;
A seven out of Africa,
Out of here -
One Adam and the common Eve's of future mankind,
Would fear live on with us?
Would mankind survive...

Perpetuate?

HE GLANCES AT HER AGAIN

WOMAN First love...

MAN No

WOMAN First time!

MAN Not today...

THEN WOMAN, UNDER MAN'S LINES

WOMAN ... bastardbastardbastradbastardbastard...

MAN ... the Eves on this train
Are more eve than break of day:
Too old.. .
Too late!

WOMAN ...bastard only time!

MAN Too damned late.

WOMAN The first time Dad'd done anything for us...

MAN Thank God

WOMAN ...apart from cut me out of the will because of you.
The first time he'd done anything;
Given in,
Softened,
Given us something...
And you threw it back in his face.
Deliberately,
Spitefully, you shit.

SHE MOVES INTO MAN'S VIEW.
HER YOUTH UNNERVES HIM

WOMAN Ok, there was a cockroach in the sofa, but it was dead!

MAN WITH TREPIDATION

MAN Oh, no...

WOMAN Dry dead.
We'd shaken it out.
We sprayed the death out of that thing,

MAN A beautiful Dawn...

THEN UNDER THE NEXT LINE

MAN ... beautifulbeautifulbeautiful...

WOMAN Still you wouldn't sit on it

MAN ... an Eve in Eden!

A TRAIN GUARD APPROACHES

GUARD Tickets ready for inspection!
Please!

MAN CATCHES HIMSELF

MAN Fuck it
No, no, no, no...
No more pain
Fear dies with us on this train...

GUARD Ticket, sir?

MAN LOOKS AT THE GUARD

MAN Mmm?

GUARD Ticket please?

MAN Yeah, of course, sure...
Sorry, it's here somewhere...
I um...

MAN SEARCHES FOR HIS TICKET.
GUARD IS LOST IN THOUGHT

GUARD I'd brought you coffee, for God's sake!
Thought it was strange; all those cards,

Couldn't work it out.
What's the occasion? I said,
The occasion is my birthday!
Your birthday!
Oh, shit...
You've forgotten it again, haven't you?
Again, you said
And then 'Again!' for effect.
Again, again, again...

MAN TAKES A LONG TIME; EMPTIES POCKETS

MAN Sorry about this...

GUARD Take your time, sir.
What's a birthday anyway?
Just one year less to live.
Who cares?
I care, you said.
Shit, I care as well.
You don't care
I do care
You don't care
I do care
You don't care...
Crying out loud!

MAN I thought I'd put it in my bag..
Ah, here it is...

MAN HANDS THE GUARD HIS TICKET

GUARD Small Country Pass...

MAN Yeah...

GUARD Where you going, sir?

GUARD INSPECTS THE PASS.
THE INSPECTION CREATES UNFOUNDED
GUILT IN THE MAN

MAN Just traveling..

GUARD HANDS TICKET BACK TO MAN

GUARD Nice.
Never find the time to travel, myself

MAN No...

GUARD Too busy getting there and back

MAN Sure

GUARD Any request stops?

MAN No

GUARD Have a good journey.

HE HANDS THE TICKET BACK TO MAN

GUARD Thank you.
And uh,
Sorry about the lights in this carriage.
They're working in the next one.
If you want to move along..

MAN No. I'm fine

GUARD Not many tunnels on this line

MAN Thanks

THE GUARD MOVES ON TO THE GIRL
WITH BLONDE HAIR

GUARD No problem.
Ticket, love?
Ticket?

WOMAN Sure

GUARD No rush...
I could waste my whole life standing over you,
Right over you.
Bend down to your bag
That's it, darling...
Oh my God...

Down, boy,
Bad boy,
Dirty boy.
Think of the maintenance,
Think of the kids

WOMAN I've got it somewhere

GUARD Oh, you have...

SINGS HIS NEXT LINE - FROM BANANARAMA

GUARD ... Baby you've got it
I'm your Venus
I'm your fire...

MAN SEES WOMAN CLEARLY FOR THE FIRST TIME

MAN She must've joined the train at Ferryton; before I got on

WOMAN I think I left my ticket in the case?

GUARD No rush

SHE GETS UP TO LOOK IN HER BAG
WHICH IS ON THE RACK

WOMAN It's in here somewhere.
Sorry

GUARD Take your time

MAN I fear...

GUARD ...All the time in the world...

MAN ... I fear pain would live on with us...

GUARD One deposit in the Wank Bank...

MAN Bastard! I know his look

GUARD On credit...

WOMAN Look at him staring

GUARD ...for future withdrawal

THE NEXT TWO LINES OVERLAP

MAN Making her feel guilty...

WOMAN ... guilty for doing nothing

GUARD I am your Willie Wonka

MAN Making me guilty!

GUARD SINGS UNDER THE NEXT PARAGRAPH OR SO
TO THE TUNE OF 'I'VE GOT A GOLDEN TICKET'
FROM CHARLIE AND THE CHOCOLATE FACTORY

GUARD You've got a golden ticket
Show me your golden ticket...

MAN Look at him look at her!
I bet he'd try and beat me to her;
Beat me off with his ticket puncher.
It's my train! My bloody train!
And you're not playing!
Make tracks! he'd probably say.
Make tracks.
Get on down the line!
Damn him!
He looks stronger..
Younger, maybe?
Is he?

UNCERTAIN.
HE IS ALWAYS UNCERTAIN ABOUT HIS OWN AGE

Fuck him!
If he wants to play Adam, let him.
If he wants the pain,
I'll take the pleasure...
In time,
In good time.
I'll wait in a cave at the foot of a mountain...
I'll wait...
Then I'll get her.

One day, when he's out hunting, I'll take her:
Caressing and listening.
Because she'd be bored to death with him by then;
With his ticket punching hands,
His football conversation!

WOMAN I knew I had it somewhere

GUARD Thanks

GUARD TO WOMAN

GUARD Change at the Junction

WOMAN The Junction?

GUARD Yeah...

MAN No!

GUARD ...The Junction.

MAN You can't leave me at the Junction.

GUARD You won't wait long for a connection

MAN We are the future

WOMAN Thanks

MAN Eve and Adam

GUARD Thank you

MAN You can't leave at The Junction!

GUARD Any more tickets please!

MAN IS MORTIFIED

MAN Always The Junction!

GUARD PASSES ON

WOMAN Careful, sweetie, you said

MAN A left turn at the gate in the morning

WOMAN The police have had a quiet word.

MAN And you miss someone...

WOMAN Apparently he's under surveillance.
Look, if you want,
I know someone who can teach him a lesson...

MAN Bloody Junction...

WOMAN Nothing serious, just enough to scare...
Leave him, Dad, please.
I'll sort it out myself
Just don't interfere.
Ok, Dad?
Ok, Sweetie.
Look, I know I've been hard on you, but...
It's not easy, for a father...
For me....
Since your mother...
I know, Dad...
I know...

OLDER WOMAN SINGS

WOMAN Is he treating you well?
Who?
Him.
Yes, Dad.
Are you sure?
Yes, Dad
Got everything you need?
Yes, Dad
There's the old sofa in the garage,
You're welcome to it, if you want it.
Thanks, Dad, thanks.
I thought you'd be pleased with my father's gift,
I thought that's what you wanted.
You moaned enough about being banned
from his pub after we got together,
But that's all you cared about were the lost pints with your friends.
I was stupid...

Totally blind!
I lost my family because of you,
I didn't see my father for a year
Because of you; because of him...
Stubborn as each other!
Then six months working,
Worming my way back to him;
our way into him.
Trying to convince my Dad you weren't a bastard
When all along...

THE GUARD IS ON A PHONE BETWEEN
THE CARRIAGES. DURING THE NEXT SPEECH,
THE WOMAN GETS UP AND GOES TOWARDS
THE TOILET. WOMAN'S LINES UNDER THE GUARDS –
DIMINUENDO

WOMAN ... bastardbastradbastardbastardbastard...

GUARD ... I'm really sorry, love.
Look, I'll be back by seven.
Yeah...
What if you dump the kids with your mother,
We'll go down to the Chinese buffet.
You like it there... it's cheap. (REALISES HIS MISTAKE)
Not that I want to stint on your birthday, but...
What with the new boiler and everything.
What do you say?

BEAT

GUARD I know, and I'm really sorry.
Look, I would've taken the day off if I'd known.
I know I should've remembered but...
That's why I said you should always remind me.
You know what I'm like; head like a sieve.
If you'd told me, love I would've...
Love?

SHE HAS OBVIOUSLY HUNG UP

GUARD Shit!

HE DIALS AGAIN – IT'S ANSWERED

GUARD Hello, can you give me a number for a florist please?

GUARD IS STANDING IN FRONT OF
THE TOILET DOOR

WOMAN Can I?

GUARD Sorry, love, this one's out of order.
Try the other end...
Not you, love, yes, Where?
In Ferryton... that's it, Ferryton.
Yeah, put me through please...

WOMAN WALKS THROUGH THE TRAIN TO THE BACK
OF THE CARRIAGE. SHE APPROACHES AND WALKS
PAST THE MAN, HE SMILES. SHE SMILES UNCERTAIN

MAN We could be Genesis...

GUARD Is that Daff-o-Dilys? (*Daf-oh-dil-lis*)

MAN (ALMOST INAUDIBLE) Hello

MAN TURNS AS SHE PASSES

WOMAN On my eighteenth birthday,
No present;
You drank the money I'd borrowed for the pints.
On my birthday!
My birthday!
Why did I stay?
Why did I begin?
Barely legal; totally stupid

MAN You remind me of someone
Someone I'd punch that Guard's lights out for.
Just say the word,
I'd have a go.
I'd be your champion,
And from us, a new civilisation will be born,
A better one!
Well, maybe just another one.
For you, my love, I'd endure...
Perpetuate.
We could be the world

IN THE TOILET

WOMAN

You came home late,
Again!
Home late: deliberately
To argue with me,
Again!
To make me the bastard
Again!
So you'd feel less guilty.
It was all, 'my fault'
I never cared, apparently
I didn't understand...
And my lack pushed you...
I pushed you,
That's rich,
Without knowing,
To go with other women.
All the nights when I was working,
Earning your beer money,
Nine little bitches...
Sniffing your arse,
Lapping it up.
And bitch number ten....waiting;
Waiting in the car outside for you to leave me.
Leave the little girl, who wasn't woman enough
To understand what a real man is...
Needs...
Wants...
A little girl who left everything
For you,
For nothing.
All my fault, you said!
That's why you were leaving.
What had I ever done?
What had I ever done!
Why did you make an excuse of me, then walk out?
You just walked out, and the bitch drove you away to her kennel
to do it doggy fucking doggy!
Bitchbitchfuckingbitch!
And you just left me sitting on a sofa no-one wanted;
Horrible sofa, never liked it.
Thought my father'd thrown it out before he offered it to us.
Never want to see it again

Never want to see you.
I'm going to go far away.
Far, far away;
To the other side maybe.
Live on a boat, no sofas on a boat...
Well some, but not a trawler
I'll trawl a reef, a great big reef... catch fish.
Sail far far away
As far away from this 'Small Country' as I can get

SHE SINGS UNDER GUARD. THIS GOES AGAINST THE RHYTHM OF THE TRAIN. IT IS ETHEREAL – A WORLD BEYOND THE TRACKS. ONCE ESTABLISHED, HER SINGING UNDERSCORES THE MAN'S NEXT SPEECH.

WOMAN
... far far far away
... from here
... far far far away
... from here
... far far far away
... from here
... far far away

GUARD Red roses, the biggest ones you've got, yeah...
No!
Hold on...
A dozen pink ones with one big red one in the middle...
A special one;
She is the one, sort of one.
Before us, there were just 'nothing much' sort of women.
But she is The Red Rose Woman.
Yeah!
So how much is that?
(TAKEN ABACK) Shit!

RE-THINK

GUARD How about carnations?
What?
(CORRECTS HIMSELF)
No, you're right, it's got to be roses;
Red roses,
Bite the bullet...
No... no message, I hate messages.

Just – Carlon.
No, not kay like Klingon...
just put cuh...cuh, yeah... cuh
...and a kiss

WOMAN
(SHE CRIES AS SHE SINGS)
...far far far away
... from here
... far far far away
... from here
... far far far away
... from here
... far far away...

MAN The Village!
 My Village...

GUARD Next stop,
 Request stop.
 The Village,
 Next stop.

WOMAN STOPS SINGING NOW

MAN (HE SUDDENLY SEES THROUGH THE TRAIN WINDOW)
 Oh, my God, it's me!
 Freewheeling on my bike from Kirin Villa
 down the mountain road.
 Past the Village Idiot pub,
 Under the railway bridge
 There I go;
 Lookatme! Lookatme!
 Seaside kid, brown and easy.
 What am I? Eight? Nine?
 Look at me speed;
 Past the bowling green,
 The beach *café*.
 Onto the pebbles
 And there, in front of me...
 Clicketty clack, down the track
 Clicketty clack down the track,
 There and back,
 Clickety clack...
 I hate this line;

Thin vein between sea and mountain...
Full of memory...

THE TRAIN STOPS. A YOUNG MAN BOARDS IT. HE IS LISTENING TO HIS IPOD. HE IS OBLIVIOUS TO THE WORLD. HOWEVER, PERIODICALLY, HE WILL HUM ALONG TO HIS PERSONAL SOUNDTRACK – IT UNDERSCORES MOMENTS ADDING TO THE CRESCENDOS OF SOUND DURING THE FOLLOWING SPEECH, THE YOUNG WOMAN LEAVES THE TOILET AND PASSES THE YOUNG MAN ON HER WAY BACK TO HER SEAT.

WOMAN (RISES OUT OF HER TEARS)
.. thank you! Fuck you! Good night!
My father'll be pleased
Glad I've ditched you.
He's got friends who could teach you a lesson.
You're dead...

THERE IS A MOMENT OF EYE CONTACT BETWEEN THE YOUNG MAN AND THE WOMAN

WOMAN ... I'm fishing!

SHE SMILES FLIRTATIVELY

MAN Is there a trolley on this train?

THE OLDER WOMAN DRINKS TEA FROM A FLASK AND HUMS A TUNE

MAN I should've brought a flask,
The one you bought for me.
Looks like hers,
Exactly like hers,
Exactly...
I know that song...

THE OLDER WOMAN TURNS TO HIM AND SMILES. HE LOOKS AWAY SHEEPISHLY, NOT WISHING TO CONNECT WITH HER GAZE. THE WOMAN TALKS ON HER MOBILE PHONE, MAN CRANES TO SEE HER

WOMAN Dad, I'm coming home

Leaving him...
Yeah, I'm glad too...
I know, you said.
Cockroach...

MAN Yes!

WOMAN Da-ad...

MAN Now I know who you are!
(THE MEMORIES TUMBLE OVER EACH OTHER)

WOMAN Can you lend me a few thousand?

MAN You're my ex-girlfriend's friend!

WOMAN I'm going away...

MAN We were both 'exes', remember?
We met to console each other
In that bar, that night;
Days, I hadn't washed.
Why wash if you don't expect?
And I didn't,
But I was caught out.
We fell into each other,
Fell back to your flat.
I stank
And you politely said good night.
Regrets eh!
Had a few...
... there again,
You're the girl who followed me to that shop,
challenged me with my own name and I took it up.
We got on,
We got off.
Two... three in the morning;
You wouldn't let me in,
You got out.
You left for a taxi,
I stayed in bed.
You could've been mugged!

TRAIN HORN SOUNDS

MAN No, no, no, got it!
You're that girl from Montpellier.
I'd just had a fight
You sat next to me
On a Georgian Step
Before a Georgian House.
That's it...
You were so beautiful;
So quintessentially Big Country.
I was really small that night.
Drunk and small...
Yeah...
You were patient, then lost it and left.
I never knew your name...
Charlotte, Beatrice?
No, I know,
You're Christianne in the Alsace
Je t'aime, I shouted as you crossed that bridge.
No, no.
You're that Spanish girl on the Arctic train!
The poem...
Remember the poem?
It's you, isn't it...
Isn't it?

GUARD Next stop the Junction

MAN Who the hell are you?

THE LIGHTS CHANGE. A NEW YEAR'S EVE PARTY IN A
BAR IN TABERNACLE. IT IS MANY YEARS EARLIER.
THE YOUNGER WOMAN PLAYS THE WIFE. THE OLDER
WOMAN BEARS WITNESS

WOMAN It is you, isn't it?

MAN Is it?

BEAT

WOMAN I'm sure it's you.

MAN Well, if you're sure...

WOMAN (AFFIRMING) I knew it was you

MAN I must be me then. (JOKINGLY)
Who am I?

WOMAN Adam..

MAN ... Dawn

WOMAN I saw you and I thought... it's him!

MAN Here I am

THEY SMILE

WOMAN So what are you doing here?

MAN Can't I be here?

WOMAN Course you can

MAN Good.

WOMAN But how come?

MAN Oh, I was in the Village Idiot with a friend,
And he said let's go to Tabernacle;
Let's hit town for midnight,
And here I am...

WOMAN Great

MAN Haven't been in this bar for years

WOMAN Still bad

MAN Still home

BEAT

WOMAN Someone said you were working in The Big City.
You went there for university, didn't you?

MAN Yeah, but I always come back for New Year's

WOMAN Welcome home.

MAN Thanks

BEAT

WOMAN So...
Big City

MAN Yeah

WOMAN I'd love to go there

MAN You've never been?

WOMAN Not yet.
Want to go though

MAN If you're ever there...

WOMAN Too busy...

MAN ... but if you ever are...

WOMAN Sure...

BEAT

WOMAN What's it like living in Big Country then?

MAN It's not small

WOMAN No

MAN It's.... (LOST FOR WORDS)

WOMAN Big?

MAN Yeah

THEY SMILE

WOMAN So what do you do?

MAN How do you mean?

WOMAN For work...

MAN Ah, it's boring...
 You know.
 And you?

WOMAN I own a shop

MAN At twenty three!

WOMAN A small shop

MAN Great

WOMAN Just beads and stuff...

MAN I'd be useless in a shop

WOMAN Really?

MAN No business sense

WOMAN No?

MAN I'd probably give stuff away

WOMAN It's been bred into me;
 My grandmother,
 my mother,
 we've always had stalls...

MAN Yeah, I remember

WOMAN Do you?

MAN Yeah, down the market...
 I saw you...

WOMAN Did you?

MAN Once...
 A few times...

 BEAT

WOMAN So what do you do?

MAN You really want to know?

WOMAN Yeah

MAN I proof read

WOMAN What's that?

MAN I told you, it's boring;
Just words and stuff

WOMAN Ok

MAN It's a living, just about

 BEAT

MAN Good to see you though

WOMAN Yes...
Good to see you too

 BEAT

MAN I still remember that Valentines card you sent me; fourth year

WOMAN Please...

MAN Roses are red
Violets are blue...

WOMAN ...Don't...

MAN ...You'll never guess
Who sent this to you

WOMAN ...so embarrassed.

MAN But I did.
I can picture your writing;
Swirls, round...

WOMAN I've got kids writing

MAN ... the hearts, the exes...

WOMAN Really embarrassing

BEAT

MAN Sorry, I never sent you one

WOMAN You were someone else's.

MAN Yes...
Guess I still owe you a kiss

THE BELLS OF MIDNIGHT STRIKE NEW YEAR.
THEY DANCE AND SING *AULD LANG SYNE*.
AT THE END, THEY CANNOT QUITE BRING
THEMSELVES TO KISS

WOMAN Is there someone...?

MAN ... no, not at the moment.
And you?

WOMAN No

MAN Right...

WOMAN Right

MAN No

WOMAN Right

BEAT

WOMAN So where are you staying tonight?

MAN Well, I'm going to walk home to my parents

WOMAN Back to The Village!

MAN I'll never get a taxi...

WOMAN ...not tonight

MAN No...
So I'll walk, I guess

WOMAN It's far...

MAN I'll be ok

BEAT

WOMAN Look, um...
Don't think I'm coming on to you, but...
You could crash at my place if you want.

MAN No, no...

WOMAN No, I live close.
Got my own house

MAN Your have a shop and your own house!

WOMAN Small house

MAN More than I've got

WOMAN Well you're welcome to stay...
If you want, that is...

MAN I wouldn't want to...

WOMAN ...you wouldn't

BEAT

MAN ... well, if it's...

WOMAN ... it's ok

MAN Ok, then...
Great...
Thanks

SHE TOUCHES HIM TENTATIVELY.
GRADUALLY, THEY EMBRACE

MAN You took me

WOMAN ...took my chance

MAN ... my beauty

WOMAN ... not that I'd waited...

MAN ... mounted me

WOMAN ...just hoped

MAN ... married me,

WOMAN ...just wished...

MAN ... 'til death

WOMAN ... wished all along you'd walk back into my life

MAN ... we flew away to Big City

WOMAN ... walk up to me

MAN ... your house

WOMAN ... hold me

MAN ...a deposit

WOMAN ...sealed with a loving kiss

MAN ... on our new home

BOTH ... a life together

 BEAT (AS THEY DRIFT APART)

MAN ... now you're gone

 BACK ON THE TRAIN.
 YOUNG WOMAN IS EMBARRASSED AS SHE PASSES

MAN Bye

THE YOUNG MAN SMILES AT THE YOUNG WOMAN
AS THEY PASS EACH OTHER - A LOVE LOST BEFORE
IT HAS BEGUN!

MAN Damned youth!

AS THE WOMAN LEAVES THE TRAIN, MAN
SNEAKS A LOOK AT THE OLDER WOMAN. SHE LOOKS
ACCUSINGLY AT HIM. HE AVOIDS HER GAZE. HE IS
EMBARRASSED BY IT

MAN (UNDER HIS BREATH)
Mankind definitely dies with us
(AS IN, THE OLDER WOMAN AND HIM)

HE LOOKS AWAY. SHE LOOKS HIS WAY.
THERE IS A SADNESS IN HER GAZE.
ON THE LOUD SPEAKER

GUARD We are now at The Junction.
Make sure you have all your possessions before you leave the train
And please, mind the gap as you disembark.
Next stop Bluerinse Bay...

THE OLDER WOMAN SINGS. THE MILES PASS

MAN Bluerinse Bay
Chavton
Poverton
Then somewhere a border;
Invisible line,
Between
Small Country and Big Country.
No custom control,
No paranoia;
No America / Canada here.
Just a line on a map,
Through lives,
Through history...

BEAT. WOMAN KEEPS ON SINGING

MAN Tired,
And I've barely begun...

ON THE LOUD SPEAKER

GUARD

Next stop, Bastion

MAN

Bastion,
A station between us and them.
First stop across the border;
The border within me...
Naughty, naughty Small Country
Big Country knows best!
And stop gurgling on about identity?
Spitting in your dragon's tongue!
Sorry?
(SORRY SAID AS AN APOLOGY RATHER THAN
AS A REQUEST FOR CLARIFICATION)
What!
Sorry
Bloody should be!
Sorry was us, sorry was me;
Sorry damn nation,
Always the apology...
But my son
My champion,
He is!
No sorries
(HE LAUGHS)
We'll gurgle on about identity, he'd say,
(without a hair on his tongue),
We'll gurgle on, until you realise
Your Empire's gone,
You are not Great,
We are not United,
You are just a country
And we are, another one;
Smaller, but another!
Oh, my Champion...

GUARD WALKS THROUGH THE TRAIN

GUARD

Bastion, next stop.
Change trains
For all stations south.

MAN GAZES AT YOUNG MAN WHO IS HUMMING.
HE RECOGNISES HIMSELF IN THE YOUTH

MAN

Eighteen...
I was eighteen
Eighteen?
I was you (THE YOUNG MAN)
Eighteen...
Am I still?
No.
Was eighteen,
Must be.
At eighteen,
I crossed the border...
Rode the line
Past Bastion
To The Big City.
Capital, Big Country.
Beware!
They eat dragons there!
People warned;
Small people; people who'd only ever traveled on TV!
Stay at home,
Forget learning,
Learning only gives you airs.
What good are airs, son?
And don't start me on graces!
Listen to reason,
Small is heaven enough for any man!
Understand?
Seek within and you shall find...
Seek without and you sin!
Ah, fuck off then!
Just don't come back crying
When you're eaten!"

BEAT

MAN

Looked within,
Looked without...
A small country looks very big from the inside, I saw.
I saw, but looking is a matter of seeing.
Perspective....
I wanted to judge size.
To see.
How small is small?
How big is big?

Measure my own country on a foreign scale.
Is that your journey? (THE YOUNG MAN)
To see with borrowed eyes...
Can you borrow eyes?
You can borrow a tongue:
Borrow a dollar.
But eyes?
Ears?
Lend me your ears...
Did they actually lend them?
Pinching a nose between finger and thumb.
You've got my nose!
How do I smell?
Awful.
Sensation.
To touch yourself with someone else's hand!
You can't!
You just can't!
That is our failing,
Our utter isolation.
So alone...

GUARD ...next stop, Bastion!

MAN But at eighteen...
So much ambition...
Desire,
To journey to the centre;
Glimpse a fleeting grace,
Hear
Smell
Taste
Touch
Then penetrate.
To see, to grow...
Small Country men to a man.
Our mayfly ambitions...
Our hopes...
Our day in the sun;
To make big in Big,
(The true measure of a Small man),
Then travel home first class and say
Look at me, look at me!
I didn't get eaten.
In the Big City, I ate!

Headline in the local press
Small town prodigal eats penny and the bun!
At eighteen,
I had ambition,
An appetite to 'go large';
Frieswiththat? Coke?

GUARD WALKS PAST

GUARD I wonder if she's had the flowers yet?
What do florists do when they want to say sorry?
What do florists do...

MAN Eighteen
Twenty eight
Thirty eight
Forty eight
Fifty eight...

THE ABOVE CAN DOVE TAIL UNDER BELOW

GUARD I'd like to see her face when she gets them.
Be a pretty sight;
Like a beetroot, I bet, like a beetroot!
I can hear all her friends now
See he does love you, love!
Because she's probably gone on and on
About what a horrible man I am;
On and on,
All bloody morning,
On and on...
He might as well be Jehovah's Witness.
He celebrates nothing!
No love, I forget.
They make a deliberate choice to ignore;
To mess up their kids,
Piss off their wives.
Things just slip my mind.
Don't mean to... they just do
Anyway, better late than never, I say!
Always too late...

BELOW UNDERSCORES GUARD'S SPEECH
YOUNG MAN HUMS ALONG TO MUSIC.
OLDER WOMAN SINGS

THE SOUNDSCAPE BUILDS

MAN

Clicketty Clack, down the track
Clicketty Clack down the track, there and back
Clicketty Clack, down the track
Clicketty Clack down the track, there and back

GUARD

She'll find something to moan about in heaven
Always moaning;
On and on,
Same round tune,
Day in, day out.
On and on and on...
Is this it!
Is this just it?
Is this love?
Just forgetting and moaning?
Moaning,
Forgetting.
Year in, year out?
Same old tune
Repeating..
... 'til the end?
God's sake get me off this bloody train!

THE TRAIN BLOWS ITS HORN. OLDER WOMAN,
YOUNG MAN AND MAN STOP. SILENCE OF SORTS. THE
GUARD'S PHONE RINGS. SUDDENLY HE CHANGES

GUARD

Yeah?
Ah, you got them!
Yeah, I know, like a sieve.... like a sieve.
Sorry...
Happy birthday, love...
And many of them...
Happy Birthday...
Warn me next time.
Got to go.
Chinese?
Great

BEAT

GUARD

Bastion, next stop,

Where this train will terminate

MAN Excuse me, so do I change here for Our City?

GUARD Uh, yes, sir,
You can either go direct via Shireton ,
Or change via Allpoints East

MAN I hate Allpoints East

GUARD It's not a pretty station

MAN No.
So, on which platform will the Shireton train be?

GUARD See the Guard and he'll see you right.
Next stop Bastion!
All change.
All change.

THE MAN, OLDER WOMAN, GUARD AND YOUNG MAN
PREPARE TO DISEMBARK. THEY HEAD FOR
DIFFERENT EXITS. THEY LEAVE THE TRAIN AND
ENTER AGAIN THROUGH EACH OTHER'S EXIT
DOORS. THEY TAKE THEIR SEATS; DIFFERENT ONES
THIS TIME.

SECOND TRAIN

OLDER WOMAN SINGS. WE HEAR THE VOICE OF A
GUARD ON THE LOUDSPEAKER. YOUNG MAN SITS
QUIETLY READING THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY. HE
READS THE FIRST SECTION OF THE CHAPTER
'SECTION THE SECOND. THE VISION OF SUDDEN
DEATH' *ENGLISH MAIL COACH* BY THOMAS DE
QUINCEY. YOUNGER WOMAN IS NOW A TROLLEY
DOLLY

GUARD (OOV) Welcome to the Seacastle train
If you've only just joined us at Shireton, we'll be stopping at:
Grayling
Lionchurch
Mappaton
Five Ways
Newtown

Newbridge
Our City
Dullage
Foxton
Nest
Whitorse
Ugly
The Dock
Final stop, Seacastle, where this train will terminate.
First stop Grayling. We'll be there in a bit now

THE NEXT SPEECH UNDERSCORES THE GUARD'S
ANNOUNCEMENT.

MAN
There in a bit now
bit, bit, bit
In a bit now
bit, bit, bit
There in a bit now
bit, bit, bit
In a bit now
bit bit bit....

GUARD (OOV) And we are sorry for the delayed departure of this service.
This was due to a fatality on the line.
Unfortunately, he is no longer with us.
We thank you for your patience

YOUNG MAN (READING FROM BOOK) Section the second

MAN Fear...

MIDDLE AGED MAN UTTERS A WORD
THAT PIERCES HIM

M.A. MAN Silence...

TROLLEY Shame...

YOUNG MAN The vision of sudden death

MAN Would fear die with us,
Today,
On this train?

TROLLEY DOLLY WHEELS HER TROLLEY THE TRAIN

MAN
If, for some reason,
Some Andromeda strain,
We were the only ones left on this earth,
Would fear live on with us?
Perpetuate...

M.A. MAN
Pain...

MAN SEES TROLLEY DOLLY

TROLLEY
(ALMOST SINGS)
Tea,
Coffee...

MAN
She?
Maybe, she...
Maybe baby...
She is May in Quebec,
Season's end;
The sap already risen on the maple tree.
Sweet syrup,
Late bottled,
Poured liberally.
Would she sweeten the pain?

M.A. MAN
Pain but not silence!
It shouldn't have been there...
Shouldn't have been there...
There should've been sound;
Laughing..

TROLLEY
Anything from my trolley, love?

M.A. MAN
... crying

TROLLEY
Tea?

M.A. MAN
... not silence

TROLLEY
Coffee?

M.A. MAN
... not fucking silence!

TROLLEY Me?

HIS ATTENTION IS DRAWN. OLDER WOMAN SINGS

M.A. MAN Um, sorry...
Tea, please

TROLLEY Milk?

M.A. MAN No.
It shouldn't have been there,
Shouldn't have been there...

TROLLEY Sugar?

M.A. MAN Please
Anything but silence.
Shit, shit, shit!

MAN How old are you?
Am I as old as you?
Am I?
Older?
Younger?
Difficult to tell.

M.A. MAN It was that bloody nurse's fault.
She kept you too long in the ante room.
She should've taken you...
Sooner,
Much sooner to the theatre.
You needed a doctor...
You needed...
You didn't need silence,
You didn't need that.
Even the pain was silent.
A perfect pain;
Numb...
Beyond feeling...

MAN Never look in mirrors...
Never look down...
Hate reflection

TROLLEY Here you are, love

MAN Hate...

TROLLEY Napkin

M.A. MAN Thanks

TROLLEY A stick for the bag..

TROLLEY DOLLY HAVING SERVED, MOVES ON

MAN If we pinched the skin on the back of our hands
Whose skin would smooth first?
Yours?
Mine?
Do you have children?
Do you bear the marks,
The scars life exacts?

SHE APPROACHES MAN

TROLLEY Fancy anything from my trolley, love?

MAN Do you serve yourself?

TROLLEY Tea?
Coffee?

M.A. MAN Silence...

MAN Um...

BEAT

MAN Tea... please

TROLLEY Sugar? Milk?

MAN No thanks
Excuse me, I was wondering...
Did I hear right?
Does this train go all the way to Seacastle?

AS SHE MAKES THE TEA

TROLLEY All the way

MAN So I don't have to change at Our City to go west?

TROLLEY Not on this train

MAN Good

BEAT

TROLLEY Shame about the boy eh?

MAN Boy?

TROLLEY On the line.
Suicide;
Totally inconsiderate

PUTS TEA DOWN ON TABLE IN FRONT OF THE MAN

TROLLEY Here we are...

MAN Thanks

TROLLEY One fifty, please

HE PAYS HER

M.A. MAN Out she came,
Little thing.
Chord wrapped once,
wrapped twice.
Nothing unusual in that, but...
Slapping her
Flicking
Trying to pain life into being!
But nothing...
You looked straight ahead... avoiding
I looked across you;
Across you at our baby on that life support machine.
You daren't look at that
You looked dead ahead
Our gaze; a cross
And she.... our little thing

In that incubator;
Oxygen,
Injections,
More flicking.
One...
Two ...
Three...
More minutes.
Nothing.
No explanation.
Then they took her away
And we were left alone...
In silence.
No noise!
A child should be born with noise.
Yeah,
noise is life.
Silence...
Kills

BEAT

TROLLEY Celia is modelling the latest in lingerie...

WE HEAR THE YOUNG MAN READ FROM DE QUINCEY

YOUNG MAN Caesar, the dictator,
At his last dinner party..
(On) being asked what death,
In *his* judgment,
Might be pronounced the most eligible,
Replied
"That which should be most sudden"

TROLLEY DOLLY APPROACHES YOUNG MAN WHO
HAS A PENCIL (WITH WHICH HE UNDERLINES DIFFI
CULT PASSAGES IN HIS BOOK). HE TAPS THE PENCIL
AGAINST THE PAGES AS HE WRESTLES WITH THE
COMPLEXITY OF THE TEXT

TROLLEY Something from my trolley, love?

BEAT

YOUNG MAN ...Most sudden

HE NODS HIS HEAD DISMISSIVELY AS SHE PASSES ON

TROLLEY You could be a model, he said

M.A. MAN Eight long minutes!
Eight minutes dead.
There she lay,
Little thing,
In the incubator:
Barely living,
But alive,
Alive...
Eight minutes dead, they said.
(HE FIGHTS THE CRYING)
My beautiful daughter...

TROLLEY You have the bone structure,
The body for it

M.A. MAN ... Shit!
Lots of babies swallow,
The nurse said.
But she breathed in.
Her first breath,
Almost her last,
Filled her lungs with it.
Not with life,
But her own shit!
Welcome to the world
This is it!
The pain of it.
Never forget!
... never forget...

TROLLEY Here's my card.
Give me a ring me, he said
Never did...
Thought about it...
Catwalk, aisle?
Aisle, catwalk?
I was afraid...
I married...
Oh, if only...

M.A. MAN GETS UP OUT OF HIS SEAT AND GOES
TOWARD THE INTER-CARRIAGE BIT. THE FOLLOWING
PASSAGES OVERLAP

MAN Clicketty clack, down the track
Clicketty clack down the track, there and back,
Clickety clack down the track
Clicketty clack down the track, there and back...

UNDER ABOVE, YOUNG MAN READS FROM DE
QUINCEY

YOUNG MAN ... Sudden death
(by Christians),
Is ranked among the last of curses.
And yet, by the noblest of Romans,
it was ranked...
The first of blessings...

BY NOW, MIDDLE AGED MAN IS IN BETWEEN
CARIAGES ON HIS PHONE

M.A. MAN How's she doing?
It's not normal to fit...
Is it?
Are the drugs working?
Have they said anything?
Time!

MAN Want to go home, you said,
Three months pregnant.
I'd just had promotion...
It'd taken me long enough

M.A. MAN Shit!

ADAM AND HIS WIFE, BEFORE THEY LEFT BIG CITY
FOR OUR CITY.

MAN I hate this city, you said,
A perfect hate.

WOMAN We belong somewhere else, Adam...
We belong, and I long, so much...

MAN God, Dawn!
If longing was an Olympic event,
Small Country'd take the gold for bloody 'Longing'
We are champions of it!
I'm going to sleep in the back bedroom!

WOMAN Sometimes you can be a real shit...

BEAT

MAN Look, Dawn

WOMAN No, you look.
I gave up everything for you

MAN You didn't have to...

WOMAN Oh, don't start that again!
I gave it up ...
Gladly;
Sold the shop,
Sold my house,
Just so that we could make a new start...
Together

MAN Ok!

WOMAN You had nothing,
Just a shit job and too many books.
But I didn't care.
I sold everything
And came here,
To this City I hate,
For you...
For us

MAN Why throw it back in my face?

WOMAN I'm not throwing it back in your face

MAN You are!

WOMAN I'm not

MAN You are.

I've just had the promotion.
You know how long I've been waiting for that

WOMAN I know and I'm pleased for you.
But I want something more

MAN And you've got it.
And I'm thrilled for you,
For both of us.
It's great...
Timing's shit, but...

WOMAN Adam!

MAN Come on...

WOMAN Come on what?

BEAT

MAN Let's put things into perspective, eh?

WOMAN Perspective!

MAN There's no rush.
I wasn't aware there was a time limit;
After ten years
I'd be a bloody pumpkin!
We didn't say,
Ten years from now whatever happens, we're going home

WOMAN No, but...

MAN This is home for me,
I'm happy here

WOMAN You should've married a girl from here then!

MAN But, I didn't...

WOMAN ... maybe you should've

MAN Maybe I should've...

WOMAN Oh, that makes me feel really good

MAN But I didn't!
 I married you.
 I love you.
 For Gods' sake!

WOMAN Do you?

MAN You can be so difficult...

WOMAN Me!

MAN But I still love you...

WOMAN Oh great

MAN (SINCERE) It is...
 And now you're having our child,
 That's fantastic.
 It's what you wanted;
 What we wanted.
 That's not the problem.
 The problem is
 I just don't understand your problem with Big City

BEAT

WOMAN I just don't like it here;
 Never have,
 You know that.

MAN You enjoy your job

WOMAN It's ok,
 And I'd stay...
 For as long as it would take,
 For you...
 For us...
 But 'us' is now us three.
 And you always said...

MAN ...yeah, yeah...

WOMAN ... you always said,
 We'd go back if we had a baby...

Back to Small Country

MAN Oh, god...
I'm only thirty three, Dawn

WOMAN Jesus!

MAN I still have ambition

WOMAN And?

MAN You know, I...
(DIFFICULT)
..I don't like it here
I mean really like it.
It's just...

WOMAN This is not home, Adam

PAUSE

MAN No
But, what would there be,
Back home,
For me...
Now?

BEAT

WOMAN You just want to stay here to prove something.
But what are you trying to prove really?
And who are you trying to impress?
Nobody else cares about you here, apart from me...

MAN I know,
I just...

WOMAN What?

MAN I just need to prove that...

WOMAN What!

MAN I just need to prove that I'm not small

WOMAN Small Country doesn't mean small, Adam
Big Country doesn't mean big
Grow up...

MAN I know, but...

WOMAN No you don't.
You think you know,
But you don't...
Not in there. (HIS HEART)

 BEAT

WOMAN This place is not us, Adam.
It's their country, not ours

MAN It's just a big city

WOMAN It's more than a big city, Adam;
it's 'Big City'

MAN Yeah...
Sorry

WOMAN It's 'what' not 'sorry', Adam!
Little words;
The difference between
Us and them.

MAN What?

WOMAN I just want our child to grow up
Not believing that he has to get out
To be big;
As you tried to be.
I don't want our child to believe the shit you swallowed

MAN Oh, thanks

WOMAN You know what I mean!
You're not still eighteen, Adam!
Times have changed,
Small Country's not the same country you left all those years ago

MAN I know...

BEAT

WOMAN

It's time to go home, Adam.
Time to go home because I want our child to believe
In himself,
In his own country,
In his own language.
Not to feel the constant need
To ask for permission 'to be' in their tongue
To be constantly sorry, sorry, sorry!
It stops with me!
With us...
With him

BEAT

Things are changing back home
Nothing will change here.
Nothing
They'll cling on,
It's what they do best.
They accuse us of being
Small minded and backward looking...
When we just want to move on.
They refuse the future, not us.
They won't move in that direction,
So it's up to us to move towards it despite them

BEAT

Look, I'm not saying, let's move tomorrow,
Next week or next year.
I'm just asking...
Can we just think about it?
Can we put a few things into 'perspective'...
Get a sense of proportion....
Can we?
Please...
For our baby?

BEAT

MAN

I love you...

WOMAN I love you too

BEAT

MAN If that's what you want...

WOMAN What do you want?

WE ARE BACK ON THE TRAIN. MIDDLE AGED MAN AND TROLLEY DOLLY ARE LOST IN HIS OWN THOUGHTS. THE YOUNG MAN READS ON

YOUNG MAN ... the difference is,
That the Roman,
By the word "sudden",
Means 'unlingering'

M.A. MAN God!

YOUNG MAN Whereas the Christian,
By 'sudden death',
Means death *without warning*...

M.A. MAN So helpless.
So useless.
So fucking far away...
Even when I'm there!
I want to do something;
Make her well,
Stop the fits,
Repair the damage,
(If there's damage, long term),
We don't know,
Only time will tell.
Fucking hell!
Leave it, John,
Leave it...
Leave it

HE REACHES FOR HIS PHONE AND DIALS. TROLLEY WALKS THROUGH THE CARRIAGE AGAIN

GUARD (OOV) Next stop, Our City

MAN What did I want?

What did I want from life?
More than that.
What did I desire?
A home?
A wife?
A child?
(ok, that point came sooner than I'd hoped;
not that I would ever begrudge you,
my little champion, but...)
But more than anything,
What did I really want?

M.A. MAN Crying!

MAN Dignity,
 Just... dignity.
 Isn't that what we all want?
 I just...

BEAT

MAN ...fear

OLDER WOMAN UNDERSCORES

OLDER WOMAN
... far far far away
 ... from here
... far far far away
 ... from here
... far far far away
 ... from here
... far far away

M.A. MAN So far away,
 Even when I'm there...
 We haven't held her.
 I don't care about me, but...
 You, my beautiful wife,
 Beautiful mother,
 You haven't held your gorgeous daughter yet!
 I want to corner that nurse and kill her.
 I want to fucking kill her!
 She played God with our baby's life,
 She played God with both of you.

I want to play God with her.
If our child...
If our beautiful baby...
Suffers because of her mistake!
If she...
Ah! Shit!
Stop it, stop it, John!
Stop it!

GUARD (OOV) If you're leaving the train at Our City,
please make sure you take all your possessions with you
Next stop. Our City!

MAN (ALMOST AS A MANTRA) Our City
Not Big City.
But Our City
Capital of Small Country

UNDERSCORES M.A. MAN'S SPEECH

MAN
Our City
Her City
Your City?
Was it ever My City?
Our City?
Small City
Easy City
Inter City
...

M.A. MAN My baby!
Be strong, little thing
Be strong,
Daddy's coming!
I'm going to hold your hand.
I'll always hold your hand,
Whatever happens.

MAN You were right, my love
You were right...

M.A. MAN Be strong, little thing
Be strong..
Time heals

OLDER WOMAN SINGS THROUGH IT.
YOUNG MAN READS FROM DE QUINCEY

YOUNG MAN Sudden death...

TROLLEY Divorce...

YOUNG MAN ... where death,
In some shape is inevitable,
Proposes a question of choice which,
Equally in the Roman and Christian sense,
Will be variously answered
According to each man's variety of temperament...

TROLLEY Invisible Trolley Dolly,
Walking up and down the aisle.
Could've walked the catwalk;
The whole world looking at me,
Wanting me...
You could be a model, he said.
Here's my card, ring me...
Celia is wearing a little number called 'Regret'...

GUARD (OOV) Our City, folks.
If you're leaving this train,
Make sure you have all your possessions.
If not, stay on, for all stations West.
Have your tickets ready for the new guard.
Our City, next stop...
Our City

THEN TROLLEY, MIDDLE AGED MAN AND YOUNG
MAN PREPARE TO LEAVE THE TRAIN. OLDER WOMAN
CONTINUES TO SING

MAN Twenty years we lived here...
In this city;
Out of exile,
In Jerusalem;
Twenty years...
The span of a son's education,
Before moving on;
Moving further West;
West is best,

East is least –
Though not to me –
I'm still a man of my time!
Something in me still sees
Big as Big City, their city.
I'm sorry...
I could never admit that to you.
Never.
I could never quite deal with the moving across /
Back down the line;
One stop closer to heaven!
Never quite deal with that...

BEAT

Though, we lived well, didn't we.
You re-planted that entrepreneurial skill,
Stunted for years in a pot
On a sill,
In a Big City house
And it flourished.
And you flourished with it;
We flourished because of it;
No denying that.
And work came easy to me as well.
The Dragon's tongue was enshrined in a new constitution
Officially, a two tongued country.
The dragon had a dollar worth;
A worth more than its wealth of words and myth.
Money took a peasant tongue and from it,
Shaped a bourgeois heaven!
In our own country, we ate cake!

BEAT

MAN

And our little Champion
Grew up to believe
In himself,
In his country,
In his language.
Your little baby;
All you'd hoped for,
All you'd worked for.
He never felt the need to ask for permission to be...
As I did.

Never a sorry,
He was his own man!
You were right, my love.
Right, all along

BEAT

Always right,
It's what was 'right' about you.
And I...

BEAT

I wasn't wrong, just...
Forgive me?

BY NOW, A NEW GUARD HAS EMBARKED THE TRAIN
(WE NEVER SEE HER) A FEMALE GUARD. SHE
ANNOUNCES WITH EFFICIENCY, THEN FIRES HER
THOUGHTS OFF QUICKLY

GUARD (OOV) If you've just joined us at Our City,
This is the Seacastle train.
It's a full train,
So would you kindly take your bags off seats
And have all tickets ready for inspection.
Thank you.

THEN, ALMOST MACHINEGUN LIKE

If I pick Jake up from the Club by six,
I can dash over to the supermarket,
They can have pizza, it'll be quick.
Then if John comes home at seven,
If he doesn't I'll be livid,
I can get back to the school by quarter past
For that bloody parents meeting;
Waste of time, always is,
As if I haven't got better things to do with my life...

A YOUNG MAN ENTERS THE CARRIAGE. IT APPEARS
AS IF ALL SEATS ARE TAKEN, HE MOTIONS TO MAN
'MAY I SIT BY YOU?' MAN MOTIONS FOR HIM TO SIT.
THROUGHOUT, THE YOUNG MAN IS GLUED TO HIS
MOBILE PHONE.

THE OLD WOMAN KNITS THROUGHOUT THE
NEXT SECTION.THE MIDDLE AGED MAN READS A
NEWSPAPER - KILING TIME!

YOUNG MAN ...yeah, I know,
Heard about it on the news.
Bet his mother had a fit;
I was like 'What'!

IN THE BEAT, OLD WOMAN'S KNITTING NEEDLES
CLICK

YOUNG MAN God, I know...
Eighteen!
Exactly...
'Cause of his mincing gait, they said
What?
Me?
A screaming flower?
Queen of Sheba when you walk in!
Poor kid,
Can't imagine it?
Don't want to imagine it,
His life'll be hell...

MAN ...hell for us all,
If we have to listen to this shit

YOUNG MAN Well, I phoned up Graham when I heard.
And he said, I knew something was going to happen.
Well that's easy to say after the event, isn't it, Graham, I said!

MAN Is there no privacy left in this world?

YOUNG MAN Listen,
He said he knew something was going to happen,
Because he'd been talking to Andrew...
Who?
God, not her.
Blond Andrew
That's him;
Fabulous glasses,
Yeah, works in the bank.
Well he knows Liam.

They went to school together..
Who?
Graham?
No, Andrew!
Graham knows Andrew,
Andrew knows Liam,
Listen!

MAN ... we're all listening!

YOUNG MAN ...Graham!

MAN ... the whole carriage is listening;

YOUNG MAN ... he was talking to Andrew

MAN ... forced to listen.

YOUNG MAN ... exactly!

MAN ... tortured

YOUNG MAN ... Graham's got nothing to do with it, right!

MAN ... Michael Caine ...

YOUNG MAN ... listen, will you!

MAN ... in the Odessa File

YOUNG MAN ... listen!

MAN ... the pain!

YOUNG MAN Graham was talking to Andrew,
And Andrew said,
He knew something was going to happen,
Because he'd been talking to Liam.
What?

**SUDDENLY THE MAN GRABS THE YOUNG MAN'S
PHONE FROM HIS GRASP**

MAN Graham was talking to Andrew,
Andrew was talking to Liam!

What don't you understand?
It's clear as day here.
We're all listening to this shit;
Your lives,
Invading ours
With your asinine rhetoric!
I'm not prejudiced,
I just champion the private.
Leave us alone.
Leave us out of your world.
Our own worlds are complicated enough!
We don't want to know.
We don't care who did what
To whom and what happened.
Is there no peace any more?
No peace for the wicked!
These things are a fucking curse!

HE FLINGS THE MOBILE PHONE. SUDDENLY, THE
YOUNG MAN CHANGES INTO THE SON.
WE ARE IN A DINGY BEDSIT ON THE SHADIER SIDE OF
THE TRACKS

SON Why, Dad?
 Why did you leave?
 Without explanation.
 I don't understand.
 Mam is lost

MAN Oh, son...

THE FOLLOWING IS THOUGHT. THROUGHOUT, THE
SON WAITS FOR AN ANSWER

MAN What do you want from me?
 The truth?
 A father should never saddle his son with the 'truth';
 Kill him before he lives,
 Clip before he's flown.
 Would a son ever listen anyway?
 Do you really want to know why, my little Champion?

BEAT

MAN Do you want to know

How your grandmother died,
Seeing Jesus in everything;
Cancer in the brain,
Leaving your grandfather alone.
My father.
Your gramps?
The pain he felt... the loss...
Do you?
You don't want to know that.
The smell of whisky and piss on a man
Who always prided himself on self control;
The stench of fear and loss.
How that disturbed something in me;
A balance easily tipped,
Too easy..
You don't want to know how weak your father is;
How weak I've become...

SON

Dad?
Answer me

MAN

Just tell me what your mother wants... needs, and I'll say it.
Would it be easier if it was another woman?
Would it?
Does your mother need to know that,
To make sense of the loss?
Something is easier than nothing, I guess.
I'll lie, if you want, If she wants...
But there was no-one...
There is no-one.
Just a pissed up grandfather,
And I saw me in him,
And you in me,
And it scared the hell out of me,
That the pain could go on and on...
Perpetuate.
Not sin, son,
Just...
This living.
You were still a baby at the time.
Your mother wanted another one...
Oh, God...
(EXHALES)
How could I inflict pain again?
And one night,

Carrying my father to his bed,
(His trousers wet;
Pissy, shitty pants)
The indignity, he said.
The indignity!
And I thought, I would rather die alone,
Than die like that.
The inhumanity of it...
Die alone...
Because
I never want you to have to carry me up the stairs like that.
Never...
I never want you to feel how I felt with my father in my arms...
The smell of his piss on my skin for days after...

BEAT

MAN

And it played on my mind,
Played with me in the silences,
Invading thought;
Eating, like a virus.
And I wanted to stop it.
How could I stop things, break the line?
So I thought,
If I was alive,
I could never cope with losing your mother.
I'd piss my pants for sure
And I'd be carried...
By you.
So I thought,
Never knowing,
If she was dead or not,
Means she could always be living...
Somewhere...
In there (TAPS HIS HEAD),
And I'll die in ignorance...
Alone,
Without causing pain... to you;
Die alone with a certain dignity,
And you'll be saved the shame.
But, you were still small.
So, for your sake, I stayed,
I waited the years... years
Then one day,
(You'd long gone)

I looked at your mother and I thought,
Get out, now, before it's too late.
Get out before the whisky and the piss
Just run...

BEAT

MAN It's pathetic really, my Champion...
 This living.
 But you don't want to know that...
 Not yet

A DIALOGUE RESUMES

SON I'm waiting, Dad

MAN Oh, son...

BEAT

MAN Oh, I don't know

BEAT

MAN Remember you talked about 'the wall', remember?
 The wall you hit running that marathon.
 I couldn't run to the end of the road,
 But you are my Champion...

SON Dad, please...

MAN Sorry...
 It's just...
 I've just hit a wall as well
 And I'm too tired to run through it.
 I want to....
 I just need time,
 To sort things out;
 Strengthen.
 Then, hopefully..
 Tell your mother I'm sorry.
 Tell her that please.
 ... just time

SON No-one else?

MAN Would it be easier?

SON God, no.

MAN No

 BEAT

SON Have you seen a doctor?

MAN Yes

SON What did he say?

MAN Time...
 Heals everything, he said

SON Did he give you something?

MAN He offered,
 But I didn't want to take.
 I think I need to work this out myself...
 It'll be better in the end

 BEAT

SON There's no shame, Dad

MAN Doctor said.
 There's no stigma...
 You're my Champion, son

SON Please, Dad...

MAN You'd keep running,
 I know you would.
 You're my inspiration...
 My life...

SON Dad, please...

MAN ... and I am trying

SON Good.

BEAT

SON God, this room is...

MAN Yeah

SON It's the wallpaper

MAN Yeah...
I thought I'd seen the last of it,
Thirty five years ago
When I left to be with your mother;
Different city,
Same room though...
Same wallpaper.

SON You don't want to be here, Dad

MAN I know son

BEAT

MAN Hey, tell me.
How's work?

SON I don't want to talk about work now, Dad!

MAN Sure

SON Sorry

MAN No, no,
I only asked
Because I want you to know...
Whatever you do in your life, son,
You'll never disappoint me.
Whatever you do...

SON Dad...

MAN No, please...
Whatever you want to be...
Just...
Just don't be like me.

SON Fuck's sake, Dad

MAN Don't swear, son, you weren't brought up like that

SON Dad, please

MAN You have nothing to live up to;
No shoes to fill.
Understand?
You are already better than I could ever have been

SON Dad, please!
I don't want to listen to this

 BEAT

SON Just come back home, ok.
Come back to us

MAN I will

SON Soon.
Mam needs you

MAN I just need time

SON No rush,
Just ... come back...

MAN In time...

OLDER WOMAN SINGS. A LOOK BETWEEN FATHER
AND SON. WE COME BACK ONTO THE TRAIN. THE
YOUNG MAN HAS A SECOND, IDENTICAL MOBILE
PHONE. HE CONTINUES TALKING AS IF THE ABOVE
HAS NOT HAPPENED

YOUNG MAN I said,
Graham was talking to Andrew,
And Andrew said,
He knew something was going to happen,
Because he'd been talking to Liam
And Liam said he was getting shit from the boys...
I don't know what boys;

Local boys, bad boys, yes.
And he was upset about it
And you know what he's like.
Liam's very sensitive
And he'd been taunted...
Why do you think?
Exactly...
We've all been there, girl!
So Liam said to Andrew,
I'm going to have to do something about it.
Andrew said he could sort them out if he wanted,
But Liam didn't want to do it that way
Because he'd have to live there after that
And there's more than one way to skin a cat!
Yes, a cat
What?
A cat!
Keep your voice down!
I'm on a bloody train!
Andrew said,
Liam said
There's more than one to skin a cat
Yes!

MAN

Please

YOUNG MAN

And he was going to deal with it his way.
I'm not sure...
They'd called him names;
Said he wasn't a real man,
Whatever that is?
And proud of it, bitch!
Don't you start, listen...
Will you listen!
So, they said to Liam, if he was a man,
He'd do something to prove it.
And Liam said, to show them, he would...

BEAT

I know...
Knifed...
Twice, in the chest.
The old man died there and then.
Hardly any money;

A few hundred...
Not worth a life!

BEAT

They caught them running away on CCTV
They recognised Liam
Because, and I quote,
Because of his 'mincing gait'.
Mincing bloody gait, my arse!
He'll get years,
His life'll be hell.
I'd rather die,
I'd kill myself

BEAT

Eighteen...
And dead, because....

BEAT

I thought we were over things like that.
Even if Liam killed that man,
Who's guilty, eh?
Still so much hate...
So much bloody hate in this world...

MAN LOOKS AT THE YOUNG MAN

MAN My god...

YOUNG MAN LOOKS AT MAN AND REALISES THAT HE
HAS BEEN LISTENING

YOUNG MAN It's terrible, isn't it

MAN NODS

YOUNG MAN Tragedy
(INTO PHONE)
No, this man, next to me
(TO MAN)
Life is sick...
Really sick, you know.

They say it's murder but...
There's a reason for everything, isn't there?
A reason for everything.
Oh god, I just feel for him...
Poor kid...
Excuse me...

AN EMPATHETIC BEAT, THEN BACK TO HIS PHONE

Anyway, are you going out tonight?
No, I don't really feel like it either, but...
I just feel I need something...
Yeah...
A stiff one!
Please!
See you in the club at ten.
Yeah, bye, girl

HE HANGS UP. SILENCE, BAR THE RHYTHM OF THE
TRAIN. MAN WANTS TO SAY SOMETHING, BUT HE IS
UNSURE HOW TO BEGIN

YOUNG MAN Sorry,
 I just...
 It's just, so tragic;
 For the old man...
 For the boy

MAN Yes

YOUNG MAN A waste...

MAN Mmm...

YOUNG MAN It's a shitty life;
 Nothing 'fabulous' about it, is there?
 Nothing!

MAN No

GUARD (OOV) Seacastle, next stop.
 Change here for the Far West and for buses north.
 This train terminates at Seacastle...

YOUNG MAN Sorry (MOTIONS THE PHONE)

Bye

MAN Hope your friend...

YOUNG MAN Yeah

GUARD (OOV) Please make sure you have all your possessions
with you when you leave the train.
Mind the gap as you disembark. (THEN QUICK-FIRE)
If my mother can pick up Jake from school, before Club;
If she can do that.
Then if John picks him up from her house when he finishes work
(Because I won't be back before half seven...)
Tomorrow'll be sorted.
Next week will be hell...
Thank you for traveling with us today.
Have a safe onward journey

THEY ALL DISEMBARK. THE MAN AND THE OLDER
WOMAN NOW WAIT FOR THE SEACASTLE TO
RIVERMOUTH BUS.

MAN Waiting for a bus now, bus, bus, bus
For a bus, now, bus, bus, bus
Waiting for a bus now, bus, bus, bus
For a bus, now, bus, bus, bus

BEAT

IT'S COLD. HE SPEAKS TO KEEP WARM – QUICK FIRE /
MAYBE MORE OF A SMOULDERING EMBER

MAN To be old...
To wait;
Wait for the kids to ring,
Wait for excuses,
Wait for explanations.
Wait for parcels from Amazon;
(their parcels).
Wait for their gas man,
Their builder,
Their electrician...
Wait on your children's children.
Waiting...
In waiting rooms,

For prescriptions.
Wait for doctors to write them.
Wait for the surgeon.
Always waiting, but mostly,
For dying..
And buses in the cold!

BEAT

Trains are for the young.
They make tracks!
Kids wave at them.
No one waves at buses,
Apart from those who just miss them!
Buses are for the invisible.
They carry the inept and the decrepit
Up and down the west coast of this small country:
The dying coast, next stop Avalon!
We'll retire there, shall we?
You said. Go back home?
It'll be quiet there..
You'll get better.

THE MAN EXHALES.

Better!
Better be a bus now bus, bus, bus
Be a bus, now, bus, bus, bus

STILL WAITS

Dear Prime Minister of Small Country,
National Assembly,
Our City.
First things first,
Congratulations for eventually wrestling some kind of freedom
From Big Country.
You got my vote,
Freedom!
My wife's wildest dream.
And now, her son will live it!
But after my lifetime, I guess...
I guess I'll miss that bus!

BEAT

Which brings me to my second point:
Buses... and bus passes...
Your government's decision to grant
Free bus travel to the old is sadistic.
To be frank and,
In the spirit of open government you champion,
Inhuman!
Buses are for the old and the mad.
They are Charon's craft across the Styx!
A bus pass is hardly a badge to be waved with pride
At a bus driver who then prints a wasted ticket.
(And on that point,
Why print a ticket when you have a pass?
The pass is the ticket!
What about the planet?
The future?
Again, my son?
What good freedom
If you lose the world through waste!)
But anyway..
To receive a bus pass is a reminder, from the state,
As if you need reminding,
That you're just a bus ride away from death?
Is it perhaps your devious plan to drive your older subjects mad
With their own sense of mortality?
Mad enough to commit
Mass suicide on the Seacastle - Rivermouth bus?
In future, will you supply a blade with each pass?

BEAT

Yours, looking a gift horse in the mouth...

A BUS APPROACHES

... at last, a bus!

MAN, OLDER WOMAN AND A YOUNG MAN CATCH
THE BUS. IT IS DRIVEN BY A WOMAN.

FIRST BUS

OLDER WOMAN BOARDS THE BUS AND SLIPS INTO
HER SEAT UNNOTICED. THE MAN BOARDS THE BUS

MAN Rivermouth, please

DRIVER Are you a pass?

MAN (WITH IRONY) Pass.

SHE PRINTS A 'WASTED TICKET' FOR THE MAN. HE TAKES IT, WE SEE HIS DISGUST, THE DRIVER DOES NOT REGISTER IT

DRIVER Where the hell am I meant to find a thousand?
Even with overtime!
A thousand'll take weeks...
I slave to the bone, as it is.
I'm so annoyed;
So angry with that school of his!
Why don't they tour somewhere closer to home?
Just because the Catholic school's going to The Great Wall...

TO THE MIDDLE AGED MAN WHO APPEARS PREOCCUPIED

DRIVER Where to, love?

M.A. MAN Rivermouth, please

DRIVER Single?

M.A. MAN Um...

DRIVER You coming back tonight?

M.A. MAN No...
Well, hopefully...

DRIVER So it's a single

M.A. MAN Well, possibly...

DRIVER Well, if you are,
You don't want to pay twice, do you?

M.A. MAN No, you're right.

DRIVER A return then

M.A. MAN Return then,
Just in case, yeah...

DRIVER That'll be five forty...

M.A. MAN Sure,
Sorry...

OVER THE NEXT SPEECH, MONEY IS EXCHANGED,
TICKET PRINTED

DRIVER Always money...
Always something...
Now this.
And I can't say no;
Make him hate me more than he does already
For being the 'No' parent;
They knew what they were doing,

M.A. MAN (TAKES TICKET) Thanks...

DRIVER They knew...
Letting him bring that letter home;
Knowing he'd hand it to me,
With his father's eyes.
As if I could refuse him?

YOUNG MAN BAORDS BUS

YOUNG MAN Rivermouth,

DRIVER Return?

YOUNG MAN One way...
Out of here

DRIVER And he was looking at me...
Looking...
Daring me to say no
Daring me to make a martyr of him...
She never lets me!
She never lets me!
He's always moaned;

Moaned from the moment he was born.
No need to slap him,
He just came out moaning!

MAN We moved west.
I retired, you expanded...
Second, third shop...
Your empire grew,
My world grew less

DRIVER A thousand deposit --

MAN You'd travel to work,
I'd wait for a bus --

DRIVER A thousand!

MAN A bus to nowhere in particular...
Just to anywhere...

DRIVER I can't afford that --

MAN Trying to re-trace the journey I'd made in my life
Up to that point when I lost it...

DRIVER And there'll be spending money!

MAN ...was lost to it;
When I walked amongst people,
But I didn't walk with them;
A ghost amongst men

M.A. MAN Too late...

YOUNG MAN If we were the only ones left on this earth
If there was this big fuck off virus
And everybody died apart from us...
We'd be the shag end of creation!

DRIVER Dad would want me to go, he said
He probably would,
But Dad's not here to pay, is he, love!
Yeah, well, that's your fault!
Here we go...
Not tonight, love,

Oh, just forget it then, Mom!
Just forget it...
Love...
Love!
I try my bloody best for you...
It's all I can do...

YOUNG MAN How did you get your inspiration for the film?
I thought you'd ask this question

M.A. MAN To have been someone

YOUNG MAN To be honest,
It's inspired by myself.

M.A. MAN To have inspired...

YOUNG MAN You inspired yourself?
Yes.
I travel a lot...
Do you?

M.A. MAN To have moved

YOUNG MAN Always moving;
Here and there, up and down...
And I got thinking one day,
When I was on this bus,
What if this crazy virus
Killed everybody in the world apart from us?
Would mankind survive?
How do you mean?
Well, was there someone...
You know, that I could...
Would we...
You know?
Can I say...

M.A. MAN Fuck!

YOUNG MAN ... and if there was,
What would happen?
Or would it be Mankind rest in peace.
Simple as that really,
Hence the title -

R.I.P.
Rip

M.A. MAN Dead loss

YOUNG MAN That's genius?
No, just....

M.A. MAN Oh, I don't know

YOUNG MAN Thanks
Yeah, it is...

M.A. MAN Too fucking late

YOUNG MAN But you know, on the shoulders of giants, eh?

DRIVER I just thought...
I just thought
It was just another cry for help.
You'd done it before,
You'd probably do it again...
To get close...
As you'd say,
To feel...

MAN ... feels like the back of my hand;

DRIVER Anyone for Dragon's Boast?

M.A. MAN Always too late

MAN The times I've traveled this road;
Villages like beads threading a line...

DRIVER ... strung up again! she said, on the phone
He's strung up again, you'd better come.
(What was she doing there?)
To hang within an inch of your death;
To feel the flat-line before coming down.
How many times?
How many times had you hung?
How many times had I come home
To the hanged man?
I'd had enough!

Do it then!
Hang yourself!
Don't fuck about,
Stop fucking with me,
Think of your son!
Spare him or do it for real!
Go on...
Stop playing at it!
Just do it!
Hang yourself then!
Do something in your life
More than jacking up and being a Jack shit!
So when she phoned that day, I thought
Sod him!
I finished work; in my time;
Drove home; didn't rush.
How was I to know the knot had tightened on your vein?
Dad would still be alive, if you'd been there for him!
If you'd rushed home, straight!
How can I tell him?
How can I tell him how his father died and lived!
Odd Sins Inn anyone?

YOUNG MAN How can I explain...
They just drive and drive looking for other survivors...
City to city,
Country to country...
Not that city and country mean anything in the New World!
They just drive, looking.
But they can't find anybody; no sign of life

M.A. MAN You just keep going

YOUNG MAN They don't give up;
Traveling,

M.A. MAN On and on

YOUNG MAN Because that's what life's about, isn't it?
Just moving on,

M.A. MAN On and on
Blow by fucking blow...

YOUNG MAN That's profound

M.A. MAN All shit

YOUNG MAN No, not really...
You called me genius,
But I'm just this guy who likes buses.
And for your next song?

OLDER WOMAN/ MIDDLE-AGED MAN AND YOUNG
MAN SING DIFFERENT SONGS

MAN Dragon's Boast
Odd Sins Inn
Butcher's block
Oxbridge;
Small towns... long ribbon.
The Spot
Small Mill
Little Urs
Fordham
Ten miles on,
Rivermouth.
You'll get better there, you said.
We'll live in Rivermouth and everything will be fine,
You'll see.
I never really thought...

DRIVER I should've been there, should I?
Should've saved him, should I?
So that you could've grown up
With a pin cushion for a father;
Tracks all over,
Is that the sort of father you'd have wanted me to save?
Is it?

YOUNG MAN You should've been there really

M.A. MAN Never got there,
Never get anywhere...

YOUNG MAN It was fucking awesome
Shit, I can't say that on TV!
Can I?

DRIVER When you dream of him,

Do you dream of a smacked up father who fucked around?
Do you?
No...
I know what you dream,
You dream of a king...
A father,
Dripping gold,
Giving permission!
And that's good.
And I want you to dream that;
Let you hate me,
Blame me for everything.
Just keep dreaming.
Because I don't want the truth to hurt you
Not yet;
Enough time for that,
Life's hard enough as it is.
I'll find the money,
I'll find the money, son
Somehow...
Get off the fucking road!

MAN

I never thought you'd die before me,
Not really.
If I had,
I'd never have come home,
Moved to Rivermouth with you.
I would've stayed in that room in the city:
Shut out the world,
And hid;
Alone until the end.
But I came back thinking,
Ah, men ordinarily die before women,
I'll die first,
It won't be a problem.
You'll be alright,
You'll make new friends.
I pictured you dancing slow tangos at eighty.
And I'd be happy for you;
Knowing you could live without me.
But, without you...
Without you
There's just longing,
That Small Country word again,
Longing...

I can't move further west!
There's only the sea!
I long for Avalon,
But however far I'll sail
I'll never arrive,
So I keep traveling...
Making the circle round
I keep searching..
Because if I stop...

DRIVER Anyone for Butcher's Block

DURING THE NEXT THE LIGHTING CHANGES

MAN ... if I stop moving
I'll think...
I'll remember...
I don't want to remember
That day you mounted and married me.
I should've let myself be taken, then fled;
Wiped clean on the curtain and left!
Why did I stay for the chat?
Why did we say 'I do' for decency's sake!
(PASSIONATELY WITH LOSS)
Lovers should die together!
They shouldn't be separated one inch;
Less than that,
An impossible distance.
I long for a country not on this earth,
I cannot arrive there,
But I keep traveling...
Traveling...
If I stop moving
I'll think...
I'll remember...

THE FAMILY HOME

SON Dad?

MAN Oh, hello, son

SON Are you alright?

MAN Mmm....
Has everybody gone?

SON Yes

MAN Thanks for dealing with them.
I just couldn't face your mother's family;

SON Sure...
Ok?

BEAT

MAN No, but...
Leave me son, I'll be alright

SON I'll tidy up first

MAN Not tonight, just leave it...

SON No, I'll do it

MAN Leave it, son

SON Two minutes...

MAN (WITH FRUSTRATION) Leave it... please!

BEAT

MAN Sorry

BEAT

SON It's ok

MAN No,
I shouldn't have...
It'll give me something to do

SON Sure.
I don't want to leave you alone tonight, Dad

MAN I'll be all right alone, son...
A few whiskies...

Knock me out and...
I'll be all right

PAUSE

SON Do you remember New Amstel, Dad?

MAN Mmm?

SON Do you remember New Amstel?
We went there on holiday with Mam.
We never went on holiday.
Why did we go there?

MAN A college friend was getting married

SON Mam loved it

MAN Yeah, she did

SON When we arrived at the hotel,
That porter took us to our room,
And he tussled my hair,
My curly blond hair I used to hate;
I would love to hate it now!
Everybody tussled it;
And he called me the Prince of New Amstel.
And that's why Mam always called me her Prince.
Remember, Dad

MAN My champion...

BEAT

SON I wish we could be there again...
with Mam

MAN Yeah...

SON Shame...

THE NEXT IS THOUGHT

MAN I was ashamed of you,
Because you didn't wear the clothes

I thought you should.
You had beautiful clothes at home.
But whenever you traveled,
You always traveled heavy but light;
A case full of co-ordinates;
Cheap thin things,
Lots of them!
I wanted you to wear the heavy things
You'd left at home;
The dresses, boots and coats that ennobled you,
Crowned by your smile.
In the most expensive city on this earth
(a Medici city of walking jewels screaming wealth),
You decided to whisper poverty.
And to my shame...
I was ashamed of you...
As if I was a pretty picture!
I am an ugly man, my love,
I could never find beauty in anyone,
I only ever saw the flaw.
I married the most beautiful woman in the world
Who never once commented upon the clothes I wore,
Only how heavy I was on them
When you repaired them.
I am ashamed of myself more than anyone!
Yeah, I want to go back to New Amstel.
Walk down Wideway
With our little Prince swinging between us...
Happy...

SON I fear memory tonight, Dad.

MAN ...regal,
Proud.

SON I fear it's waiting for me...

MAN I'm sorry, my love, I'm sorry

SONon the edges of the day

MAN One second more, that's all a sorry would take, please!

SON I fear...

MAN One moment more in New Amstel
Enough to say sorry, my love...

THE NEXT TWO SECTIONS ARE SPOKEN
SIMULTANEOUSLY.

MAN sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry...
sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry...
sorry, sorry, sorry, sorry...

SON I fear the waking memory;
a torturer from the Heart of Darkness,
He opens a first aid box,
To reveal a pair of pliers and a screwdriver.
Which one do you want?
He spits...
Acid fucking wit!
Pliers or screwdriver?
Does it fucking matter?
Torture is torture...

PAUSE

MAN Son?

SON Just thinking

MAN Yeah...
It was a good holiday

SON Mam was happy...
So happy

MAN Yes

BEAT

SON I've taken the week off work, Dad.
If you need anything?

MAN You shouldn't have

SON Just in case

MAN You're a Prince...

SON Look, Dad...

MAN What?

 BEAT

SON I don't want to... (impose)
 But, can I stay tonight, here with you?
 Please

 BEAT

MAN Of course.
 Your Mam would like that...
 I'd like it

 BACK ON THE BUS

DRIVER Next stop, Rivermouth station.
 If you're heading north,
 The bus to Tabernacle
 will be waiting on the stand in front of ours.

YOUNG MAN ... picking up the award was great...

M.A. MAN All my heroes should've been there

YOUNG MAN ...And everyone was on their feet,

M.A. MAN ... clapping

YOUNG MAN ... and me, just a small boy from Small Country...
 Awesome.

M.A. MAN But as I would have...
 Should've said in my speech
 For an award I should've won...
 For something...
 Anything

YOUNG MAN ... the important thing is the going
 It doesn't mater where...

M.A. MAN We always know our cradles

YOUNG MAN ... cause that's what life's about, isn't it?
The traveling

M.A. MAN We never dare guess our graves

YOUNG MAN ... you are a genius.
Yeah
And for your final song?

OLDER WOMAN SINGS AS THEY DISEMBARK AND
BOARD ANOTHER BUS – THE FINAL BUS FROM
RIVERMOUTH TO TABERNACLE.

SECOND BUS

THE MIDDLE AGED MAN IS THE DRIVER ON THIS BUS,
THE YOUNG WOMAN IS A PASSENGER. THE MAN
HANGS BACK. HE'S THE LAST TO CLIMB
ABOARD

DRIVER (IN AN UGLY ACCENT)
Can you move along the bus, please!
Move along.
Make room!
Ok, sir,
Where you going?

MAN Home

DRIVER Don't forget your ticket

MAN Yes...

OLD MAN TAKES HIS 'WASTED' TICKET. THE BUS IS
FULL. THE YOUNG WOMAN AND OLDER WOMAN ARE
SITTING NEXT TO EACH OTHER. YOUNG MAN
LOUNGES OVER A FEW SEATS, HE SLEEPS, HOOD
OVER HIS HEAD. THE OLD MAN HAS TO STAND.
AFTER A WHILE THE YOUNG WOMAN
GETS UP SHE OFFERS HER SEAT TO THE OLD MAN.
OLD MAN AND OLDER WOMAN SIT NEXT TO EACH
OTHER FOR THE FIRST TIME

MAN No, I'm all right

Y WOMAN Please, I've been sitting down at work all day

MAN Well...
Thank you

Y WOMAN That's ok

YOUNG WOMAN STANDS BY THE DRIVER

DRIVER All right, darling?
No seats back there?

Y WOMAN No

DRIVER Keep me company then.
Where you going again?

Y WOMAN Henllys

DRIVER Ah, I used to live in Henllys...
Not a bad little place

Y WOMAN Boring

DRIVER You're right...
Arse end.
Live in Gogsham now.
It's ok,
Small Country people can be a bit funny though, can't they?
But it's their country, I...

AN AWKWARD LOOK BETWEEN THEM.
THE YOUNG WOMAN IS OBVIOUSLY FROM SMALL
COUNTRY.

DRIVER I think it looks like rain

SUDDENLY THE OLDER WOMAN (WOMAN) TALKS TO
MAN

WOMAN You've been ignoring me

MAN What?

WOMAN What not sorry! (WITH IRONY)

MAN Sorry?

WOMAN You've ignored me all journey

MAN I know

WOMAN You haven't said anything

 BEAT

MAN Mmm...

WOMAN You've hurt me

 BEAT

WOMAN You can't even look at me...

MAN Who are you?
 Are you that woman at the top of an escalator
 In that New Amstel toy shop?
 And, as I passed with my Champion,
 I didn't know whether to look or not
 As the sun shone through your transparent skirt,
 Are you?
 No, I know who you are,
 You're that woman in the Irish pub.
 You were small,
 Beneath my gaze,
 And you stood in front me for an age,
 Willing me to look at you,
 But I didn't dare look,
 And in the end, you got annoyed,
 Called me a Godsake and left...
 I never saw your face,
 I wondered what you looked like.
 Is that you?
 No, no I know who you are...
 Are you all the women in the world;
 All the left turns I didn't take at the gate?
 Is that who you are?

WOMAN Don't be a fool, Adam!

You know damned well who I am...
I'm the right turn you made

MAN Keep your voice down

WOMAN Only you can hear me...

MAN What?

BEAT

WOMAN Do you miss me?

MAN Yes

WOMAN Would you still walk in front of me,
Down the Wideway, in New Amstel?
Would you?

MAN LOOKS AT HER

WOMAN Still ashamed of me?

MAN I was never ashamed of you

WOMAN Oh, you were...

MAN I...

WOMAN I what?

MAN I just thought
You just didn't make the most of yourself...
On that particular occasion

WOMAN I was happy being me;
Being us was enough for me.
I didn't care what you wore walking down the street

MAN Sorry

BEAT

WOMAN Doesn't matter...
Do you like my co-ordinates?

Travel things,
Just for you!
Would you prefer me nude?

SHE BEGINS TO UNDRRESS, MAN RISES TO STOP HER

MAN Dawn, please

WOMAN I told you, no-one can see me.
They can see you though

DRIVER Are you all right back there, sir?

MAN Yes, thank you

WOMAN Sit down before you make a fool of yourself

DRIVER Better sit down, sir

MAN SITS DOWN

DRIVER Do you know Peter?
Drinks at the Arms Tavern in Henlys?

Y WOMAN No

DRIVER No?
(TO HIMSELF / SHE LOOKS AT THE OLD MAN)
What do you know?
Do you know how beautiful you are?
Do you know how good you make me feel...
Standing beside me
As I drive the twisting roads;
Drive the years back...
(SHE TURNS TO HIM)
Perhaps your dad knows him?

Y WOMAN Maybe...

BEAT

WOMAN How's my little Prince?

MAN Still my Champion

WOMAN We didn't deserve such beauty, did we?

MAN You did.
 But how he came from me,
 God only knows!

WOMAN You can't be that ugly!
 I married you,
 And I have taste.
 Maybe not abroad, but...

MAN I said I'm sorry...
 I was wrong

WOMAN I was happy;
 Cool, in the way I wanted to be.
 Whilst you sweated in your leather shoes!

MAN I needed them

WOMAN I knew you did.
 I knew everything about you...
 Yet I still loved you!

 BEAT

WOMAN So tell me...
 What was it like to kiss me dead?

MAN What?

WOMAN How did you feel...
 To kiss my cold lips?

MAN Angry;
 I was really angry with you.
 You always drove too fast on the country lanes
 I kept telling you,
 Drive slower

WOMAN (WITH SARCASM) Sorry Daddy...

 A LOOK BETWEEN THEM

WOMAN (WITH SINCERITY) Sorry.

What was it like to kiss death?

BEAT

MAN I wished it was kissing me instead

WOMAN Oh, Adam...

PAUSE

MAN I'm tired, Dawn

WOMAN I know

BEAT

WOMAN Do you know what went through my mind
As my head shattered against the windscreen?
Oh you were lucky,
You saw me after the patch up!
Before that I was in pieces!
Do you know what I thought in that moment?
So many things I could've thought about:
Reeled through my life,
Prayed to God,
But I didn't.
I just thought,
Damn!
I've forgotten to darn his favourite socks.
In the split second it took to leave the world
I panicked, because I'd promised to darn your socks.
Is life is that pathetic...

MAN Is it?

BEAT

WOMAN Take your shoes off

MAN What?

WOMAN Take off your shoes
Go on,
Let me see!

MAN See what?

WOMAN Your socks!

MAN I can't take my shoes off in public

WOMAN You're an old man,
You can do anything!

MAN God

WOMAN Show me!

OLD MAN TAKES OFF HIS SHOES

Y WOMAN He's taking his shoes off

DRIVER Who is?

Y WOMAN The old man

DRIVER He's just old

TAKES OFF HIS SHOES

WOMAN As I thought!
Useless without me!
Give me them...

MAN What!

WOMAN Give them to me...

MAN I can't

WOMAN Give them here!

Y WOMAN He's taking his socks off

DRIVER If he smells,
He's off;
Old or not

BEAT

WOMAN Oh, Adam...

SHE LOOKS AT HIM THROUGH A HOLE IN HIS SOCK

WOMAN What would you have done without me, eh?

MAN I don't know

WOMAN What would I have done without you?

BEAT

I could've fixed these...
Too late, now, sorry

SHE HANDS BACK THE SOCKS
(A CHANCE TO EXCHANGE THEM)

Sometimes you were hard to love, Adam

MAN I know

WOMAN But I still loved you; always loved you;
Loved you even before you knew my name,
Loved you with words on a card, sealed with a loving kiss,
For better or for worse.
I love you still
And I'm sorry...
Sorry it was you who owed me the kiss...

THE YOUNG WOMAN LOOKS AT THE MAN.
SHE TURNS TO THE DRIVER

Y WOMAN The old man's crying

DRIVER On a bus!

SHE GOES UP TO THE OLD MAN

Y WOMAN You all right?

MAN Yes

Y WOMAN Are you sure?

MAN I'll be ok

Y WOMAN Here...

SHE HANDS HIM A TISSUE

Y WOMAN The whole bus is looking

MAN I don't care who's looking!

WOMAN Adam!

MAN What?

Y WOMAN I'm only trying to help

WOMAN She's only trying to help

MAN I know...
But I'll be all right,
Please...
No fuss...
I just....
I'll be all right

DRIVER Is he all right back there?

MAN I'm all right

DRIVER What did he say?
Didn't understand.
Is it Dragon's tongue?

Y WOMAN He says he's all right

DRIVER I don't want you dying on me, old man

Y WOMAN He'll be all right

YOUNG WOMAN'S ATTENTION SPLIT BETWEEN
DRIVER AND RECOVERING MAN

DRIVER Had this guy last week -
Had a fit...
In front of everyone!

Worst was, when he came round, he said,
I always have a second... and it's worse.
And he started fitting again...
Screaming...
Really screaming.
Horrible
To know something like that is coming, and you can't stop it

Y WOMAN You ok?

MAN Yes, thanks

DRIVER Horrible

MAN If we were the only ones left on this planet,
Would fear live...

YOUNG WOMAN DOESN'T UNDERSTAND HIS LOOK

Y WOMAN Got to go, sorry.
My stop

DRIVER Do you want to get off here?

WOMAN Please

MAN Bye

DRIVER Bye, love

SHE LEAVES THE BUS

WOMAN You're a sad man, Adam

BEAT

Do you know my one regret...

MAN Not now, please

WOMAN My one regret...
We didn't have a daughter.
I would've liked to have had a little girl, Adam

MAN I know

WOMAN Why didn't you want another child, Adam?

BEAT

WOMAN Didn't you love me, Adam?

MAN Dawn...

WOMAN Didn't you?

MAN I did, you know I did

WOMAN Then why wouldn't you give me a girl?

BEAT

WOMAN Why?
If you loved me so much, Adam,
Why didn't you given me that?

MAN Because...

SHE CUTS HIM OFF

WOMAN ... I know.
I know your fear, Adam

BEAT

WOMAN We're nearly there

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES OLDER WOMAN SINGS
THE TOWNS PASS BY. SHE STROKES HIS HAIR AS SHE
SINGS

WOMAN Henlys
Gogsham
Crossmount
The Port
Castleton;
Our country.
As beautiful as it ever was,
As heaven ever will be

MAN I'm tired

WOMAN Nearly there

DRIVER Tabernacle station!

MAN So soon
Seems only this morning I left

WOMAN So much can happen in a day...
Moment leading to moment,
And before you know it,
There's a life!

MAN Is this it?
Do we get off?

WOMAN Yes.
Come on,
You've got a train to catch

SHE HELPS HIM UP

MAN Thank you

DRIVER Feeling better?

MAN Yes

DRIVER You nearly died on me

MAN I've got a train to catch...

DRIVER Bye, old man

MAN Not that old...
I hope...

WOMAN C'mon

THEY DISEMBARK.
THEY WALK ARM IN ARM TO THE STATION

WOMAN If you could live it all again.
What would you change?

Would you change me?

MAN
No
I'd change myself;
Think less...
Pain less...

WOMAN
Without pain, there's nothing, Adam.
You never understood that.
Without pain,
Our little Prince,
Your Champion,
Would not have reigned for a day over New Amstel!
His reign was worth the world:
All the pain of being.

MAN
We'll go back there...
To New Amstel,
One day..

WOMAN
We can't,
We're here.
Come on...
Let's cross to the station.
Your train will be here soon

AS THEY REACH TABERNACLE STATION

MAN
Late again

WOMAN
You were three days late, your mother said.
You didn't want to come out,
Screaming to get back in!

THE TRAIN'S HORN SOUNDS IN THE DISTANCE

WOMAN
Here it comes

MAN
Come with me
Please
I won't ignore you this time.
This time we'll have a daughter

WOMAN
I can't

MAN Come on, it'll be a lovely ride along the coast.
 We'll stop off at the beach;
 Build sand castles,
 Eat ice cream

WOMAN We can't, Adam

MAN But I don't want to travel alone,
 It's lonely

WOMAN I know

MAN I hate traveling

WOMAN That's your problem...
 Front or back?

MAN Mmm?

WOMAN Plenty of seats

THE TRAIN ARRIVES

MAN I'm scared

WOMAN Think of socks...

MAN Socks!

WOMAN You've got to think of something...

BEAT

MAN Why can't we take this train together?

WOMAN We take it alone

MAN Oh, Dawn.

THEY EMBRACE

WOMAN Be brave, Adam

BEAT

Hey, do you remember
When we used to come and wave you off at the station?
And our little Prince would race the train
Along the platform?

MAN Yes

WOMAN I'll race you to the tunnel!
I bet I'll get there before you,

BEAT

MAN I love you

WOMAN I know
I knew.
Even before you knew me

THEY KISS A FINAL TIME

WOMAN Roses are red
Violets are blue

MAN I don't want to live without you

WOMAN You don't have to...
Go

THEY EMBRACE. MAN BOARDS THE TRAIN
SHE MOTIONS FOR HIM TO TAKE OFF HIS SHOE
AND LOOK AT HIS SOCK

MAN What?

SHE MOUTHS 'LOOK AT YOUR SOCK'
HE TAKES OF HIS SHOES, HIS SOCK IS DARNED

MAN How did you do that?

SHE MOUTHS

WOMAN I love you

THE TRAIN PULLS OFF.
OLDER WOMAN RUNS AHEAD OF IT,

SHE IS YOUNG AGAIN

GUARD (OOV) Welcome aboard this 'first light' train
from Ferryton to Bastion.
If you've just joined us at Tabernacle
We will be stopping at:
The Junction
Bluerinse Bay
Chavton,
Poverton,
And arrive at our final destination,
In good time for whatever you have to do.
First stop, the Junction,
We'll be there in a bit now...

PAUSE

MAN There in a bit now, bit, bit, bit
In a bit now, bit, bit, bit...
There in a bit now, bit, bit, bit
In a bit now, bit, bit, bit...

THE TRAIN ENTERS THE TUNNEL
AS IT LEAVES TABERNACLE STATION,
MAN BEGINS TO PANIC

MAN In the darkness,
Cow gut... darkness,
I wonder what a fetus dreams...
As it lies...
Crouching...
A fist in a fuck?
In darkness...
Nightmares?
Little...
Fears...
Fears, no
How can it?
Doesn't...
Doesn't know...
Only knows
You've got to know...
To know...
You've got to know loss ...
In the darkness.

Know...
No!
Lightmares then...
Fear of the no-dark
Eye blinding fear...
Cracking open the black ...

BEAT

Fiat Lux
Let there be....
Please
Let...
Let there...
In the darkness
Let there be...

THE TRAIN HORN BLASTS.
THIS TIME, THE TRAIN DOES NOT EMERGE FROM
THE TUNNEL INTO LIGHT. THERE IS JUST DARKNESS.
ANOTHER JOURNEY BEGINS...

For geographic reference
(rounding the country clockwise)

First Train

Tabernacle - Bangor

The Tabernacle church in Bangor (a cathedral city) was converted into a home for the proto-National Welsh Language Theatre Co. (*Cwmni Theatr Cymru*) in the 70s.
Tabernak! is also a powerful expletive in *Quebecois*.

The Junction – Llandudno Junction

Bluerinse Bay – Colwyn Bay

A retirement town full of ageing incomers

Chavton – Rhyl

Rhyl has two of the poorest council wards in Wales

Poverton - Prestatyn

The poorer relative of Rhyl!

Bastion – Chester

Welsh name, *Caer*. Trans. castle / bastion

Second Train

Shireton – Shrewsbury

The shire town of Shropshire

Grayling - Ludlow

In Welsh, *Llwydlo* – grey calf (!)

Lionchurch – Leominster

A synonym

Mappaton - Hereford

The *Mappa Mundi* (Map of the World circa 1300) is kept in Hereford Cathedral

Five Ways – Abergavenny

Five ways is a village near Abergavenny. It is also the title of a painting by Sarah Snazell and the possession of that painting is the subject of the play, *Butterfly*

Newtown – Cwmbran

Cwmbran is a new town

Newbridge - Newport

In this town there is a transporter bridge. Constructed in 1906, it is one of only six remaining transporter bridges in the world

Our City – Cardiff

Made a city in 1905. Capital of Wales since 1955

Dullage – Bridgend

An excruciatingly dull place – to be avoided more than Llanelli (see below)

Foxton – Port Talbot

Port Talbot was a port developed by the landowning Talbot family (of Margam Abbey) in the 19th century. Henry Fox Talbot (1800 - 1877) was a pioneer photographer

Nest - Neath

Trans. *Nyth* (pronounced neath) / a nest

Whitorse - Swansea

After the White Horse Tavern, NY – one of Dylan Thomas' haunts. Swansea being his birthplace

Ugly – Llanelli

In an 18th century guide book (reference lost) it stated '(Llanelli) has no redeeming features whatsoever, avoid at all costs'

The Dock - Pembrey and Bury Port

Here, on the 17th of June 1928, the American aviator, Amelia Earhart, landed following her solo trans-Atlantic flight

Seacastle – Carmarthen

In Latin *Maredunum*. Trans. Seafort

First Bus

Dragon's Boast – Pencader

According to Giraldus Cambrensis (*Gerallt Gymro* / Gerald of Wales), in his *Descriptio Cambria*, the Old Man of Pencader prophesied (to Henry II in 1163) "Nor do I think that any other nation than this of Wales, nor any other language, whatever may hereafter come to pass, shall on the day of examination before the Supreme Judge answer for this corner of Wales"

Odd Sins Inn – Synod Inn

Butcher's block – Llanybydder

This village has a massive abattoir. Its miasmic stench often hangs over the village like a death sentence

Oxbridge – Lampeter

Apart from Oxford and Cambridge, The University of Lampeter (Llanbedr Pont Steffan) was, to my knowledge, the only university to award Oxbridge degrees. Its charter was granted in 1828

The Spot – Cribyn

Cribyn lies in an area known as *Y Smotyn Du* (trans. The Black spot) the heartland of Unitarianism in Wales

Small Mill – Felinfach

Literal trans. from the Welsh

Little Urs – Aberarth

Literal trans. the estuary of the Arth river. However, *arth* also means bear in Welsh / *urs* in Latin

Fordham – Llanrhystud

There is a beautiful ford in this village

Rivermouth – Aberystwyth

Trans. The estuary of the Ystwyth river

Second bus

Henlys – Machynlleth

(*Hen lys* - Literal trans. Old Court) Owain Glyndwr was crowned the Prince of Wales in this town in 1404

Gogsham – Dolgellau

The Welsh for North is *Gogledd*. The inhabitants of the north are affectionately called *Gogs* by the *Hwntws* (their Southern neighbours)

Crossmount – Trawsfynydd

Literal trans. *traws* / across, *mynydd* (mutated to *fynydd*) / mountain

The Port – Porthmadog

Trans. Madog's port, named after W.A. Maddocks. whose ambitious 'Cob' embankment scheme led to the town's name

Castleton - Caernarfon

In 1969 Prince Charles was 'invested' in Caernarfon Castle. The castle is a symbol of historic oppression hated by the Welsh in this, the most Welsh speaking town in Wales.

Others

Ferryton – Holyhead

The Dublin ferry port on Anglesey, Ynys Môn

Allpoints East – Crewe

A soul-less station in a soul-less town

Montpellier – Cheltenham

Big City is obviously their city, London

The Wideway, New Amstel – Broadway, New York

Troyanne

Contextualising essay 2

Troyanne: A Trojan Horse Model of Development

Having schematically contextualised *Desire Lines* and the self as a devolutionary dramatist, and having traced elements of the evolution of intent, I shall now consider the development of *Troyanne*, the first of the two texts that together, interrogate the practice of Play Reading in the New York theatre ecology as I encountered it. Following a brief contextualisation of *Troyanne*, I shall then turn back to the realisation of intent within my work by focussing upon a specific reading of *Troyanne* that took place at the New York Theatre Workshop under the direction of Daniella Topol (December 12th, 2011). For in analysing the dynamic of that reading, and one moment in particular when the convention of ‘revelation through clarity’ demanded of a play reading by Urbinati (Urbinati 2016, 6) was transgressed, I will make a case for performativity within my work and offer a definition of *Being* (as a third way); one in opposition both to dramatic representation (acting) and post-dramatic presentation (doing).

Drawing upon Rancière, I will then argue that the paradoxical state of *Being* – simultaneously present and absent – demands a third way of seeing: one in opposition to the models of spectatorship (predicated either upon the collapse of distance or an empathetic response (recognition) favoured by the pedagogic and ‘stultifying’ theatres of both postdramatic and dramatic forms (Rancière 2011, 14).⁵⁷ Much of that definition rests upon the identification of the exact quality of spectatorship I envisage for my work (as event), predicated upon a relative distance between event and spectator.

⁵⁷ Walter Benjamin, in *Understanding Brecht*, and as Blau informs us, defined this tendency towards pedagogy as the ‘educative effect’ (qtd. Blau 1990, 250).

3.1. The Trojan Horse Model

The project I intended to embark upon, stemming, as previously outlined, from a discussion with the theatre director Daniella Topol,⁵⁸ was the creation of a pair of reflexive texts that were both developed through, and an exploration in dramatic form of Play Reading, the dominant development tool in the New York theatre ecology. Firstly, a 'B text' would be drafted (based upon a series of interviews conducted with women in Troy, Ohio); a device with which to initiate a development process that would enable the gathering of experiential evidence from actors regarding the practice of Play Reading and their role as actors within the parameters of that practice. The testimony gathered in developing the 'B' text would inform the development of the 'A text'; that text being the dramatisation of a reading of the 'B text.' Note that a key element of the process of developing *Troyanne* was the identification of actors upon which to base personae with which to populate the 'A text'. Having identified those actors / personae I then set about mining them for personal anecdotes, information etc. with which I could flesh out their theatrical avatars. The 'A' and 'B' texts would subsequently be published in the volume *Historia* alongside contextualising texts that enhanced the reflexive nature of a project that effectively critiqued the very process out of which it arose and of which, this document is a further extension. On that note, Phillip Auslander, citing Craig Owens, comments on 'the impossible complicity' of postmodernist political art that it participates in the very activity that is being denounced *in order to denounce it* [original emphasis] (Auslander 1997, 129). Thus the reflexive texts, *Troyanne* and *A / The Biography of a Thing* could be construed as postmodernist / postdramatic as they critique the praxis out of which they arose. However, whilst admittedly written by a post-modern, I would, and will caution against such easy categorisation.

⁵⁸ Freelance at the time, as I write, Topol is the Artistic Director of Rattlestick Theater www.rattlestick.org & www.daniellatopol.com

It was proposed by Topol that the 'B' text should only be partially drafted; a series of sample scenes would suffice to stimulate debate in the reading room. However, in the course of the creative process, the 'B' text, *Troyanne*⁵⁹ seemed to demand full realisation; in so far as an inanimate entity can demand anything of anyone. This was possibly due to the fact that at its heart lay a material event (one recounted near-verbatim in *A / The Biography of a Thing*); the accidental shooting of a son by his father as related to me on the morning of that shooting in 2008 by the father's brother. Whilst devices coalesced around that event, thereby recontextualising it, and despite the relocation of the action across state to Troy, Ohio (in an attempt to anonymise the protagonists) the power of the event itself insisted on being fully realised in dramatic form. Whilst excerpts of *Troyanne* would indeed function as a *mise en abyme* (as per the original intent) *Troyanne* evolved into a complete text in memoriam; a Thing in its own right. Such animistic whimsy on my behalf led to the conceit that is central to *A / The Biography of a Thing*; the personification of text as sapient entity, as Thing.

*

Drawing upon *The Trojan Women*, as briefly outlined in the short play, *Troy Story* (contained within *Historia* (Portfolio,416)), *Troyanne* is yet another attempt to harness the classic text in order to interrogate the present.⁶⁰ *The Trojan Women*, written by Euripides, has lent itself to copious adaptations in the past century by those who seek to critique hegemonies, be those critiques feminist, postdramatic, post-colonial or other. For all conflict results in the disproportionate suffering of women and children and all wars produce widows such as Hecuba. The inherent humanism that underpins Euripides' text, at the expense of the hegemonic order, enables adaptations of the *The Tro-*

⁵⁹ Originally titled, *The Trojan Woman*. Regarding project nomenclature see, 'What's in a name?' the end piece in *Historia*

⁶⁰ Having met the dramatist Christine Evans in New York, I was subsequently asked to translate her award-winning text, *Trojan Barbie* into Welsh. *Barbie Caerdroia* was performed by 3rd year students at University of Wales Trinity St Davids and webcast on March 21 2014. Howlround: <https://howlround.com/happenings/barbie-caerdroia-welsh-translation-christine-evans-trojan-barbie>

jan Women to make salient contributions to the socio-political debate of all times and from disparate though potentially intersectional perspectives.⁶¹

The structure of *Troyanne* mirrors that of Euripides' text, and the figures in *Troyanne* find equivalences in their classic counterparts: Hannah / Hecuba, Anne / Cassandra, Police / Talthybius, and Tory (her neighbour, bearing an anagrammatic name) as a one-woman chorus of whom Hecuba asks, 'Why do you keep raising me up?' To which Tory replies 'We are Trojan Women / We raise each other.' However, there is one fundamental difference, the *casus belli* in modern day Troy is not Hellenic beauty, rather, it is the metallic beauty of a gun. And importantly, as Jerry Hunter observed in his *Introduction to Troyanne* (contained in *Historia*), whilst *The Trojan Women* is an account of atrocities enacted upon Troy by another society (thereby making it ideal for post-colonial interrogation), in *Troyanne* 'we are faced with a society killing itself'. It is this irony that lies at the root of *Troyanne* as protest text.

In brief, *Troyanne* opens with the grieving Hannah in the front yard of her house. Some days previously, her husband, having accidentally killed their son, T.C. in a shooting accident, shot himself. Her neighbour Tory tries to assuage Hannah's grief, but to no avail. A policeman arrives and informs Hannah that, in a hostage situation at Culvers (a local frozen yoghurt parlour), her grandson, Ethan, and step-daughter, Anne (T.C.'s son and wife / Hannah's grandson and daughter in law), were killed in the cross-fire. Upon hearing this, Hannah becomes inconsolable; she curses the police and all men for their love of the gun – the true weapon of mass destruction. When the policeman departs her front yard, Hannah rises out of the dust, razes her family home to the ground and walks away from Troy: 'Rise with dignity woman / Rise out

⁶¹ Drawing upon comments made in 'Trojan Women in Contemporary Perspectives: Dual Readings of Two Recent Adaptations', where Izuu Nwankwo E. compares postdramatic and post-colonial adaptations of Euripides' text in Nigeria.

of the memory / And walk this earth out of Troy [...] Away from God. [...] Away from... / And towards...'⁶²

Whilst *Troyanne* is a critique upon gun culture in the New World, a personal (Old World) preoccupation lies at its heart: an oppositional stance to the patriarchal hegemony. Armed with fine words and guns (both instruments of colonisation) and possessing the Manichean logic of the symbolic order, the patriarchal hegemony, as Roland Barthes posits, needs to be disarmed and dispossessed of its seductive mythic language in an act of revolution if true social transformation is to take place (Barthes 2000, 148 -149).⁶³ It is towards this revolution that Hannah walks, contrary to Hecuba, who walks into servitude.

3.2 On the Gun and American Exceptionalism

The totemic nature of the gun, which lies at the heart of *Troyanne*, underpins American 'exceptionalism'; the cohesive myth of a neo-nation.⁶⁴ However, whilst birthed at gunpoint and maintained by the gun, the nation it has been argued, was conceived by the pen. In her volume, *Republic of Signs*, Anne Norton asserts that '[t]he Declaration of Independence spoke the American nation into being' (Norton 1993, 9), thus echoing both Ernest Gellner's (*Nations and Nationalism*) and Benedict Anderson's (*Imagined Communities*) ubiquitously cited theories regarding the unifying power of the word

⁶² In an earlier draft dated August 2010 (when the text was titled *Troy Story*) the final few lines read: 'Rise with dignity / Out of the memory / And walk this earth out of Troy, / Away from all Baptists / And Brethren, / Methodists, / And Lutheran;/ Away from God. / I'll walk away from Troy,/ On a wing,/ Without a prayer / Towards eternal suffering. / In that, there is.../ *Beat* / In that, / One day, / There'll be... / Nothing.' The nihilism of this closing paragraph betrayed a European melancholy. In order to Americanise the text, I amended the ending.

⁶³ In his essay 'Myth Today' (contained in *Mythologies*), Barthes wrote: 'Statistically myth is on the right, There, it is essential; well fed, sleek, expansive, garrulous, it invents itself ceaselessly [...] the oppressor is everything; his language is rich, multifarious, supple, with all the possible degrees of dignity at its disposal - he has an exclusive right to meta-language' (Barthes, 148 - 149).

⁶⁴ An epithet generally considered to have been coined by Alexis de Tocqueville. However, Dr David T. Gordon in *The Roots of Tocqueville's American Exceptionalism*, questions this. <https://www.faithandfreedom.com/the-roots-of-tocqueville-s-american-exceptionalism/>

through education and the media.⁶⁵ Norton conflates the performative act of declaration (of the written constitution) with the coming into being of America; a near biblical naissance for the ‘City on the Hill’⁶⁶: ‘America is a nation founded by the word. It is through the exercise of speech and writing that Americans construct those literary selves that constitute their self-determinations in the republic of signs’ (33). In *Historia*, I remarked that ‘New York, in particular, seemed to me to be a city of dramatists, desiring to write themselves upon the City stage.’ Taking Norton’s comment on board, one could fancifully conjecture that the near obsessional need of Americans to create mediatised narratives for the self could be construed as the acts of writing the self into the constitution; each dramatic text an amendment and refinement of American ‘exceptional’ intent.

It is not tangential for us to briefly consider one particular exercise in the nation writing the self, the drafting of the Second Amendment; or rather the clause within the second amendment relating to the right to bear arms pertinent to this thesis. A single clause of merely twenty-seven words has, through repeated mis-reading of the historic intent, resulted in the free availability and over-proliferation of guns in the United States. It reads: ‘A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, *the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed*’ [my italics]. Those that defend the right to bear arms, including the outgoing President at the time of writing in 2020,⁶⁷ wilfully ignore the historical contextualisation of the first part of the clause vis a vis the arming of militias in defence of ‘free’ states against the State: States’ Law (Volsky 2019), and use the second part to argue their position on gun ownership in contemporary America. Glibly, a dramatist could say that it is the schiz-

⁶⁵ ‘One’s prime loyalty is to the medium of literacy and to its political protector’. (Gellner 2006, 136) and ‘(T)he very idea of ‘nation’ is now nestled firmly virtually in all print-languages; and nation-ness is virtually inseparable from political consciousness’ (Anderson 1983, 135).

⁶⁶ As originally coined by the Rev. John Winthrop in a sermon aboard the *Arabella* bound for the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630 (Lehmann, C. 2016, 3).

⁶⁷ In 2018, President Donald Trump became only the second standing President to address the National Rifle Association’s annual conference.

ophrenic determination to arm the self against the self.⁶⁸ Stanley Fish's theory regarding the nature of an 'interpretive community', and that in relation to America's reverence for its near sacred constitution, would seem apposite: 'Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading (in the conventional sense) but for writing texts, for constituting their properties and assigning their intentions. In other words', and contra Wimsatt and Beardsley et al, 'these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is to be read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way round' (Fish 1980, 171 qtd. Bennett 1997, 40). The clause, despite liberal interpretation, once written will always remain problematic until it is unwritten; for, one could posit, to question the historic intent of a 'founding father' is, in part, un-American: hence the divisive nature of the debate upon gun control in America.

It so happened that the initial development periods of *Desire Lines* coincided with the nomination of Alaskan Governor, Sarah Palin, for Vice President (2008). Amongst the theatre *Liberalati*⁶⁹ orbiting the Lark at the time, Palin's defence of the 2nd Amendment and gun ownership was seen as parochial; from an alien's perspective it was an anathema. Considering the aggressive nature of American foreign policy in the naughties, it suggested, to this naive European, a correlation between gun ownership and gun diplomacy: as extrapolated upon by Laurent Cohen-Tanugi in *An Alliance at Risk*.⁷⁰ One must realise that I first visited New York, by invitation of The Lark, in 2006, a mere five years after the fall of the Twin Towers. The debate surrounding

⁶⁸ The surreal and ugly manifestation of this being the storming of the Capitol in Washington D.C. by armed American citizens on January 6, 2021.

⁶⁹ Liberalati being the 'lefty friends,' of the dramatist, Laura Zam as termed in *Performance Rant Anti-Rant, Right After Virginia Tech*, a short play text in which Zam charted her increasing incredulity at shooting in the USA. Her text, appears alongside *Troy Story* (that details my journey to Troy, Ohio to research *Troyanne*) in *24 Gun Control Plays*. Note that I wrote a second piece for Gun Control Theatre Action, *Dance On*. This was written in response to the shootings at the gay club, Pulse in Orlando, Florida (11 June 2016) when 49 Latino and Latina victims were indiscriminately massacred. Though unpublished, a recording by students from USC School of Dramatic Arts was accessible at the time of writing - see bibliography (Rowlands 2016).

⁷⁰ 'Rarely exposed to public opinion, the arguments invoked by the United States to justify its positions carry little weight against the widely publicized image of an America attached to its consumption of energy and to the freedom to purchase firearms and hostile to international criminal justice. And American isolation from an international community federated by Europe on these highly symbolic issues only increases bilateral tension' (Cohen-Tanugi 2003, 24).

that event, and the retaliatory ‘crusade’ - a contentious term, subsequently downgraded by the Bush regime, to that of ‘war’⁷¹ – was current. Possessing a healthy European, and most pertinently, a post-colonial suspicion of American neo-imperial foreign policy, it was only natural that I would consider it the responsibility of the victim to acknowledge the causality of its own misfortune. The editor, Steve Corcoran in his introduction to Jaques Rancière’s work, *Dissensus* echoed my Old World position: ‘In the aftermath of the attacks, the evident failure can be seen in the inability of US society to do anything other than to claim that they were a result of some evil that must be eradicated [...] US society did not manage to integrate this event in the framework in which it represents its relation to itself, to others and to the Other’ (Rancière 2015, 17).

To the moose-eating Palin, guns innocently provide Americans with the means to stock their freezers with game.⁷² However, the ready availability of the means to hunt with assault rifles makes random killings possible. Likewise, an aggressive foreign policy, driven by an unshakable belief in one’s own ‘exceptionalism’, realises the potential for heinous retribution. By 2010, when the ‘A’ text / ‘B’ text development model was proposed by Topol, gun control, being the topic du jour seemed an apt theme for *Troyanne*; one that would fire an enthusiasm of practice within the self and one that would ensure indigenous engagement with topic, text and process.

3.3 Troy, Ohio

Within the I dramaturgical meta-project, fictional / metaphysical narratives are anchored to physical coordinates in the real world: *Desire Lines*, as stated previously,

⁷¹ As Chomsky notes, ‘to call it a “war against terrorism,” however, is simply more propaganda, unless the “war” really does target terrorism. But that is plainly not contemplated because Western Powers could never abide by their own official definitions of the term [...] To do so would at once reveal that the U.S. is a leading terrorist state, as are its clients.’ (Chomsky 2002, 14)

⁷² cited from <https://www.usacarry.com/forums/politics-and-news/12614-sarah-palin-second-amendment.html>

being a case in point.⁷³ One could therefore consider I dramaturgical texts as memory maps; the cartography of a personal memory theatre: the mapping of a life lived. In *Troyanne*, the opening lines of the secondary text state that the action takes place, 'in the front yard of a house at the intersection of Troy and Indiana in the suburb of Woodlawn.' During my brief sojourn in Troy I searched for a place to site the action and settled upon that particular front yard, located across the Great Miami from midtown, as it had something of a Winesbergian atmosphere to it.⁷⁴ Sherwood Anderson's portrayal of the fictitious *Winesberg, Ohio* at the end of the nineteenth century was, in my mind at the time of writing, interchangeable with Troy, Ohio at the beginning of the twenty-first; hot and dusty, idyllic yet dark; the ennui of the plains seemed to hang over both the fictional and the physical towns that lie at distances from cities on the horizon.⁷⁵ I envisaged that the counterparts of Winesberg's 'grotesques' – the 'gnarled apples unfit for fashionable cities' (Anderson 2008, 19) – also populated Troy, Ohio. And in *Troyanne*, I tried to portray the truth of their parochial being with as much humanity, tenderness and compassion that Anderson had given to the fictitious citizens of *Winesberg*.

For Anderson's Modernist text, as described by Glen A. Love, is an expressionistic study in loneliness and frustration; the innate isolation of people deepened by 'strained communication' that results in 'the alienation of men from women and of both from the earth.' (Anderson 2008, x - xv) As it was the dynamic between the wo-

⁷³ In *Desire Lines*, Man's journey is the act of re-mapping Wales 'Reclaiming space' being a well rehearsed post-colonial dramatic project (Gilbert and Tompkins 2006, 145). And on that note, I regret retaining the fabricated place names in *Desire Lines* for the Sherman Cymru production. Even at the time, I knew that I was missing an opportunity, especially in relation to the bilingual names of the towns along the historically contested border: Caer, Chester, Henffordd, Hereford, Yr Amwythig, Shrewsbury etc.

⁷⁴ From my limited sojourns outside of New York – which is 'a product of American commercial civilisation' more than it is 'representative of American civilisation' – I would concur with the travel writer, J Pope-Hennessy, 'America is an atmosphere'; an atmosphere Anderson captures superbly in the synecdochic *Winesberg, Ohio* (Pope-Hennessy 1947, 10).

⁷⁵ As recounted in *Troy Story*, there is no train or scheduled bus to Troy Ohio. It feels isolated even though the interstate passes north of it. Note also that Winesberg is described as being surrounded by 'berries and small fruit'; Troy has an annual strawberry festival.

men of Troy⁷⁶ and the male dominated gun culture that was the focus of my inquiry, the sense of gender alienation in Anderson's work was inspirational. On Anderson, the feminist critic, Sally Adair Rigsbee in her essay, 'The Feminine in Winesberg Ohio' wrote: 'few other modern male writers have been able to convey with such loving sensitivity the hurt women bear' (qtd. Anderson 1997, xxii). Such was my project, to explore the hurt Trojan women bear. Quintessentially small-town America, Troy (as Winesberg), lies at the notional heart of the nation. However, to lie at the heart of America is to lie at the dead centre of the Dream; in all its manifestations and distortions.⁷⁷ As I write these few lines barely forty eight hours after the double shooting in both El Paso, Texas and Dayton, Ohio (from where I set out for the Square; as recounted in *Troy Story*), CBS news reported that, including the El Paso and Dayton massacres, 'the amount of mass shootings across the USA so far in 2019 has outpaced the number of days this year [...] As of Aug. 5 which was the 217th day of the year, there have been 255 mass shooting in the U.S., according to data from the nonprofit Gun Violence Archives.'⁷⁸

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Of the several women interviewed in Troy, Ohio, all recounted instances when the gun had impacted negatively upon their lives. For the marshal society that polices the world through gun diplomacy has created casualties of several young Ohio men both in the foreign and in the domestic sphere. As a consequence, all the women interviewed held ambiguous relationships with the gun for they had all suffered the effects

⁷⁶ Prior to my arrival, Linda Lee Jolly, director of the Troy-Hayner Cultural Center had agreed to arrange a few meetings with several Trojan women, in particular those who had issues with guns and gun culture.

⁷⁷ The American Dream was first coined by James Truslow Adams in *The Epic of America*, a paean to his country and the spirit of American exceptionalism. The Dream is first encountered in the introduction, that affirms the concept was already in currency: 'He has endeavoured in particular to trace the beginnings at their several points of entry of such American concepts of "bigger and better", of our attitude towards business, of many characteristics which are generally considered as being "typically American" and, in especial, that American dream of a better, richer, and happier life for all our citizens of every rank which is the greatest contribution we have as yet made to the thought and welfare of the world. That dream or hope has been there from the start'. (Adams 1931, vii-viii)

⁷⁸ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/mass-shootings-2019-more-mass-shootings-than-days-so-far-this-year/>

of gun culture at some point; if only as friends of those who had lost relatives both at home and abroad. One of the women interviewed was a prominent member of the Bluestone Mothers of America, a highly patriotic organisation that supports women widowed through war.⁷⁹ Her testimony runs throughout the text.

Regarding the ethical implication of research, it is important to note that the transparent process of testimony gathering that resulted in *Troyanne* – one that would, I believe, conform with the exacting ethical standards that verbatim dramatists (such as Alecky Blythe, Robin Soans and others interviewed within *Verbatim Verbatim*), would demand of themselves and others who exploit witness testimony for dramatic purposes (Hammond and Stewart 2008, 24, 94) – was in opposition to the semi-covert process that would produce *A / The Biography of a Thing*. For the women formally interviewed in Troy, Ohio were made fully aware of the nature of the project, prior to being interviewed. And yet all willingly shared intimate details of their lives and impressions and trusted that I would honour their life stories. David Hare, in relation to testimony gathering, notes in *Verbatim Verbatim*, ‘People like talking to theatre people and they trust them, and they talk more freely to playwrights and directors and actors than they do to journalists’ (70). Having been entrusted, *Troyanne* belongs more to the interviewees than the interviewer; it is a tribute to their lives in the tradition of testimony theatre. Emily Mann wrote in notes preceding her play *Still Life* that it is a ‘documentary’ play about violence in America set against the backdrop of Vietnam and ‘dedicated to the casualties of war - all of them’ Mann continues, ‘The play is a documentary... constructed as traumatic memory... an attempt at understanding our own violence and a hope that through understanding we can, as Nadine says [a character within *Still Life*], ‘come out the other side’’ (Mann 1997, 34). Whilst not using the exact speech patterns of the people I interviewed (as would be common to verbatim theatre in its purest form), my aim was to retain their truth and integrity, similarly to Mann’s intentions. I hoped that *Troyanne* was both an act of gratitude for the confid-

⁷⁹ ‘Proud military mothers honouring our children and supporting each other’ www.bluestone.org

ences they shared and a small contribution to the ongoing debate upon gun control, so that all citizens, not just Trojans, could ‘come out the other end’.

3.4 Performativity

Following two roundtable in camera readings at The Lark, *Troyanne* was first read in public as part of New York Theatre Workshop’s ‘Usual Suspects’ programme on the 28th of November 2013.⁸⁰ Prior to that reading, the Chicago actress, Elizabeth Rich was earmarked as a possible Hannah / Sarah; the Chicago elements in *A / The Biography of a Thing* are partially based upon her testimony and partially upon interviews I conducted with theatre practitioners in that city. However, as both Topol and I were eager to gather further responses to both text and upon process, Topol invited a ‘name’ – the Broadway actress, Laila Robins – to read Hannah in the NYTW reading. Regarding ‘names’, Urbinati notes that ‘Many celebrity actors will participate in a reading if it is being presented by an eminent theatre’ (Urbinati 2016, 36). The status of the New York Theatre Workshop possibly assuaged any doubts Robins may have had of reading an unknown alien writer’s text. However, whether she considered that reading of *Troyanne* a calling card for Jim Nicola (Artistic Director NYTW. 1988 - to date) or not, her reading was exceptional; and her rendition of one particular section of the text was transformational.

In the second half of *Troyanne*, when the policeman returns to the yard to inform Hannah that both her grandson and daughter-in-law have been killed in a shoot-out at Culvers, Hannah lunges for the policeman’s gun in an attempt to kill herself. He pushes her away. In despair she begs him to shoot her. When he refuses, she curses him: ‘Curse all you men; / You and your guns. / You find beauty in them. / You caress them, / Hold them tight / And squeeze them gently / Until they shoot off in

⁸⁰ An artist led programme that allows artists to develop work at the NYTW. Usual Suspects are a core of 500 or so theatre artists affiliated to the company. www.nytw.org. Topol was an Usual Suspect

your hands / And spread your seeds of hate and death / All over this earth.’ Despite Baudrillard’s cautioning, the speech develops into an avowedly Old World condemnation of gun culture and American exceptionalism: ‘So god damned American, / I’m ashamed of it; / Of this nation, / And of a God / That lets its flag be flow in his name, / And planted at the point of a gun. / That is real terrorism. / Dam him, / Damn you!’ As her diatribe reaches a climax, she wills herself to rise up out of the dust, out of the earth which has reclaimed her family (the image is central to Euripides’ text): ‘Rise up. / Rise up and raise your hands, / Rise them high, / Like roof beams, sky high.’ Then, she charges herself to ‘Tear down’ (Portfolio 277). She runs out of the yard and into the family home and, as recounted, proceeds to raze the family home to the ground.

I detail the above, as it was during its rendition that Robins astounded those present with visceral performativity. Without subtextual motivation and conceived by the word (as was requested of her), hers was neither a representation of agony nor its presentation, she was corporeal agony; made flesh through *becoming*. Note that I do not use the term *becoming* as Herbert Blau would use it in relation to method acting (“the actor who *becomes*”) in an attempt ‘to eliminate the distance between signifier and signified,’ vis a vis, to ape ‘the *look* of life in an attempt to *be it*’ [emphasis in the original] (Blau 1990, 255 - 256). *Becoming* or rather *coming into being*, in the sense I would claim for it, whilst admittedly taking place within a hermetic model of enactment (within a fourth wall, closed, environment; as per realism / naturalism), need not conform to quotidian reality. Indeed, *Being*, as I will argue, is not an effect, it is pure performative intent that can, at times – and this is the key point that differentiates the hermetic realm of *Being* from realism – be all too real, but can also be hyper-real or un-real; it possesses its own reality; its own realm of *Being*. It does not seek to ape life, it is true to its own life. I have previously made a case for kinship with Beckett and do so again. A *being* comes into being because it is compelled *to be* through utterance.

In *Kant and the Platypus*, in considering the nature of Being (essence) from a semiotic perspective, Umberto Eco, in partially taking up Aristotle's position and Heideggerian grammar, notes that one can only conceive of being if a being (*Dasein*) is within Being (*Seiende*); a non-being cannot conceive of being (neither its essence nor as substance). Conversely, only something can ponder nothing: nothing constituting the limit of language, the very limit of being, from and only within which, can such conjecture be made. Hence a being's pre-occupation with the nothing of death; the absence of all words. For, birthed by the word, a being is destined to be silenced; whilst a being 'is' in being, there exists only the antinomical Beckettian obligation to utter words against the prospect of silence. Thus, '(t)he primary meaning of being is the essence that signifies the substance' (Eco 1999, 22).

Regarding further reflection upon the nature of Being (as essence), Eco notes that 'Language does not construct being: *ex novo*, it questions it, in some way always finding something already given (even though being *already given* does not mean being already finished and completed' [emphasis in the original] (Eco 1999, 54). 'Being always manifests itself in language only' (52). And, by extension, Eco wrote, echoing Aristotle, 'the self revelation of being is actuated within language' (31). Hence, my project, based as it is upon a lay interpretation of Eco's semiotic analysis of *Being* – which he also italicises in drawing the distinction between essence and substance (12) – is the enactment of the transubstantiation of a being through the performative act of utterance, from which a being is formed out of previous formlessness. On the title page of *Trilogy of Appropriation* (1999) I wrote 'All is sign. After Eco'. A being comes into being through the uttered proliferation of signs, or 'chains of referents'⁸¹ that construct an incomplete being retrospectively. By extension, I, as artist, retrospectively construct myself through my performative texts in order to 'reckon with being' (*Being*). It is the process of laying bare the known, despite the reluctance to know: a rationalist approach. Given the limits of being, a poet (dramatist or other wordsmith), according to

⁸¹ As the feminist post-colonial commentator, Gayatri Spivak would term them: and as noted by Fredric Jameson (Jameson 2009, 40)

Eco, assumes his / her task is to extract a ‘surplus of interpretation’ from language rather than a surplus of being, for being is finite (34). It is that very limitation that defined the aporetic art of Beckett – inspired in part, as is detailed by Pascale Casanova in her forensic historicisation of Beckett's formalism, by Geulincx's philosophy of constraint and impotence (‘the principle of externality [...] the disjunction between soul and body’),⁸² and also the theory of perception (*esse est percipi*) as theoreticised in work of the Irish philosopher, George Berkeley⁸³ – and also defines the nature of my formalistic intent: the enactment of finitude.⁸⁴ However, before proceeding to a tentative definition of *Being* (as material event), it would seem apposite to consider performativity in relation to the theatrical intention of *Being*.

It is well documented that the term ‘performative’ was coined by J.L. Austin in a series of lectures published under the title *What to Do with Words* (1962). Austin's Speech Act Theory begins with a simple proposition, a certain statement (uttered in appropriate circumstances and with a specific intention) is not the description of an action (as statement) but the act of doing. Austin terms such an utterance a ‘performative.’ One could presume that theatre is the performance of performatives – speech action. However, the direct leap from Austin to the use of performativity within a theatrical context is problematic. For, as Austin states, and as often discussed (famously by Derrida), ‘a performative utterance, will, for example be in a peculiar way, hollow or void if said by an actor on stage [...] language in such circumstances is in

⁸² ‘Beckett would seek to illustrate Geulincx's system of mutual externality very precisely by conveying in literary form [...] [a]n exact embodiment of the principle of inaction stated by Geulincx [...] Beckett discovered in Geulincx's system a formulation of his own intellectual, national, literary, social and psychological confinement [in Ireland, which Beckett considered purgatory] and a tool for understanding it. And that in turn enabled him to implement new narrative solutions.’ In short, Beckett found a vocabulary with which to construct a literary purgatory that reflected a purgatorial life: ‘without the courage to end, or the strength to go on.’[my parenthesis] (Casanova 2020, 60-62)

⁸³ ‘Berkeley's idealism complements Geulincx's in Beckett's intellectual and illustrative arsenal of the 1930s. The idealist problematic is much in evidence in *Murphy*, in particular when the issue of existence is linked to external perception: ‘Murphy begins to see nothing... being the absence (to abuse a nice distinction) not of *percipere* but of *percipi*’ (Casanova 2020, 68).

⁸⁴ As Beckett articulated in *Three Dialogues: Samuel Beckett with Georges Duthuit*, ‘There is nothing to express, nothing with which to express, nothing from which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the *obligation* to express’ [my italics] qtd. West 2010, 35 (and alluded to by Terry Eagleton in Casanova 2020, 8).

special ways – intelligibly – used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use – ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiologies* of language. All this we are excluding from consideration’ (Austin 1962, 22). To Austin, an utterance delivered upon the stage (within a mimetic convention and prone to *parasitic* play) is *infelicitous*. Such an *unhappy* utterance (as Austin would term it, for it fails to resolve itself in true action outside of the fictive realm) *misfires* (14). A theatrical utterance therefore constitutes an absence of intention, whereas a performative, as Roland Pada terms it – in his analysis of Austinian speech act theory in relation to Derrida's criticism of it – constitutes the ‘futureal possibility of presence (*Jouissance*)’ (Pada 2009, 70).

In identifying a certain Platonic prejudice at the root of Austin’s devalorisation of performativity within the theatre, Jacques Derrida references the historic rivalry between theatre and philosophy. That ancient mutual suspicion, is also ironically touched upon by the philosopher dramatist, Alain Badiou who, in *Rhapsody for the Theatre* writes, that theatre (of the Idea, to keepers of the philosophy of the Idea) ‘is bastard philosophy, or philosophical bastardry: principled impurity, diverted lesson, all too serious analysis, all too lucid truth to be assured’ (Badiou 2013, 72-73). Hence the damning of theatre by philosophy as it signifies nothing.. yet everything: and that, to the philosopher’s chagrin. As a Welshman, one is reminded of the couplet penned by the poet, R. Williams Parry: ‘Nes na'r hanesydd at y gwir di-goll, yw'r dramodydd sydd yn gelwydd oll’ [The dramatist and his lies are closer to the truth than the historian and his academic proof – my loose translation]. Derrida excoriates Austin’s theory, for, whilst it acknowledges the inevitability of the *parasitic* play within aggregate reality and accommodates this *infelicity*, Austin damns theatre on grounds of blanket *parasitic* play. This comes as no surprise, for, as Derrida cuttingly notes, ‘it is [...] as a “parasite” that writing has always been treated by the philosophical tradition, and the rapprochement here, is not at all fortuitous’ (Derrida 1982, 325).

It is therefore intriguing that postdramatic theatre would embrace the term performative, given the criteria, vis a vis, social convention, demanded for *felicitous* perform-

ativity in Austin's anti-theatrical theory. Herbert Blau offers us a reason; the ecstatic embrace and embodiment by the postdramatic of *etiolation*. According to Blau, Terry Eagleton, in 'Brecht and Rhetoric,' drew particular attention to Austin's 'enigmatic' remarks upon theatre. Blau citing Eagleton, and in relation to *Verfremdung* / alienation technique, writes, 'Bad acting' – that Brecht presumably favoured [...] permits us to see, by contrast, or by its seeming ineptitude *as acting* the hollow in everyday actions'. Blau continues by defining 'the "void" in alienated acting as 'a kind of Derridian "spacing" rendering a piece of stage business exterior to itself' (Derrida 1982, 317). Such alienation generates 'a *productive emptiness* which, as it throws the elements of *presence* into relief, the lineaments of the representational structure, puts into question the (falsifying?) distance between representation and non-representation' [my italics] (Eagleton 1985, 16 qtd. Blau 1990, 291).⁸⁵ Making a dramatist's leap of logic, the postdramatic project, by embodying absence, becomes presence; the negative of a negative; a body, as sign of free association in association with other bodies. As a result, the postdramatic, of which Brecht is arguably a proto-dramatist, through embracing the Austinian 'void', is able to critique the postmodern void (empty yet pregnant with parasitic possibility) with postmodernity's own grammar.

As both *Being* and the postdramatic share a claim to notions of performativity, a distinction should be drawn. In discussing the production of Peter Handke's infamous *Offending the Audience* (Theatr am Turm, Frankfurt, June 2nd - 6th, 1966), Erika Fischer-Lichte, in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, notes the following: 'First and foremost, the actions of the actors and spectators signified only what they accomplished [...] By being both self-referential and constitutive of reality, they [...] can be called "performative" in J.L. Austin's sense' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 21). Here I read 'constitutive of reality' as constitutive of its own reality, as a performance despite unrehearsed interventions – as detailed by Fischer-Lichte. Turning to Judith Butler's often quoted theory of gender as 'constructed identity', Fischer-Lichte proceeds to juxtapose Austin's closed concept of performativity with Butler's open concept of per-

⁸⁵ Eagleton, Terry (1985) 'Brecht and Rhetoric' in *New Literary History* 16

formative gender (if I may interpret them as such): 'Performative acts (as bodily acts) are "non-referential" because they do not refer to pre-existing conditions, such as an inner essence, substance, or being supposedly expressed in these acts; no fixed, stable identity exists that they could express' (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 27 - 28). At first, it would appear that the performative nature of Handke's production and Butler's concept of performativity as identity construction within non-referential contexts, are two separate qualities of performativity. Whilst the former is the performance of postdramatic irony, the latter, is the performance of sincere and projected intent. Accepting Austin's logic, the former would be an example of *etiolated* performativity, for however much it was constitutive of its own theatrical reality (its performance context), it would remain a hollow reality, whilst the latter, the construction of gender through action, is a *felicitous* performative act in the aggregate of reality, for it carries an intention that it will strive to realise i.e. 'I chose to be of a specific gender and will act accordingly and that, against convention.' Butler draws the distinction herself: 'In the theatre one can say, 'this is just an act,' and de-realize the act [...] On the street or on the bus, there is no presumption that the act is distinct from reality.' However, Butler concludes intriguingly with the following comment: 'Gender reality is performative, which means, quite simply, that it is real only to the extent that it is performed' (Butler 1988, 527). Hence, gender is both performative (an intention to enact) and also a performance (acting a role). By extrapolation, any act, within a given convention (not necessarily, *the social* convention), is simultaneously both felicitous and infelicitous. One could posit from this that Butler challenges Austin's logic: hence, as noted by Fischer-Lichte, Austin is never cited in Butler's essay (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 28).⁸⁶ Any performative act is real by virtue of it having been performed (uttered or embodied) if the intention, paradoxically is both non-referential (constitutes its own reality) and self-referential (maintains its self-signifying reality). What Butler seems to suggest is that convention

⁸⁶ One wonders whether referencing Austin would have constituted the etiolation of her own theory owing to its exploitation of theatrical metaphor e.g. 'Consider gender, for as a corporeal style, an 'act', as it were, which is both intentional and performative, where 'performative' itself carries the double meaning of 'dramatic' and 'non-referential' (Butler 1988, 522).

(the convention of the hegemonic order⁸⁷) is not the base condition of the performative act. Hence both qualities of performativity are equal (if different) in their essentiality; for life is theatre (as Butler intimates) as theatre is life. *Being*, certainly constitutes its own self-referential convention. For, in the convention of *Being*, taking up Derrida's reading of Austin, 'the performative's referent is not outside it, or in any case preceding it or before it. It does not describe something which exists outside and before language. It produces or transforms a situation it operates' (Derrida 1982, 321). Hence, all action conducted with intent, within the lucid convention of *Being* is performative, as is all action within the context of the postdramatic theatre.

Which brings us finally to the quality of utterance within the convention of *Being*. And it is here that *Being* differs fundamentally from the postdramatic. A *being*, brought into *Being* through a performative act, seeks meaning against non-meaning. *Being* is not an act of ironic de-construction, it is the sincere re-construction of reason through performativity within a self-referential convention. *Being*, as a formalistic intention is secular ontological inquiry. Performativity, within *Being*, is the intention to act when there is nothing to enact, just the obligation to utter the self into being. In *Say It: The Performative Voice in the Dramatic Works of Samuel Beckett*, Sarah West describes the Beckettian 'performative voice' as 'the voice that strives to reduce the voice to a single 'T', insisting that the hearer / creator is and always has been "Alone" (West 2010, 241). Such a voice cannot avoid being self-referential (auto-citational) and such are the polymonologic voices within my polymonologic I dramaturgy: the intra-personal dialogues of a self in the first subjective position seeking reason stemming from the utterance of the Word. The dynamic of *Being* is after-Word not afore-Word. A *being* is uttered into life and sustained through utterance. Consider the quality of the voice in *Not I*, it is something 'begging in the brain... begging the mouth to stop' (qtd West 2010, 131). Once the utterance stops, a *being* ceases to be. The brain may beg for

⁸⁷ Austin's first example of a performative is the utterance of 'I do (sc. take this woman to be my lawful wedded wife) - as uttered in the course of a marriage ceremony' (sic Austin 1962, 5). Derrida challenged Austin's notion of context. 'For a context to be exhaustively determinable [...] it at least would be necessary for the conscious intention to be totally present [...] since it is the determining focal point of the context' That is convention according to Austin. However, as Derrida comments in analysing Austin's theory, 'What is convention?' (Derrida 1982, 323-327)

silence, but secretly desires the continued tyranny of the Word, for only that tyranny guarantees the certainty of being: here we return to Eco, Aristotle and Heidegger. In analysing the essence of the performative voice in the works of Beckett, Sarah West states that it has ‘intentionality’ (a will which drives it to speak) and ‘materiality’ (it exists in sound)’ (12). Such is *Being*, as I would intend it, ‘intentional materiality’: performativity.

Through performativity, Robins became a mass of sinuous flesh emanating a pulsating misery. Words ceded their power as signifiers as they collapsed into the signified. I have often claimed that my words are ‘irrelevant’, that ‘they mean nothing.’⁸⁸ In that room, something came of nothing: the intended thaumaturgical event generated a palpable atmosphere; an absent presence (the note on the title page of *Desire Lines* makes the intention clear). Fischer-Lichte cites the work of Gernot Böhme on *The Aesthetics of Atmosphere*: ‘Atmosphere is to the creation of spatiality what presence is to the generation of corporeality. [...] The spectators are not positioned opposite to or outside the atmosphere; they are enclosed by and steeped in it’ (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 116). The intonation of words, stripped of signification, were transmogrified into elemental intonation: an atmosphere, the miserere of coming into being. In *becoming*, we spectators had also become other than we were. The perspective between event and spectator had somehow been both microscoped and reverse telescoped simultaneously. Ben Chaim, in *Distance in Theatre: The Aesthetics of Audience Response* posited that the deliberate manipulation of distance is, to a greater extent, the underlying factor that determines theatrical style in this century’ (Chaim 1984, 79 qtd. Bennett, 1997, 16). It has resulted, as Rancière notes, in an oscillation between necessary investigatory distance (Brecht) and vital participation (Artaud) (Rancière 2011, 5). Indeed, the manipulation of distance has been axiomatic to the evolving intent of my work as it has drifted over the past two decades from the extra-scenic to the intra-personal. In

⁸⁸ In conversation with Hazel Walford Davies, I appealed to those who bemoaned my use of too many words: ‘[F]orget the words, in themselves the words are unimportant. All my words are is music. Sit back and let the atmosphere of my theatre wash over you’ (Davies 2005, 232). In relation to the intention, Andy Smith, in discussing *Glissando on an Empty Harp* noted that ‘The polyphonic tonal qualities of the text are designed by Rowlands to surround the spectator with a multitude of sensory experiences, in defiance of his own character’s preferences’ (Smith 2005, 241)

becoming, Robins had realised intention through the negation of the received ‘production-reception contract’ – or the autopoietic feedback loop, as Fischer-Lichte would term it (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 39) – and the re-positioning of the spectator upon the theatron axis. We had become witnesses, and as witnesses, we had been *distanced* to the point where we were neither spectators in the dramatic sense nor postdramatic participants (spect-actors). For the transformed was both before us, and also beyond us; an entity that invited neither empathy nor cynicism, it existed beyond value judgements. It was the pure manifestation of *Being*: the paradoxical state of absent presence.

3.5 Distance and Ideal Spectatorship

Rancière talks of the need for a reformulation of the logic of a theatre that has accused itself of ‘rendering spectators passive and thereby betraying its essence as community action’. Modern theatre, in its myriad rescue attempts has assigned itself the mission of reversing its historic effects and ‘expiating its sins by restoring to spectators ownership of their consciousness and activity’. This has resulted in ‘a vanishing mediation between the evil of spectacle and the virtue of true theatre’. However, as Rancière notes, a theatre that seeks to abolish distance ‘succeeds only in abolishing itself’ (Rancière 2011, 6-7). Or, as Susan Bennett puts it, ‘when distance disappears, art does too’ (Bennett 1997, 15).

Whilst both Rancière and Bennett concur on the necessity of distance, it must be noted in passing that Susan Bennett in *Theatre Audiences* (published a decade before Rancière’s *The Emancipated Spectator*) opened her seminal text on the relationship between the stage and the audience with the following declaration: ‘Many of these emergent theatres have self-consciously sought the centrality of the spectator as subject of the drama, but as a subject who can think and act. The productive and emancipated spectator is my subject’ (Bennett 1997, 1). First published in 2008, one could

read Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* as a riposte to Bennett's concept of the emancipated spectator and the 'emergent theatre': the postdramatic rapture (and rupture) that, as Rancière notes, mocks its illusions but, 'reproduces its logic' (Rancière 2011 [2008], 45). Whilst both Bennett and Rancière seek to create spectators who think (Bennett) or are pensive (Rancière), Bennett's conception of the emancipated spectator does not challenge the underlying culture of pedagogic edification endemic to both dramatic and postdramatic forms of theatre. Rancière, on the other hand, seeks to emancipate the spectator through the dissolution of the presumptuous pedagogy of a theatre obsessed with collapsing distance and presence, and with it, a shared temporality, of being there, in the now: in the theatrical sense. For, to collapse distance, according to Rancière is to perpetuate 'the logic of the stultifying pedagogue' (14). And, as long as pedagogy struts upon the stage, theatre remains diminished.

It has been the collapse of distance imposed upon my work by directors inculcated with the logic of pedagogy, and in thrall to *presence* (believing that presence and proximity are synonymous), that has undermined the alienating intent that lies at the heart of my work. It is the need to right this wrong that has resulted in the drafting of this manifesto of sorts; a document in defence of distance. Distance does not mean that I lack respect for the spectator: a disdain. Rather I respect the spectator enough not to attempt to teach her anything, as I shall argue.

Following the reading of *Troyanne* at NYTW, Jim Nicola rose to his feet prior to the commencement of a feedback session that would be conducted using the framework outlined by Liz Lerman's 'Critical Response Process,'⁸⁹ and though he ordinarily does not comment upon actors in public readings, singled out Robins' performance as "re-

⁸⁹ Liz Lerman's Critical Response Process is a four stage process, employed by New York Theatre Workshop 'where an artist, via a facilitator engages in a post presentation dialogue with a group of responders. Stage One, (Statements of Meaning): responders state what was meaningful in the work they have just witnessed. Stage Two (Artist Questions): the artist asks questions of the responders. Opinions may only be voiced if they are in direct response to questions asked. Stage Three (Neutral Questions): responders ask neutral (non-opinionated) questions about the work. Stage Four (Opinions): responders state opinions, subject to permission from the artist. Such a forum creates a sincere and generous environment where thoughts and ideas are 'presenced' in the room rather than directly voiced – an indirect dramaturgy (Rowlands 2011, 88).

ally beyond what we usually see in readings”. Linda Chapman echoed this as did all those present, for we had all witnessed true performativity.⁹⁰ In an empty reading room, devoid of the apparatus of theatre, Robins had transformed both self and spectator through the performativity of the Word. She had realised the intent of my work – that had been compromised in successive interpretations – by *coming into being*.

Troyanne was subsequently mounted as a ‘bare-bones’ production in Cardiff by Company of Sirens in 2016,⁹¹ whilst every effort was made by the director, Chris Durnall to negate the representational – for he truly attempted to realise the performative intent rather than interpret the intention – the actors were British and therefore the adoption of an American accent in itself resulted in the creation of a representational mask of assumption. Whilst the actors aimed for instinctive responses to the word, the word was unavoidably filtered by the mask. This filtering was doubled in the case of the lead actress, who had recently suffered a bereavement. She appeared to self-mediate the self, or ‘performed’ the self, as the sociologist Erving Goffman would term it: a double masking. One could conjecture that hers was a necessary performance in order to defend the private self whose aim possibly was the ‘maintenance of respect’ within a social context, as a declaration of her ability to transcend her loss (the director’s impression). As Goffman states: ‘The self, then, as performed character, is not an organic thing that has a specific location, whose fundamental fate is to be born, to mature, and to die; it is a dramatic effect arising diffusely from a scene that is presented, and the characteristic issue, the crucial concern, is whether it will be credited or

⁹⁰ Chapman’s post workshop notes are headed: Critical Response to *Troy Story* (dated 11 November 2011). Re. Step 1: the actor who played the Policeman) echoing Laila Robins’ comments is recorded as stating, ‘I love the hyper-reality. Everyone’s floating on top of it, disconnected and unrooted.’ Re. Step 2: In answer to Daniela’s specific question, ‘Did the play feel written from an outsider’s perspective?’ The general consensus was no. However, two points of note were raised: (i) Nicola stated that the relationship between Hannah and Tory ‘could be richer. I think you can lean heavier on the details of this world. What is her place / roots in this town’s sobriety?’ (ii) When Hannah confesses to Tory that she would have paid for her daughter in law’s abortion, the ready acceptance of that by Tory was questioned. Re. Step 3: yielded little of note. Robins commented, ‘I kept thinking of *Waiting for Godot*’. Re. Step 4: Opinions were positive.

⁹¹ Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, October 1st - 5th 2016. For reviews of Chapter production: <http://www.britishtheatreinfo.com/reviews/troyanne-chapter-cardif-9461>. (Reviewer: Othniel Smith) http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews_details.asp?reviewID=3079 (Reviewer: Jon Gower) http://www.theatre-wales.co.uk/reviews/reviews_details.asp?reviewID=3078 (Reviewer: Tim Rhys). Following the tragic suicide of Keith Morris, the theatre-wales website creator in 2020, much of the content of that invaluable repository of information upon Welsh theatre bridging the Millennium has become unavailable on the web.

discredited' (qtd. Elliot 2008, 37-38).⁹² In performance, one sensed that the actress's desire was indeed, to be 'credited' and to project an image of the self as jobbing actress, more in control of itself than Hannah is of herself within the text (as I witnessed in Robins' performative coming into *being*). Throughout her 'performance' one sensed a 'chronic monitoring of self-identity' as Goffman would term it. The actress represented grief, or at least, the level of grief she chose to exhibit, or rather could exhibit given the circumstances: and who could blame her after her deep loss. Being objective, it was a case of good casting, bad timing. The consequences of double and single masking were that (i) motivationally driven characters, drawn from presumption (rather than *being*), populated the stage and (ii) the spectators were consequently cast in the more traditional role of an audience passively watching a re-presentational drama, rather than as a collection of witnesses to a material event, as had been the case with the New York Theatre Workshop Play Reading.

3.6 The Window of Wonderment

Returning to New York, it would now be apposite to consider the inculcated practice of character creation (within the US theatre ecology in particular), and that, in relation to the optimum length of any Play Reading process.

During one residency in NY, it was remarked by a prominent theatre director that a play in development should not be workshopped for more than three days at any one time. After that three-day 'window of wonderment,' as I shall term it, the text begins to be concretised as actors seek to create characters based upon their subjective readings of that text, within which, they are taught, the truth of their character is encoded. However, hasty character objectives, if unstable, can compromise both the text and authorial intent. Urbinati cautions actors within play readings to 'trust their abili-

⁹² *The Goffman Reader* (1997) ed C. Lemert and A. Branaman, Oxford. Blackwell, 23-24.

ties' (instincts) and serve the text (live upon the word) rather than strive for the subtextual which accrues with 'detailed exploration of character' during full production (Urbinati 2016, 156). Such is the received core skill of their discipline; character creation through a closing down of options in order to attain the mirrored 'truth' of realism.

On American realism, Howard Shalwitz wrote, the great 'revolution of purpose' in American theatre in the first half of the twentieth century was to 'more truthfully reflect the realities of American life' (Shalwitz 2015, 23).⁹³ The result was the creation of a democratic aesthetic, 'realism' (consolidated through cinema), that has become the dominant mode of expression in the Aristotelean American theatre. Truth is attained through acting techniques derived from Stanislavski's system. And that truth – be it 'natural' truth, as per Sam Kogan's *Science of Acting* (Kogan 2010, xvi) or other – is the re-presentation or reflection of the aggregate reality of an emergent adolescent nation. However, as Holly Derr argues, citing *The (Female) Actor Prepares* (written by Linda Walsh Jenkins and Susan Ogden-Malouf), practitioners of psychological techniques tend to reduce the 'truth' to patriarchal, gender normative behaviours.⁹⁴ That questionable 'truth' is problematic as Derr points out vis a vis the Svengali nature of Method based practices in America: 'the actor must rely on an all-knowing guru' (director) to get to the 'truth', and the 'truth' they must believe in is gendered; culturally conditioned (Derr 2019).⁹⁵ From a like position, Anne Bogart and Tina Landau in their volume *The Viewpoints Book: A Practical Guide to Viewpoints and Composition* argue, that this closing down of options (self-imposed limitations) through whichever psychological / emotional based technique in an attempt to form character truth, is corros-

⁹³ On the root of American Realism, Anne Norton, cites an early nineteenth century lecture delivered by Horace Hooley. Hooley 'argued that American language, unlike the languages of Europe, was language "in earnest" continually corrected and refined by "the consent of those who are deeply concerned to maintain its truth and significancy"' (Norton 1993, 101). One could therefore posit that Americans believe American realism to be the dramatic expression of their exceptional truth.

⁹⁴ 'The performer in realism is unable to transcend gender boundaries and so usually experiences negative reinforcement rather than growth' Linda Walsh Jenkins; Susan Ogden-Malouf (1985) *Theater* 17 (1): 66–69.

⁹⁵ qtd. Derr, Holly L. *Hashtag MeToo and the Method* Howlround Theatre Commons 13 June 2019

ive within the American Theatre.⁹⁶ They outline a non-hierarchical system of training, called Viewpoints, that aims to free actors of the ‘Americanisation of the Stanislavski system’, through a process of gesture and kinaesthetic response within a given architecture and temporality, to the point that actors are ‘no longer bound by unconsciousness’ and inculcated psychological technique (Bogart and Landau 2014, 16-19) – if indeed, the subconscious can be mined at all.

Philip Auslander (citing Timothy Wiles) critiques the Stanislavski system and, by extension, related methods: ‘Stanislavski uncritically equates “meaning” with psychological “inner truth”, the imprecise term he uses throughout his work’. Auslander continues: ‘Paradoxically, although Stanislavskian performance is grounded in subconscious materials which cannot be perceived or known consciously, the (perceived) presence of these materials behind a performance is the only valid criterion for truth in acting’; acting as the mimesis of a delusion; a simulacrum. He continues, drawing upon Derrida, that ‘there is no unconscious truth to be rediscovered’, for the unconscious ‘is not a repository of retrievable data’ (Auslander 1997, 31). John Paul Eakin, drawing upon Israel Rosenfield’s theory of memory, comments in similar vein, ‘memories are perceptions newly occurring in the present rather than images fixed and stored in the past and somehow mysteriously recalled to present consciousness’. Eakin adds, ‘Recollection is a kind of perception... *and every context will alter the nature of what is recalled.*’ [original emphasis] (Eakin 1999: 19 - 20)⁹⁷ Such a position would seem to lie in opposition to models of acting that exploit psychological techniques. To Rosenfield, the present is all and dictates all, as I have argued for in *Being*. We are further informed by Eakin, that Rosenfield states firstly, that consciousness is ‘self-referential’, and secondly, that ‘the base line of consciousness, of memory, of identity, is the body image’. We are physically ever coming into *being*, and our sense of self is a product of both oral and somatic sensation. One could posit therefore that both *Being*

⁹⁶Arthur Bartow’s comments are of relevance here, ‘(i)t is no accident that Americans cling to realism as their theatrical bread and butter. After 240 years we are still trying to understand who we are and to define our humanity’ (Svich 2015, 11).

⁹⁷ Rosenfield, I (1988) *The Invention of Memory: A New View of the Brain* (New York: Basic Books), 89

and ‘Viewpoints’ are two sides of Rosenfield’s coin. Whilst in *Being* performativity of the Word generates action. In Viewpoints, ‘a tool for discovering action (and memory forming), not from psychology or backstory, but from immediate stimuli’, action generates the Word (Bogarth and Landau 2014, 125). However, I must stress that the postulation is theoretical, based as it is upon a reading of *Viewpoint*. I have no practical experience of the technique.

Despite a seemingly common aim, which is to circumvent any spurious mining of the subconscious, I acknowledge that Viewpoints has universal application as a choreographic technique that can be applied cross genre and in conjunction with other complimentary techniques, for Viewpoints is a ‘pathway to unexpected choices not dictated by text, psychology or intention’. Whilst I will not claim universal application for *Being*, it could have a certain application in Play Reading as an antidote to inveterate ‘truth’ seeking. As the director Jose Zayas comments, ‘Actors need to make strong choices. They have to make the script “pop” immediately. Over-rehearsing and overthinking lead to bad choices. The most interesting choices [...] come out instinctively at readings’ (qtd. Urbinati 2016, 93). The producer Anthony Arnove adds: ‘I have been privileged to observe some play readings that I actually preferred to the staged production that followed [...] I find that some actors’ initial instincts in a reading the script are more truthful than the direction they take their performance (or are directed to take)’ (Urbinati 2016, 8). The intimation is, in public reading, one should live on the Word.

One can clearly see the limitations at play when actors are asked to read a text outside of any in camera development process (even within the three-day ‘window of wonderment’). Fearing that their public face could be ‘discredited’, an actor /actress will invariably close the ‘window of wonderment’ and ‘create’ a character using affective memory, or other recall technique depending on their training (see p. 43-44). In so doing, an actor / actress inadvertently corrupts a text believing that he/she is rescuing

both it and him/herself (as ‘play fixer’) from an un-suspendible disbelief. For, as the three actresses discuss in *A / The Biography of a Thing*, each play reading is an audition:

Anja: You never know who’s going to be in an audience. You
 never know

Sarah: I guess you never know

Anja: You never know, eh Molly?

Molly: No

Anja: No, you never know (Portfolio, 360-361)

To perform, either representationally in drama or, as I will outline, presentationally within postdramatic theatre, is to impose a set of limitations upon truth through mediation. Within the ‘window of wonderment’ one maximises the currency of truth (given that all is mediated and absolute truth is unobtainable) through adopting a performative strategy, *Being*; an instinctive process that circumvents self-mediation and unnecessary masking.

3.7 Presence and Presentness

Hans-Thies Lehmann’s analysis of the rupture in twentieth century drama – and by extension, the rupture with all previous ‘rescue attempts’ and ‘tentative solutions’ that were able to incorporate all without losing their dramatic character and out of which postdramatic theatre arose (see below) – is of particular note with regard to *Being* (Lehmann 2006, 26). Lehmann cautions us that the rupture with the dramatic should not be considered a caesura; the prefix ‘post’ does not denote an ‘epochal category’. Postdramatic is therefore not a form ‘after-drama’ that erases its forbear (92). Rather, within postdramatic theatre lies the ‘anamnesis’ of drama (a trace of its past incarnation), even though the precondition for the former, vis a vis narrative structure, was turned on its head with the advent of the latter. Lehmann defined the difference that

occurs thus: 'When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificial imposed manufacture [...] then theatre is confronted with the question of possibility beyond drama, and not necessarily beyond modernity' (26). It is this final clause that is of interest in relation to *Being*. If postmodern theatre is neither a caesura with drama nor modernity per se, then surely one could consider it as merely one further 'tentative solution' to rescue theatre from the strictures of neo-Classical absolute drama as defined by Szondi. For, following the renegotiation of the subject-object dynamic in the second half of the nineteenth century that served to drive 'people out of the interpersonal relations and into isolation,' drama has sought a myriad means, as Szondi catalogues (from Naturalism to American Realism) to rescue itself (Szondi 1987, 57-58). If so, in what position along the continuum of tentative solutions would one place *Being*, as it carries elements both of dramatic (e.g. narrative) and postdramatic (e.g. polymonologism) within its form? In attempting to answer that question, the key consideration is distance: qualities of presence.

In *From Acting to Performance: Essays in Modernism and Postmodernism*, Philip Auslander discusses Michael Fried's 'notorious essay' (as Auslander terms it), 'Art and Objecthood' (first published in *Artform*, 1967). Fried condemned the tendency towards 'theatricality' in the art world during the 1960s, and bemoaned the rise of 'objecthood', the antithesis of the modernist project, in contemporary art. Though it is stressed by Auslander, that Fried was not an enemy of theatre per se, Fried defined 'objecthood' as 'infectious theatricality'. By theatricality, Fried meant an art that asserted itself and shared a temporality with a subject, i.e. it possessed 'a kind of stage presence'. According to Fried, a theatrical artefact such as a minimalist sculpture, 'aspires not to defeat or suspend its own objecthood, but on the contrary, to discover and project objecthood as such'. Such an artefact 'depends for its completion and fulfilment as an aesthetic object upon the presence of the spectator.' Both dramatic and postdramatic theatre share that common need for completion, for both are theatrical objects in the Friedian sense. That the role of the passive spectator in drama differs

from that of the active spectator in theatre is of secondary importance. Both drama and theatre seek audiences in order to qualify their functions. For presence exist only in symbiosis with an Other presence: ‘co-presence’, which, according to Fischer-Lichte, and in relation to the postdramatic in particular, generates an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ mainly through reducing proximity that, in turn, creates a liminality, a threshold with transformative potential (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 207).

Theatre is phenomenological – a trope even to state. Helen Freshwater in the opening paragraph of her volume, *Theatre & Audience* cites Peter Brook’s famous and elemental description of the essence of theatre: ‘Take an empty space and call it a bare stage [...] a man walks across this empty space whilst someone else is watching him, and that is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged’ (Brook 1990, 11 in Freshwater 2009, 1) Freshwater then turns to Tim Etchells who, in *Certain Fragments* (1999), introduces an auditory element: ‘It is the irreducible fact of theatre – actors and an audience to whom they must speak’ (Etchells 1999, 94 in Freshwater 2009, 1). Badiou adds one further dimension. The three elementary conditions of theatre are public, actors and textual referent – thereby offering Etchells’s actors inhabiting Brook’s empty space, something to utter and be audited by (Badiou 2013, 9). Susan Bennett, affirms the given binary. In *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception* she cites Jerzy Grotowski, who in *Towards a Poor Theatre* asked the seemingly rhetorical question, ‘Can theatre exist without an audience?’ (Grotowski 1968, 32 in Bennett 1997, 1) To Bennett et al, the audience is indispensable; theatre is a social contract of production and reception; ‘drama depends on its audience’ (18). However, turning to Herbert Blau’s *The Audience*, an eloquent text within which one would expect pure affirmation of the binary, the author writes, ‘Some consider it merely intellectually capricious to imagine a theater without spectators, or with a single spectator.’ Playfully, Blau records that Grotowski (who experimented with paratheatre: a form where the distinction between spectator and performer was erased) could conceive of ‘an *idea* of theater – whose importance cannot be discounted, whether or not realized

– around the *imagined* presence of a single observer’ [my italics] (Blau 1990, 34 - 36).⁹⁸ Drifting beyond that idea of a theatre spectated by an imagined one, Blau proceeds by stating that, ‘under the aegis of high modernism we have seen some remarkably exclusive views of theatre of the isolated autonomy of art, indifferent to reception’, and then, provocatively adds, ‘I am one of those who could imagine theater, even prefer it, without an audience’ (Blau 1990, 40). One could argue that here he is describing a drift away from the audited theatre of *presence*, to a theatre of unaudited *presentness*. Drawing upon Fried’s distinction, it would be a theatre that transcends temporality existing in ‘a continuous or perpetual present [...] because *at every moment the work itself is wholly manifest*’ whether it be viewed or not’ [original emphasis] (qtd. Auslander 50 - 51). I can also imagine such a paradoxical event qua non-event, as I shall detail in relation to *Being*.

Fried was unconsciously chronicling the early signs of the rupture between Modernism and Postmodernism as it occurred in the art galleries of the 1960s: as noted by Perry Anderson in *The Origins of Postmodernity* (Anderson 1998, 62).⁹⁹ Fried declared: ‘I want to make a claim that I cannot hope to prove or substantiate but that I believe nevertheless to be true: vis a vis that theatre and theatricality are at war today, not simply with modernist painting (or modernist painting and sculpture), but with art as such’ (Fried 1967, Section VII). Fried vilified what would, in retrospect be termed the

⁹⁸ Such a theatre, imagined by Grotowski in a pre-surveillance / pre social-media culture, is now the quotidian reality. All moderns perform (either live or mediated) in anticipation of reception: as Abercrombie and Longhurst propose in *Audiences: A Sociological Theory of Performance and Imagination* (Blau 1998, 73). Freshwater echoes this: ‘Life is a constant performance ; we are audience and performer at the same time; everybody is an audience. Performance is not a discrete event’ (qtd. Freshwater 2009, 70).

⁹⁹ Anderson charts the early signs (prodromes) and crystallisation of the post-modern aesthetic: (i) Ihab Hassan's declaration (circa 1971) that ‘the underlying unity of the postmodern lay in ‘the play of indeterminacy and immanence’, whose originating genius had been Marcel Duchamp’ (18) (ii) through its wider dissemination, with the publication of Jean Francois Lyotard's *La Conditione Postmoderne* within which he announced ‘the eclipse of all grand narratives’ (31), (iii) via Jürgen Habermas to Fredric Jameson’s conception of the postmodern world: ‘Never in any previous civilisation have the great metaphysical preoccupations, the fundamental questions of being and of the meaning of life, seemed so utterly remote and pointless’; postmodernism being ‘the saturation of every pore of the world in the serum of capital’ (51-55). The implication being that postmodernism rose with the dominance of neo-Liberalism. Postmodernism is therefore not radical, it is hegemonic.

performative turn of the 1960s.¹⁰⁰ The intensity of Fried's anti-theatrical feeling is startling – as was the reaction of a previous generation to the provocation and subversion of Modernism as attested by Fredric Jameson (Jameson 2009, 18)¹⁰¹. Despite Auslander's assurance that Fried was not an enemy of theatre, Fried condemns theatre as an *Entartete Kunst*, an addled art whose leaders, Beckett and Artaud, are named and shamed. Fried draws the battle lines,

I want to claim that it is b(y) virtue of their presentness and instantaneousness that modernist painting and sculpture defeat theatre and its innate theatricality. In fact, I am tempted far beyond my knowledge to suggest that, faced with the need to defeat theatre, it is above all to the condition of painting and sculpture – the condition, that is, of existing in, indeed of secreting or constituting, a continuous and perpetual present – that the other contemporary modernist arts, most notably poetry and music, aspire' (Fried 1967, Section VII).

In a final *crie de coeur*, Fried concludes his diatribe with a crusading zeal 'Presentness is grace'.

Within the decade, and as Fried feared, theatricality, in the guise of postmodernity would come to dominate art and fragment our sense of self in a present where, as Richard Sennett states, reflecting Lyotard's prognosis in *Le Postmodern explique aux enfants*, 1986, 'it is only possible to create coherent narratives about what has been, and no longer possible to create productive narratives about what will be' (Sennett 1998,

¹⁰⁰ Detailed by Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance*, in which she draws our attention to the original performative turn that occurred at the start of the twentieth century in the physical works of the avant-garde and in the theories of the likes of Max Herrman who, saw theatre, not as a work of art, but rather, as an event (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 36).

¹⁰¹ It is a truism that everything new is feared. In *Addled Art*, Sir Lionel Lindsay opens his reactionary text with a condemnation of the novelty of the modern: 'Modernism in art is a freak, not a natural evolution or growth' (Lindsay 1946, 15). However, Fredric Jameson points out that the high modern are now classics, once the high modern became established in the academy (Jameson 2009, 19). Susan Bennett echoes this: the conservative will always protest against innovation, for it challenges received 'horizons of expectation': 'We have seen how the plays of Pinter and Beckett initially tested the tolerance and expectations of audiences, but became accepted as modern classics as those audiences became familiar with the necessary receptive strategies' (Bennett 1997, 96).

135).¹⁰² This destabilises the very concept of presentness.¹⁰³ Presence, the sine qua non of the postdramatic project would become increasingly fashionable, and ironic theatricality that eschews any grand narrative, yet invariably retains a narrative clew (if only that of decaying narrative / decomposition), would seek to eclipse dramatic irony (Blau 1990, 328). Paradoxically, and in the light of Fried's condemnation of the postmodern / post-dramatic, which he could not truly name (for the term, as Perry Anderson informs us, had yet to attain common currency (Anderson 2006, 14 -15),¹⁰⁴ it is interesting to note Lehmann's comments that the shift towards presence is the reason 'why many spectators among the traditional theatre audience experience difficulties with postdramatic theatre, which presents itself as a meeting point of the arts and thus develops – and demands – an ability to perceive which breaks away from the dramatic paradigm. [...] It is not surprising that aficionados of other art form (visual arts, dance, music) are often more at home with this kind of theatre than theatre goers who subscribe to literary narrative' (Lehmann 2006, 31): though, one could conjecture, Fried would not be amongst them. Such theatre, having collapsed distance entirely to a negative point where, at times, roles have been entirely reversed, has, if I may be personal, always left me, and leaves the Rancièrian, Freshwater with 'a profound unease', primarily due to the increasing levels of audience manipulation in the

¹⁰² See also Anderson 2006, 31.

¹⁰³ Note: Fischer-Lichte in the *Transformative Power of Theatre* (2008) offers us a taxonomy of presence that seems to contradict Fried's definitions of presence (theatricality) and presentness (transcendence). Acknowledging that 'the terms "presence" and "presentness" only rose to prominence in the aesthetic discourse of the last decades', Fischer-Lichte states that, 'these terms (or their respective historical equivalents) have determined the theatre-historical discourse since its inception' (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 93). Fischer-Lichte then proceeds to offer up a schema for presence and aura – 'that je ne sais quois that' (as she later states in an interview with Tina Peric) 'no amount of technical training can generate' (Peric 2016). Grading the quality of presence, Fischer-Lichte presents us with her definitions: (i) 'I will term the type of presentness given by the sheer presence of the actor's phenomenal body *the weak concept of presence*' (94). (ii) 'The spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present. To them, presence occurs as an intense experience of presentness. I will call the actor's ability of commanding space and holding attention the *strong concept of presence*' (96). (iii) 'Through the performer's presence, the spectator experiences the performer and himself as embodied mind in a constant process of becoming – he perceives the circulating energy as a transformative and vital energy. I would like to call this the *radical concept of presence*' (99). It is only later in her volume *The Transformative Power of Performance*, that she refers to Fried's polemic, and discusses his negatively beset terms of 'theatre', 'theatrical' and 'theatricality' without reference to her alternative definitions of presence/presentness (188).

¹⁰⁴ Anderson notes, 'The notion of the postmodern did not acquire [...] diffusion till the seventies [...] The real turning point came with appearance in the fall of 1972 at Binghampton of a journal expressly subtitled a *Journal of Post-modern Literature and Culture* - the review *Boundary 2*.' (Journal published by Dukes University Press)

postdramatic: ‘the logic of the stultifying pedagogue is perpetuated’, the unshakable ‘anamnesis’ endures (Freshwater 2007, 70-76).

What of *Being* in relation to presence and presentness as defined by Fried? Blau, who paradoxically believed wholeheartedly in theatre as ‘the condition of life knowing itself as life’ (Blau 1990, 383), yet could still envisage a theatre without audience (a life knowing nothing but itself), defines the transcendence of presentness as ‘the chastening moment in high modernism where the vacancy before us becomes the grounds of heroic possibility’. The Modernist poet, Valéry, Blau, saw poetry ‘in its solipsistic integrity alone written for the love of it by the real poets, while the others, like those worshipping an absent God, still believe they are communicating with someone there’ (20). Beckett, the late Modernist (despite Fried’s premature condemnation of him as the enemy of presentness) wrote of the eternal void into which he played.¹⁰⁵ ‘Beckett’, Blau writes, ‘would feel the absence of the audience even when it appears to be there, on ontological grounds’ (320). His tableaux vivants are transcendental manifestations of presentness; Fried need not have feared.

I share both Valéry’s solipsism and Beckett’s despair, I have no desire to communicate with anyone and, drawing upon post-structuralism as I have outlined, question the ability of any self to communicate the essence of the self to an Other (the self is merely located through utterance, what meaning the utterance carries is questionable). And yet I am compelled (obliged) to write, as Beckett wrote, what else can I do as one who seeks meaning against non-meaning, identity against anonymity, bar grasp the ‘heroic possibility’? I would therefore argue the case for *Being* as a ‘chastening moment;’ one that need not necessarily be spectated, thereby allying *Being* aesthetically with high modernism, though I shall refine this definition drawing upon the work of Perry Anderson.

¹⁰⁵ S.E. Gontarski informs us that Beckett’s formalism, was inherited, in part from the early-twentieth century modernists, such as O’Neill, in the form of the monologue intérieur, ‘which he then stretched, extended and finally disbursed, scattered beyond cohesion, beyond recognition, beyond identity, even self-identity, as the self in conversation with itself is often not self-presence, but counterfeit’ (Gontarski 2018, 20).

In considering the question where does *Being* exist in relation to presence and presentness, an alternative aesthetic alliance for *Being* could be offered. Anderson claimed that postmodernism was ‘the first specifically North American global style’ (Anderson 2006, 64), that came to ascendancy with the arrival of colour television; the colonisation of the domestic sphere by the spectacle (88). However, crucially, owing to uneven global development, Anderson asserts that the triumph of postmodernism was not made at the expense of modernism (echoing Lehmann on the postdramatic). Citing Fredric Jameson and using Raymond Williams’s grammar, Anderson proposes that influence is ‘not necessarily dominance [...] the postmodern could well be only ‘emergent’ – rather than the modern being ‘residual’. As a consequence, and in considering post-modern artists (and by extension, their creative expressions), Anderson proposes that they fall into two camps. On the one hand lie the citra-moderns that adjust to and embrace the spectacle of the postmodern world (the exponents of postdramatic theatre that revel in presence, possibly lost in their own irony) and, on the other, ultra-moderns, that desire to ‘reassess the Modernist tradition, to reincorporate elements of it as corrective to the new Postmodern’ (107), most pertinently, subversion as a post-colonial agenda that challenges the neo-colonial theft of historical memory: the ‘waning of our sense of history’, as Fredric Jameson put it (Jameson 2009, 42-44). Despite previously referenced postdramatic elements within my work (unavoidable given that I am a post-modern for I exist ‘*within* the culture of postmodernism, as Jameson points out (29), I would offer that *Being* is an ultra-modern aesthetic as it aspires to presentness and to being a ‘chastening moment’ that maintains the spectator at a distance; absent presence.

However, before discussing the quality of that spectatorship, delineation must be first made between those that *come into being* on the one hand and both representational dramatic actors (those who become through characterisation, as Blau notes) and presentational postdramatic performers (who revel in their anti-Friedian theatricality), on the other.

My early work drew inspiration from the grammar of *commedia dell'arte*; a set of *dramatis personae* of stock characters (unmasked, but based upon the original Tuscan characters), inherently non-naturalistic and aggressively extra-scenic. However, from *Blue Heron in the Womb* (1998) onwards – though the true genesis point was earlier, as I shall outline – I sought a retreat along the line of the theatron axis to a point behind the fourth wall. However, that shift was not made at the expense of non-naturalism, for the evolving I dramaturgy maintained an epic lyricism as it experimented with polymonologism (post *Lludw'r Garreg*, as discussed). Despite that shift, it strove to maintain its position as a Theatre of Ideas as I termed it (Davies 2005, 235)¹⁰⁶, rather than a theatre of emotions; though increasingly, the emotional would underscore the political and ontological thereby challenging my near Platonic aesthetic. Accompanying that evolution was a drift away from the comedic to the revelation of the self through performativity, as outlined in relation to *Desire Lines*. For performativity, as I would intend it, and as detailed, negates traditional subtextual motivations, the building blocks of mimesis, thereby negating psychological character development. For nothing exists either prior to the utterance of the Word or following the final reverberation of the Word; there is neither character history to draw upon, nor a future to project, there is just unfiltered response to the Word, at the time of utterance, by an unmasked entity. Such is the *coming into Being* of a *being*. Without the Word, a *being* (or *be-er* as one could inelegantly term such an entity), would be an un-audited 'non-being'. As Eco wryly comments: 'Without speech there is no more entity, as the entity flees, there arises the nonentity, in other words, nothingness' (Eco 1999, 27). And so, what is the nature of this *being* brought into *Being* by the Word?

Contrary to any method, system or science that aims for consistent effect – in Kogan's terms, 'to become a 'good actor' (Kogan 2010, 14) – *Being* is unpredictable and fluid; its flaws, inconsistencies, beauty and brilliance betray the ever evolving dynamic

¹⁰⁶ Badiou wrote: 'All theatre is a theatre of Ideas' (Badiou 2013, 37). Yet again, the neologism was synchronous.

between *I* and *the Other*. Therefore, when casting a *being*, one does not cast either a masked re-presenter (an actor) or knowing metatheatrical presenter (a doer); one casts a 'self'.¹⁰⁷ Casting a self is essential if one is to maintain the integrity of the intent of *Being*, for it militates against the psychological process. As the dramatist Ed Thomas, one who also demanded intuitive responses of his actors, commented, 'actors often speak of 'my Hamlet'. I am not interested in their Hamlet. I am just interested in them' (Davies 1998, 136). Thomas sought the 'self' of his actors (given that the self is already relationally constructed and mediated). He did not seek the representation of an Other or an ironic presentation (a double masking). Thomas ensured this, in his early work with Y Cwmni (trans. The Company) by writing for specific actors i.e. Richard Lynch, Russell Gomer and others who gave life to Thomas' self-reflexive oeuvre (Adams 2001, 194-195).¹⁰⁸

In postdramatic theatre, the negation of a representational character heralds a drift in the function of an entity from that of an actor, to that of a doer, or 'wordy-body' as termed by Will Eno, where the meaning shifts from the narrative to the corporeal (qtd. Voigts-Virchow and Schreiber 2006, 278).¹⁰⁹ Whereas the dramatic actor represents agony or rather is 'the carrier of agon', the postdramatic *doer* presents us with 'the image of its agony' (Lehmann 163). Whilst the dramatic process occurs between bodies, the postdramatic process occurs, as Eckart Voigts-Virchow and Mark Schreiber note, 'with / on / to the body' (Voigts-Virchow and Schreiber 2006, 278); or as Jean-François Lyotard puts it, a theatre not of narrative meaning but of 'forces, intensities and present affects' (Lyotard 1997, 282).

¹⁰⁷ Regarding fluid and contestable nomenclature, Mariellen Sandford notes that the French performance artist, Jean-Jacques Lebel used the term 'doer' – in opposition to 'looker' – in trying to make a connection between creative and political agency within performance (qtd. Freshwater 2009, 57).

¹⁰⁸ In the early days of *Theatr y Byd*, when I also wrote for specific actors, I would say, "Don't act it, just *be* it!" or "Don't act it, just *do* it!" The intention was always there, though the grammar had yet to stabilise.

¹⁰⁹ Not to be confused with 'doer' as defined by Richard Schechner, where the doer is an active spectator that signifies the democratisation of drama as an 'art whose subject, structure and action is social process' (Schechner 1977: 121).

However, in sacrificing a personated character, a doer is not a wholly un-masked self. For, as Voigts-Virchow and Schreiber note, a doer becomes a ‘permeable persona’ (Voigts-Virchow and Schreiber 2006, 279).¹¹⁰ Such a ‘persona’ still wears a transparent mask, for even in ‘tentative assumption and impersonation’ there is character (a ‘self-mediated self’; a double masking). However, a *being* is nothing more than the impulsive response of the *I* to the uttered Word; *the Other*.¹¹¹ As such, a *being* neither represents nor presents agony, it is agony, for the Word agonises. That is not to say that *Being* is an agonising event for a *being*. Rather, it is becoming agony; its quality, quasi-ritualistic. One could challenge my definition and claim that the physical effect would be close to the presentation of agony; thereby calling *Being* out as postdramatic. However, I have, and shall further counter this claim. For now, it is only important to bear in mind that *Being* is not an a priori response to a situation (be it mimetic or ironic), it is an instinctive response by a *being* to the Word. As previously stated, the Word manifests *Being*, as opposed to the Word being the manifestation of a being. The act of *being* is therefore an extension of Lacan’s adaptation of the Cartesian cogito, ‘I think where I am not, therefore I am where I do not think’ (115).¹¹²

Birthered by the Word, teleologic *beings* are ‘logorrhoeic monads,’ dis-located nothings; at times, soulless voices (*vox inanis*), as per Beckett’s characters (Voights-Virchow and Schreiber 2006, 284). And yet, they are simultaneously somethings (hence their split-subjectivity), for they were created curious and lonely beings desirous of audition and a perspective (geometry) that can only be provided by *an Other*. The Irish philosoph-

¹¹⁰ Yet again, regarding nomenclature, Voigts-Virchow and Schreiber state that ‘whenever the actor’s body, therefore, dominates a role which is only tentatively assumed and impersonated, we shall speak of persona, or transparent mask through which the body / face appears.’ This, one could say, conflicts with my use of the terms ‘persona(e)’ as an entity / entities contained within a text intended to be realised through *Being*. They note that the Latin root of ‘persona’ is ‘personare i.e. to resound or sound through’ (Wallace et al 2006, 279). Hence, the terms are consistent though the effect varies. *Beings* are audited entities, embodied by the Word: they are not mouthpieces.

¹¹¹ Accepting Lacan’s dictum (after Rimbaud) that ‘Je est un autre’ (I is an other), Beckett’s work, being the dramatisation of characters separated from themselves as a result of their introduction into the linguistic world, hence all monologue is in fact dialogue (qtd. de Vos 2006, 111).

¹¹² Badiou’s formulates it thus: ‘I am not where one thinks that I am, being there where I think that one thinks that *the Other* is’ (my italics) (Badiou 2013, 54).

er, Ciaran Benson writes that the self ‘functions primarily as a locative system in the perceptual world’ (qtd. Jordan 2006, 135). To exist is to exist dyadically, simultaneously audited in split subjective positions: the *I* in relation to *the* Other and the self in relation to *an* Other; *esse est percipi*. Of the three texts that constitute this PhD by Portfolio, all main characters speak to absent Others that once located them through audition / perception. In *Desire Lines*, it is the dead wife (*an* Other), who gave a *raison d’être* to Man, to whom he addresses the text, and after whom he will follow into silence (dis-location). In *Troyanne*, the widowed Hannah challenges God (the proto-Word: arguably both the transcendent, *the* Other and the transcendental, *an* Other) to make right the wrongs of the New World (created of fine words and foul actions) and, at the end, it is with that constructed patriarchal God (The Symbolic Order) that she breaks communion (dis-locates) and walks away to relocate herself in an alternative geometry. And in *A / The Biography of a Thing*, it is Bill (*the* Other, not *an* Other as I shall detail), the absent dramatist / creator of the Word that is the object of Thing’s ire. It is the bittersweet release from the tyranny of the self, birthed by *the* Other (the Word), that Thing begs to be freed. Thing aches to be dis-located and silenced yet simultaneously seeks audition. Such is the essence of *Being*; it is performative geometry within the realm of *Being*.

However, and this is crucial, whilst a *being* shares a geometry (within a performative space) with other intra-scenic *beings* (Others), a *being* does not seek to share geometry with any extra-scenic Other (spectator): even though a *being*, being first and foremost a person, cannot be wholly unaware of the possibility of surveillance by an anonymous Other. This is especially true, as John E. McGrath informs us in *Loving Big Brother*, within the surveillance culture of our ‘post-private society’ where we are ever aware of the possibility of being surveyed, and so our actions are ‘a self conscious uptake of spatial performativity’. Teleological ‘surveillance space’ is created through conscious performative acts. Speak and be seen (McGrath 2004, 99 & 181). Considering this, with *Being*, self-referentiality is key and focus remains within the intra-scenic realm. Whilst unavoidably being an object, a *being* never seeks Objecthood. *Being* eschews a

postdramatic extra-scenic *presence* where the audience is either addressed directly or is witness to a performer talking to a point between herself and themselves.¹¹³ The focus within *Being* remains hermetically intra-scenic. Focus does not cross into the extra-scenic dimension in search of audition / reference. For *beings* are already auto-referred (auto-citational) both by intra-scenic and intra-personal binaries i.e. the relationality of the *I* to *the* Other and the self to *an* Other: split subjectivity. Hence a *being* does not need to seek any exterior (real or abstract) listener to locate itself, as *Being* is a complete dyadic self-referential system in itself.

One could therefore posit, and I would concede, that the cocooned act of *Being* is akin to the Stanislavski model of enacting ‘solitude in public’, as described by the director Torstov to the young actor, Kostya in *An Actor Prepares*; to be ‘in public’ yet divided from the public by ‘a small circle of attention’ (Stanislavski 1936, 78).¹¹⁴ However, whilst *Being* does indeed create its own ‘small circle’, by its performative nature, it resists, as noted, any ‘inner’ psychological or natural truth predicated upon ‘affective memory’ or complex forming (internal / external dynamic). *Being* however seeks an alternative truth unbound by memory and the quotidian – the essential truth of *Being* – real only in its own hermetic reality, possessing its own temporality. *Being* therefore lies in opposition to what Blau termed the ‘psychopathology’ of American Realism (Blau 37). *Being* defies the hegemonic tyranny of realism.

In the world of global Capital, Alaric Hall, drawing upon the Icelandic essayist, Einar Már Guðmundsson, posits that it is only through the surreal (un-real being other than realism) can we critique the real, ‘for reality has outpaced realism’ (qtd. Hall 2020, 65). Realism, according to Hall, is the ‘handmaid of neo-liberalism’ (43), hence

¹¹³ As described by Lee Breuer regarding the focus of performers in the work of the New York based postdramatic theatre company, Mabou Mines. When asked whether the audience are addressing the audience in their postdramatic performances, Breuer replied: ‘They are actually talking to a point between themselves and the audience. The audience observes a conversation between the actor and a point in front of them. It is not direct address in the Brechtian sense. It is rhetoric since it is spoken to the ideal abstract listener’ (qtd. Blau 1990, 271).

¹¹⁴ ‘(I)t is what we call Solitude in Public. You are in public because we are all here. It is solitude because you are divided from us by the small circle of attention. During a performance, before an audience of thousands, you can always enclose yourself in this circle like a snail in its shell.’ Accessed via: https://archive.org/stream/actorprepares01stan/actorprepares01stan_djvu.txt

American realism is arguably the dramatisation of Capital; a theatre of the Dream – and hence, as stated, the postdramatic also walks a thin ironic line. However, surrealism, as Allaric Hall notes in *Útrásarvíkingar: The Literature of the Icelandic Financial Crisis (2008–2014)*, offers us a juxtapositional position upon truth: an oppositional point from which we may conjecture upon what is real and what is truth, contra the post-modernist project that fractures truth in order to serve its needs; as autopsied by Mark Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*.

To Fisher, ‘capitalist realism’ is a ‘pervasive atmosphere’ that seeks to destabilise the very concept of truth (Fisher 2009, 16); a ‘system which is no longer governed by transcendent Law; on the contrary; it dismantles all such codes, only to re-install them on an ad hoc basis’ (6). Through the surreality, or rather un-reality of *Being*, I attempt to seek an essential truth, against both the impossibility of its existence and the system that debases it, in the hope of glimpsing it, if only for a fleeting moment. As I wrote in *Marriage of Convenience*, ‘In our moments of light lie our reasons for living’ (Adams et al 2001, 115). Mine is the optimism of one who is part of a less cynical generation that can recall a ‘really existing socialism’ (an alternative to capitalist realism that constitutes the death of the social and the culture of ‘untruth’ (Fisher 2009, 7). Whilst *Being* is the enactment of an ontological inquiry, the texts, written to be enacted as events, in toto constitute a strategy of ongoing resistance to prescribed reality; one that began as a reaction to a performative act in a Rhondda dole office in 1984.

That the focus of my resistance would drift from anti-capitalist to post-colonial (as traced by Andy Smith) can be partly explained by the paradox suggested by Perry Anderson in *The Origins of Postmodernity*. In that volume he states that postmodernism opened up fissures in society that allowed ethnic and sexual (gender) identities to come to the surface. Thereby, a dramatist could extrapolate, that Wales is a postmodern construct or rather, without the postmodern turn, post-colonial Wales would never have emerged as an entity (Anderson 2006, 62). Paradoxically, as Anderson suggests, post-colonialism offers a resistance to postmodernism (119). Hence my claim to

being a devolutionary dramatist; one who exploits the un-real as an act of post-colonial defiance against a neo-liberal hegemony that seeks to erase personal identity through the erasure of national identity: to dictate what it choses *real* to be. The cultural hybridity of the postdramatic avant-garde, whilst critiquing the hegemonic fragmentation of identity and truth, would find any defence of national identity an anathema. Yet it is only the national, as Anderson suggests, that can counter the trans-global. Daniel G. Williams elucidates upon this antagonism in relation to avant-garde English language Welsh poetry. He opens with a truism that is painfully ironic: ‘One of the paradoxes of modern cultural history is that a measure of political autonomy has been granted to Wales at the moment when the ‘nation’ and ‘the Welsh’ are terms regarded with considerable suspicion’ (Williams 2017, 116). In an essay that attempts to marry avant-garde and nationalist agendas for the benefit of national imagining, he writes, ‘In Wales, a predominantly “anti-nationalist” emphasis on hybridity is particularly prominent in accounts of Welsh avant gardist poetry [...] on the surface it would seem that avant-gardist, experimental, poetics is inimical to nationalist politics’ (Williams 2017, 118). The avant-gardists of *The World Republic of Letters*, and all those that would claim their place within it, as Pascale Casanova illustrates, were ever inimical to that which they perceive as suburbanly national (Casanova 2004, 108). However, as a dramatist, I seek the international through the national and, in line with Daniel G. Williams’s conclusion, see no paradox in that.

To return to the thread, the revolutionary deployment of the ‘un-real’ echoes Herbert Marcuse's critique of realism. In *The Aesthetic Dimension*, Marcuse opens his text with a statement: ‘In a situation where the miserable reality can be changed only through radical political praxis [...] art as art expresses a truth an experience, a necessity which, although not in the domain of radical praxis, is nevertheless an essential component of revolution’ (Marcuse 1977, 1). Marcuse critiques the Marxist orthodoxy that had historically devalued the decadent realm of subjectivity. In ideological terms, any revolutionary artist must articulate the aspirations of the ascending class through realism, the ‘correct’ art form. However, the Marcusian line, as true now as it was

then, is that ‘freedom lies beyond mimesis’. For *Being* in Marcusean terms, ‘challenges the monopoly of the established reality to determine what is ‘real’ and it does so by creating a fictitious ‘un-real’ world that is, nevertheless ‘more real than reality itself’ (22). In defiance of the revolutionary potential of art, Marcuse wrote, ‘(a)rt can only make conscious the necessity of change, only when it obeys its own law as against that of reality (...) art cannot change the world but it can contribute to the changing in consciousness of the men and women who could change the world’ (31 - 32). What agency for change my ‘un-real’ works possess, I cannot conjecture, I can only write in the hope of change.

Turning back to spectatorship, the texts I have written to be realised with the intent of *Being*, were never created for spectators, they were created for *beings* to be alone together; a position, pace Fried, that could be construed as a claim to *presentness*. For the texts that constitute the portfolio can each be reduced to a single transcendental image; each text is an extrapolation upon an instant, a fleeting eternity. Hence the use of circular narratives within my work (as previously outlined). Consider the fear of a fracturing Man at the exact moment when he enters the eternal darkness in *Desire Lines*, the woman walking the plains ‘out of here’ in *Troyanne* or the erasing of the Word in *A / The Biography of a Thing*. Were I an artist, those mental images would have inspired material expression, but I only had words at my disposal (as had Beckett¹¹⁵), and so I wrote them; each text being the dialogue of one, written in order to contextualise the self within the sublime tragedy of existence.

Walter Benjamin wrote, ‘No poem is intended for the reader, no picture for the beholder, no symphony for the listener’ (Benjamin 1977, 69). Echoing this stance, George Steiner remarks in his foreword to Benjamin’s volume *Trauerspiel*, ‘fundamentally, tragedy does not require an audience. Its space is inwardness and the viewer aimed at is the “hidden god” [...] the spectatorial presence of the concealed

¹¹⁵ See Casanova’s identification of the inspiration drawn by Beckett from the works of the artists Bram and Geer van Velde. In a review of their work, published in *Derrière le miroir*, Beckett wrote, ‘The object of representation always resists representation’ (qtd. Casanova 2020, 80). And yet, they were *obliged* to paint. As Beckett was obliged to write.

power' (36). *Being* is an act of solipsistic transcendence in a god-absent world. It is the act of apartness, and so, with *Being* I claim pedigree with the historic intent of certain theatre makers to challenge the 'natural rights of the audience'. I also chose to resist the 'horizon of expectation' (as defined by Susan Bennett, drawing upon Jaussian reception aesthetics (Bennett 1997, 48-54)), that is held by 'interpretive communities' inculcated through cultural precedent, in order to create a new relationship between enactment and spectator. *Being* is a third way, which is neither a distorted nor shattered glass, for *being* places the spectator in a third position, a charged space between potentials. In that space, a sense of togetherness is structured by disconnection not by faux connection; thereby countering the illusion of the 'spurious unity of the theatre'. How therefore should this 'discourse of one' – a 'private rather than public fantasy, even in public', as Blau informs us Mallarme termed it – be spectated? (Blau 1990, 25). In order to clearly define intended proximities between spectator and *being* and the role of spectator within *Being*, a detour into the experiential is apposite.

3.9 Coming into being

In 1994, during the Irish tour of *Glissando on an Empty Harp*, the multi-media production played to a near empty house in Ballybofey, a small town in County Donegal.¹¹⁶ Half way through the show, our perception, from the stage, was that the house had emptied of its small audience. One of my fellow actors turned to me and asked whether we should stop the performance. As its director and producer, I instructed him to continue; in part as it was the largest guarantee of the tour and I did not want to endanger the production budget. And so we continued despite the absence of spectators. Without an audience, we had, according to the received definition of theatre, ceased to be; we had died on stage. At the opening of *The Audience*, Blau quotes Vir-

¹¹⁶ The whole of the action took place within a four by four by three metre high cube delineated by a box steel outline that had, as its back wall, a metal screen upon which the multi-media element was projected. The four actors stayed in this space throughout. 'A surreal piece of theatre that is at times very, very funny.' Michael Finlan, *Irish Times* 18. iii . 1994 (reviewed at The Galway Arts Centre)

ginia Woolf who, whilst working upon her final novel, *Between the Acts*, wrote in her diary: 'No audience, No echo. That's part of one's death (Blau 1990, 1). A sentiment echoed in *An Actor Prepares*, where Stanislavski's pedagogical surrogate, Tortsov, tells his students that playing to no audience is, if not part of one's death, 'like listening for an echo in a place without resonance' (1936, 255). Such was that hall in Ballybofey, a deathly place without 'dispartition of an echo'. And yet we did not fear, and our fate was not death, rather the opposite, we existed in a way we had not existed prior to that event. Whilst we, as actors were no longer extra-scenically referred, we re-focused solely upon intra-scenic referral. And it was that shift from extra-scenic to intra-scenic audition that would prove to be a true material event. Note that whilst we did carry a technical stage manager – that some would consider witness to the event and therefore argue that extra-scenic objecthood was maintained – that stage manager, seated at the side of the stage behind tabs, focussed entirely upon sound, lighting and video cues, was unaware of the absence of the third party gaze. He was, in effect *an Other* intra-scenic entity existing within our newly hermeticised world that had been, as far as we were aware, accidentally sealed.

To continue with the performance was as revelatory as it was revolutionary. No longer slaves to the tyranny of convention (Bennett's 'social contract' (Bennett 1997, 204)) or reality, we four actors had been freed, and in our release, we had been granted license to shed a mask, to inhabit without acting, for there was no-one *to act to*, only other beings *to be with*, within an intra-scenic 'small circle' that was not, as far as we were aware, surveyed. And in the transformational act of non-acting we were free to come into *being*. Yet crucially, in doing so, we did not diminish energy as we shifted focus inwards; as one might expect with intra-scenic separation as per the 'small circle' of psychological realism. As Dafydd Wyn Roberts, co-actor that night and co-founder of Theatr y Byd commented in personal correspondence: 'As actors, we continued playing the "truth" of the piece, being there in the moment [...] an unique experience, never repeated since.' Our hyper-reality became 'more real than real' (an un-real), divested of an audience and diverging foci it took the form of quasi-ritual: a near Pla-

tonic community enacting itself. That new reality released an essential truth I had never previously experienced as an actor. Whilst certain final runs in the rehearsal room can approach such a state, one is always aware of the intended audience signified by the director. Focus therefore remains in expectation of extra-scenic deviation; one anticipates the echo to the point that, as Badiou writes, the dress run turns into ‘the premature event of the spectacle’s already having taken place’ (Badiou 2013, 3). However, that night in Ballybofey, echoed only by ourselves, we had transcended convention and come into *being*, unaware of, and unconcerned with spectatorship.

It was only after we had finished that, through unexpected applause, we were made aware of the presence of the audience who had, owing to the temperature in the auditorium, migrated to the radiators that lined the sides of the space. Following the fracture in the convention, they had witnessed an event that had not attempted to seduce them, for it had no awareness of their presence, yet they were fully aware of us throughout and enacted their own drama in parallel to ours; a drama of migration. We were together apart, a state beyond being ‘together and alone’; the ‘communal situation’, as Tim Etchells termed it in the essay, ‘Some People Do Something. The Others Watch, Listen, Try To Be’ (Etchells 2013, 96). Several years, and the evolution of a polymonologic form would pass before *Being*, as intra-scenic form, came to frame praxis. However, it was the material event of Ballybofey that, more than any moment in theatre, served to shape my vision of it.

Having established the performative nature of coming into being and the self-referring state of being, it now remains for me to detail the exact nature of *Being*, as hermetic event wherein beings and those spectating beings exists paradoxically in both inter-dependency and opposition. In order to do so, I shall begin by analysing the status of the spectator and the nature of spectatorship at the Ballybofey event as shot through the lens of a particular model of witness theory that challenges the received assumptions of spectatorship.

In ‘The Accident and the Account: Towards a Taxonomy of Spectatorial Witness in Theatre and Performance Studies’, Caroline Wake, considers Brecht’s eyewitness account of an accident related in his essay ‘The Street Scene’ (1964) (and subsequently in his poem, *On Everyday Theatre* (1979)). Brecht’s essay is an argument for the presence of epic theatre in the quotidian experience: ‘the point is that the demonstrator acts the behaviour of driver or victim or both in such a way that bystanders are able to form an opinion about the accident’; the essence of *Verfremdung* (qtd. Wake, 1). Drawing upon relatively recent developments in trauma theory, Wake argues her case for degrees of witnessing through a more nuanced reading of the Brechtian scenario that only took the perspective of a single eyewitness into account. Wake states, ‘I have always thought that there are two scenes here: the accident *and* the account. Within the scene of the accident, witnessing is a mode of seeing whereas within the scene of the account, witnessing is not only a mode of seeing but also of saying and, for the bystanders, a mode of listening’ (Wake 2009, 1). Wake proceeds to create a taxonomy for witnessing events / the spectatorship of performance; or rather the witnessing of a ‘rehearsed accident’ where each person bears unique witness to an event, for no body of witnesses is homogenous, as is well rehearsed (Freshwater 2009, 28). Each audience is, in effect, a community of witnesses; each bringing to the ‘emerging consensus’ their own histories and predispositions in addition to the communal history and mores of the broader society: Etchells’ ‘communal situation’. Given the complex nature of the Ballybofey event, Wake’s thesis offers a model for reflexive witnessing with which one can formulate a tentative definition for the intended quality of spectatorship in *Being*. For the given binary of spectatorship (even with the inclusion of Rancièrian pensiveness: ‘a condition that is indeterminately between the active and passive’ (Rancièrè 2011, 107)) does not provide a nuanced enough model with which to analyse the shifts in status that occurred during the course of that event. For spectatorship is predicated upon contiguity between spectator and performer whereas witnessing, as is argued by Wake, is a retrospective and subjective act.

Wake begins through considering the received model of active and passive spectatorship touching upon the ethical implications of spectatorship in general. Wake reasons, citing Rancière's theories of spectatorship in particular, that if spectatorship is an activity, then passive spectatorship is a contradiction in terms and by extension, active activity is a tautology. The traditional binary of spectatorship then falls away for it leaves us with a proposition of 'whether a tautology is superior to an oxymoron or vice versa'. Instead of asserting that witnessing is a mode of active spectatorship, Wake proposes that we need to shift the terms of the debate and ask 'If spectatorship is always already active, then what is witnessing?' (Wake, 3). She then proceeds to delineate between modes of witnessing by drawing upon witness theory formulated by trauma studies. Witnessing, according to Wake, can be delineated into three categories: (i) primary, (ii) secondary and (iii) tertiary. In brief:

(i) Primary: by contrasting the writings of Tim Etchells in *Certain Fragments* and Peggy Phelan in *Marina Abramović: Witnessing Shadows*, Wake outlines conflicting definitions of the primary witness to an event (accident). Etchells references performance art events in which extreme versions of the body in pain, in sexual play and in shock demand repeatedly of those watching "be here, be here, be here [...] to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them" (the Derridian criteria of self-present witnessing). Etchells, Wake informs us, proposes that the primary witness is the *bystander* to an event for whom witnessing is 'both a conscious and self-conscious activity'. 'To witness an event' according to Etchells, 'is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them'. Such proximity renders the witness first 'speechless then garrulous' (1999, 18, 17). Interestingly in relation to *Being*, Etchells suggests 'the theatre should aspire not to give an account of the accident, but to be the accident itself' (qtd. Wake 5). This follows the doctrine of postdramatic *presence*, the play of objects. Contra Etchells, Phelan (2004) formulated a definition of a primary witness based upon her interaction with Marina Abramović's visceral time based performance piece, the

much documented *The House with an Ocean View*. Phelan describes the psychological shock she experienced standing before Abramović in situ in the gallery: ‘You slowly came off the wall and began to walk towards me. As you walked my body began to shake. My left buttock began to tremble [...] The gallery was crowded and I was worried that everyone was staring at my one jiggling buttock. But you kept coming closer and the closer you came the more I shook’ (qtd Freshwater 2009, 24). Phelan, Wake informs us, ‘seems to suggest’ that she was not ‘self-present’ during her two visits to Abramović’s twelve-day ordeal of self-imposed privation.¹¹⁷ Even though she shared a spatio-temporality with the artist, her sense of self and of the event could only be re-constructed in retrospect and continues to demand re-construction of the self through ‘compulsive repetition’ of the event (Wake 4).¹¹⁸ Phelan defined the primary witness as the *survivor* of an accident, for whom witnessing is ‘an unconscious unregulated activity’ (Wake 6). Whilst both Etchells and Phelan’s positions seem contradictory (for one cannot be both survivor of and bystander to / present and not self-present simultaneously), Wake identifies a commonality based upon temporality. For, primary witnesses, be they victim, eyewitness (or possibly perpetrator) are not always aware of the fact that they are mid-event (mid-accident) and need to reconstruct it ‘garrulously’ (Etchells) and ‘compulsively’ (Phelan) post facto. Hence, in both definitions, primary witnesses can only imbue the event with meaning in retrospect.

¹¹⁷ What Phelan might have made of Abramović’s performance *Lips of Thomas* (Krinzinger Gallery, Innsbruck. October 24 1975) as recounted by Erika Fischer-Lichte in *The Transformative Power of Performance* one can only conjecture? Having eaten a full pot of honey and a bottle of wine, smashing the wine glass in her right hand, Abramović carved a five pointed star into her abdomen with a razor blade. Abramović proceeded to self flagellate in front of a photograph of a long haired man (that she had framed with a five pointed star; both a religious and a political symbol of the Yugoslav Republic) before lying on a crucifix of ice above which a radiator hung: ‘After she had held out for 30 minutes without any sign of abandoning the torture, some members of the audience could no longer bear her ordeal. They hastened to the blocks of ice, took hold of the artist, and covered her with coats. Then they removed her from the cross and carried her away. Thus, they put an end to the performance’ (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 11).

¹¹⁸ During Marina Abramović’s twelve-day performance of *House with an Ocean View* during which the artist lived on ‘a brightly lit altar-like platform six feet off the ground that could only be reached by three ladders, their rungs made of sharp butcher’s knives. (Her) only sustenance throughout her self imposed confinement was water.’ It is recorded by performance historian, RoseLee Goldberg that ‘the aura Abramović generated was not of deprivation: rather it was of infinite time and intimate connections between artist and viewer’ (Goldberg 2011, 229).

(ii) The Secondary Witness is a participant not in the event, but in the account given of the event; a shift from ocular to aural testimony. Citing Diana Taylor writing in *Disappearing Acts*, Wake understands the witness to be ‘the listener rather than the see-er’ (Taylor 1997 qtd. Wake 7). In distinguishing between primary and secondary positions, Wake summarises thus, whilst the former collapses distance, the latter aims for ‘critical distance’ allowing ‘space for reflection’ (6). Interestingly (in relation to *A / The Biography of a Thing* and the issue of ‘life theft’), Wake adds, secondary witnessing implicates the spectator in the ethics of repetition, of listening, re-enactment and repetition (8). To be party to witness testimony is to carry an ethical responsibility towards the witness: consideration of this issue will be given in relation to *A / The Biography of a Thing*

(iii) The Tertiary Witness is neither a witness to trauma nor an addressee of testimony, but a witness, according to Karen Malpede, to ‘the act of witnessing as it takes place between characters’ (Malpede 1996 qtd. Wake 11).¹¹⁹ This is an act of meta-spectatorship. Crucially, the tertiary witness watches someone watching and through this, becomes aware of her own specular habits. This is of particular importance with regard to reflexivity of the audience within *Being*, as I shall discuss. However, Wake cautions that ‘the tertiary witness who is temporally distanced is particularly problematic, since their imaginative, assimilative recovery of the event comes dangerously close to concepts of false witnessing’ thereby magnifying the ethical considerations of secondary witnessing.

In drawing her conclusions upon witnessing and its temporal implications, Wake proposes that ‘intense listening’ ought to be the model for future discussions of witnessing for (i) primary witnesses experience a belated response to an event which is always already having passed and (ii) secondary and tertiary witnesses are only witnesses to the retelling of an event. In attempting to distinguish between witness and spectator, Wake suggests, it is only the spectator that experiences an event ocularly, for all wit-

¹¹⁹ Malpede, Karen. (1996) ‘Theatre of Witness: Passage into a New Millennium’ in *New Theatre Quarterly* 12.47, 275
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nessing is retrospective ('in and through time') and therefore verbal and aural. Using Wake's reasoning, if an entity is unaware of events during an event, being only able to reconstruct events in retrospect, then the position of the spectator is arguably always historic; witnessing is constituted by the retelling of an event and the reception of that retelling by witnesses, and not the spectated event itself. Wake places her emphasis upon listening, for, only through listening are we temporally anchored to the past, located spatially in the present by the 'listened to' who is, in turn our listener. Interestingly, Herbert Blau, on the audition of the performative voice, wrote that Roland Barthes, considered listening, 'if not the whole of theatre, nevertheless its critical act' (Blau 1990, 131). Barthes, in *The Responsibility of Forms* outlined three stages to listening: (i) *Alertness* (to the attack, the heartbeat of desire, the footstep or other) (ii) *Deciphering*: Apprehension or creation of meaning; where the 'rhythmic indices in the nautilus of the ear are converted into readable signs' and (iii) *Signifying* ('whose approach is entirely modern' and human: *Identification* within an 'inter-subjective space', where listening identifies the intruder, lover, audience or other and in so doing, identifies the self through transaudition (Barthes 1985, 245 - 246 qtd.). Hence representational drama one could conclude, rather than being a mirror to life, is primarily its echo.

Wake's thesis has relevance to *Being* and performativity. For, as John E McGrath notes, citing J.L. Austin, though taking a more Derridian line, one of language's major characteristics is its ability 'to bring about states or events that did not exist prior to enunciation [...] once established, this performative quality of language can be seen to be a factor in most, if not in all uses of language' (McGrath 2004, 41-42). One could infer from this that memory is constructed through language not vice versa (echoing Israel Rosenfield's theory of memory as previously discussed). Considering this, a distinction can be drawn between performativity in the material realm, where the accident has already happened but is re-constructed through the Word, and performativity in the realm of *Being* where the accident has yet to happen until the Word is uttered.

Wake's closing remarks are of particular note with regard to the nature of *Being* as event (accident / incident):

The accident cannot be created or rehearsed, it cannot be planned, it cannot be predicted, and it cannot be repeated – that is what makes it an accident. Yet performance can be created and rehearsed, it can be planned, it can be predicted and it can (at least to some extent) be repeated – this is what makes it a performance. It is the impossible paradox of the “rehearsed accident” that makes witnessing in the theatre so impossible and ridiculous, so important and miraculous (Wake, 15).

When the audience took their seats that night in Ballybofey they expected to become spectators of an event of which they, as individuals and as a group had certain expectations. On stage, the actors (for we were comedic *actors* at curtain up) prepared to fulfil those expectations in the customary exchange of performance and reception. However, at some point during the theatrical ‘rehearsed accident’, a shift occurred that transformed the event into an ‘unrehearsed accident’ (a true material event in the Žižekian sense). At which point, the status of all those present changed.

First consideration should be given to the changing status of the audience. Adopting Wake's criteria in its simplest form, they were first and foremost, tertiary witnesses, by virtue of their being witness to the act of witnessing (meta-spectatorship). As tertiary witnesses, they were also aware of being aware of watching. To what extent this resulted in heterogeneous reflexivity is unknown as it depended in part upon the individual and his or her engagement with the production and other tertiary witnesses. At the same time, they were also secondary witnesses for they would, no doubt, talk of witnessing the performance (as as re-constructed event) in due course. They were also primary witnesses (in Etchells' sense) – bystanders to a rehearsed accident. Wake informs us that witnesses can occupy multiple positions simultaneously.

We, as actors were primary witnesses (in Phelan's sense) for we hoped to survive the 'rehearsed accident' we were to perform. Whilst we did not expect the 'accident' to be traumatic, we would still re-construct the event post facto for, during the event, adopting Wake's postulation, we were not wholly self-present. During the accident we would also be tertiary witnesses monitoring audition. Post event, we would simultaneously be secondary witnesses to accounts of the event given by both each other and the audience whose accounts would undoubtedly differ from our own reconstruction of events. Ordinarily, both the witness positions of the audience and those of the actors (as the proximity and relationship between both is set at the outset) would remain largely unchanged in the course of the 'rehearsed accident'. However, in Ballybofey, when the nature of the event shifted to that of an 'unrehearsed accident', a reconfiguration of positions took place. In reality there was not one but two shifts and three phases to the event.

The first phase was the convention established with curtain up. The first shift actuated the second phase at the point when the audience migrated to the peripheries of the room, and in so doing changed their witnessing positions. Whilst they maintained both their role as secondary and tertiary witnesses, their retreat to the margins resulted in reflexive split-subjectivity on behalf of the audience who then constituted their own event that existed in parallel to the intra-scenic event. During that first shift, simultaneous events came into play within the theatre and as a consequence, the audience became secondary and tertiary witnesses to the 'rehearsed event' and primary witnesses both to their own event – and the event before them: their statues shifted from that of purely by-stander to that of simultaneously by-stander and survivor. The second shift, resulting in the third and most important phase, this occurred when the actors on stage assumed that they were un-located by Others – for there was no echo from beyond the lights, which then acted as a reflective - Lacanian stain - where a conscious gaze that is directed outwards transforms into a self-conscious gaze that returns to its agent as anxiety in relation to the scrutinous gaze of an externalised

anonymous Other.¹²⁰ As a consequence, when the extra-scenic relationship was fractured, we, as actors ceased to be tertiary witnesses and were forced to seek locus solely from each other and, in the very act of self-referral, came into *being*. Such was the ‘un-rehearsed accident’ that would evolve into a model for *Being*. That model found completion with the evolution of the polymonologism that split the subjectivity of *beings* within the intra-scenic realm thereby making reflexive bubbles of all in attendance at an event.

Having outlined elements that in toto constitute the hermetic model of *Being*, a tentative definition of *Being* can now be made. In so doing, I shall consciously return to the term ‘spectator’, despite Wake’s argument against its use on the basis of temporal lag. For, whilst, according to Wake, it is only through retrospective witnessing that an event (an accident) is re-created, the relationship between pensive spectator and *being* is, in fact, contiguous and meaning is constructed both ‘at the time’ (by either the unconscious or conscious ‘self’), in addition to ‘in and through time’ by the conscious self in retrospect.

3.10 *Being*, a Tentative Definition

Within *Being* several subjective states are simultaneously in play: (i) the myriad split subjective selves in the primary position – the intra-personal dialogues within each

¹²⁰ In an article, that conflates a strategy to counter surveillance culture and a critique of feminist film theory, Henry Krips, quotes an autobiographical story about the young Lacan who, in a boat with Breton fishermen is made aware of a glittering small can of sardines floating on the surface of the waves. “You see that?” says the fisherman “Well it doesn’t see you.” The object itself was insignificant. What was of significance was that the light flashing off the can disconcerted Lacan and occasioned in him ‘a lurking guilt at his own privileged position in relationship to the working class fishermen’ around him; an ‘unrealistic anxiety’ (Freud). ‘We may say that the scrutiny that the young Lacan directs outwardly at his surroundings encounters resistance from the blinding light reflected by the tin can; and as a result the scrutiny “turns around”, that is, reflexively turns back upon Lacan, a switch in polarity; from “I look” to “I am looked at.” The truth, Lacan suggests, is that ‘the gaze does not see you. So if you are looking for confirmation of the truth of your being or the clarity of your vision, you are on your own.’ (Krips 2010, 92-93).

spectator and within each *being* (ii) the events of both spectators and *beings* as separate reflexive communities in the second subjective position within both realms of the theatron-axis and (iii) the extra-scenic link between both realms, though partially fractured, maintains a one-way dynamic between subject and object. For, whilst *beings* do not seek extra-scenic referral, an echo will still be heard; however, as stated, hearing (as well as focus) can be selective – the echo need not be re-echoed and being *an* object is entirely different from seeking to be *the* object: objecthood.

Being is the act of the coming into being through fierce performativity; it is the enactment of a split-subjective self. In the first subjective position, the I, bereft of its original unity, is subject to the not I, the Word / *the* Other that fills the vacated void. *Being* is the intra-personal dialogue of the self-referring self: hence the use of the polymonologic form. In the second subjective position, beings are intra-scenically located by other beings. Yet, as stated above, beings do not seek to exist in a binary with extra-scenic spectators for they dwell in an hermetic intra-scenic un-reality.

Ranci re notes that ‘(h)uman animals are distant animals who communicate through the forest of signs’ (Ranci re 2011, 10). *Being*, as event, should be spectated as one would, walking through the forest of Arden, happen upon the ‘rude mechanicals’ at play and watch them without betraying one’s presence. Hans-Thies Lehmann describes spectating the work of the Dutch theatre maker, Lauwers: ‘We are watching a party, but the door [wa]s not quite open. We therefore look[ed] in on it as though on a party of distant acquaintances, without really participating, One could say that, the spectator ‘spen[t] an evening at Jan’s and his friends’ (not ‘with’ them)’ (Lehmann, 108 -109). The description above regarding the door as being ‘not quite open’ is intriguing. One could interpret it as being ajar. In being slightly open, it still invites entrance to a pedagogic experience; that the party was there to be seen. *Being* firmly closes that door. It fractures the theatron axis. *Being* forces the spectator to interpret the signs glimpsed through glass, effectively turning the spectator into a pensive voyeur; neither with or at Jan’s but on the outside of Jan’s world. As such, the voyeurs

occupy a position beyond alienation distanced from *beings* that inhabit their own realm of reality. *Being* is not a mimetic reflection, it is a Lacanian reflective; a moment within the forest when one's gaze is disrupted, possibly by the glare of a pool, or a shaft of sunlight, and one becomes aware that one is a spectator of other lives that do not demand anything of you and in that moment, one possibly gains an understanding of what it is to come into *being* as a distanced entity.

Being is the enactment of separateness rather than the faux drama of togetherness. It is the embodiment of the human condition, 'structured by disconnection' (Rancière 2011, 59). *Being* demands nothing of the pensive spectator; neither empathetic nor sympathetic identification, merely thought, and, in witnessing, post-evental recollection. *Being* is a fiction (an 'un-real') with which to re-frame the 'real'; a re-framing of the world of common experience as the world of 'shared impersonal experience' (Rancière 2010, 150). Such a world would be poised between senses – the 'conflict between a sensory presentation and the way of seeing it' – a dissensual space that comes into being within which one could '[invent] new trajectories between what can be seen and what can be said and what can be done' (Rancière 2010, 157).

However, the intention is not anti-theatre, 'an ecstatic form of theatre' as Baudrillard would term it, that negates stage, scene or content: 'theatre in the street, actor-less, theatre of all for all which even becomes confused with the regular unfolding of our lives without illusion'. Such 'hyper-real theatre' no longer creates anything 'but the magic of its disappearance' (Baudrillard 1990, 10). I am not arguing for a disappearance of theatre per se, only its transfiguration into a theatre with stage, with scene, with content but without spectacle; a theatre that demands distance, that cannot be seen without distance, a theatre *of* distance. I am fully aware of the paradox in writing this, for the act of *Being*, as witnessed by an external Other, possesses presence. It cannot not do so, for it is an event; an accident in progress. However, yet again I state, *Being* should not seek presence, it should aspire to absent presence; the negation of it-

self as object. For *Being* is the enactment of subjective isolation. It is the silent scream given corporality.

The desire of theatre (as body) over the past century has been to emancipate the spectator, to transform the audience with Platonic intent into a community enacting its living principle. However, as Rancière points out, what use is emancipation of the spectator if theatre still ‘maintains the logic of the stultifying pedagogue [...] based on the privilege that the schoolmaster grants himself’? (Rancière 2011, 14). I have walked a path guided only by my own pensiveness as I would wish the spectator to be guided by hers. Hence, allying my project with Rancière’s position, *Being* lies in opposition to the conventions of both dramatic and postdramatic rescue attempts that have assumed ‘that what will be perceived, felt, understood is what they have put into their dramatic art or performance.’ An equal ‘right to say’ is not predicated upon the right to peddle prescribed meaning. For understanding is ‘owned by no one, but which subsists between them [the spectator and *being*]’ (Rancière 2011, 14-15).

Being, I would argue is therefore neither solipsistic nor antagonistic. *Being* is not heedless of the spectator born out of any ambivalence towards her. It is distanced out of respect for her, for I have nothing to instruct her. Indeed, I would not presume such authority. *Being*, and I stress this, is not an act of ‘stultification,’ rather it is the enactment of a material event that is in itself potentially evental. Such an event would require spectators to be ‘active interpreters without being agents within the action’ (Rancière 2011, 22), but agents within their own action. These spectators, as Wake informs us, would, post facto become witnesses who translate the event into their own narrative idiom. Thus material events have immaterial potential.

Despite the quality of absent presence, *Being* has a spatial dimension through the creation of an atmosphere within which the spectator, if she chooses – even though there is no invitation or compulsion to spectate – is both enclosed and steeped (Fischer-Lichte 2008, 116). At its heart lies an antinomy, in line with Fredric Jameson’s defini-

tion: ‘two propositions that are radically, indeed absolutely incompatible, take it or leave it’ (Jameson 2009, 51). The Word is all, the Word means nothing; *Being* is an atmosphere generated by the Word but beyond the Word.

Being is neither the representational theatre of mimetic illusion that seeks to enthrall the spectator with shadows, nor the presentational theatre of irony that mocks all illusion whilst reproducing the pedagogic disposition. *Being* is non-representational, for it cannot re-present that which is not present within the realm of *Being* that only comes into *being* prospectively. For memory is created performatively through the Word not reconstructed by the Word. *Beings* are the embodiment of the Word (not of character): entities not governed by a priori assumption. *Being* is also non-presentational for it is progressive; a *being* is birthed by the performative Word.

Whilst drawing upon elements of Rancierian theory, it would be spurious to claim, in retrospect that a subjective reading of *The Emancipated Spectator* provided a theoretical framework for *Being*: though it has provided a partial vocabulary. The formalistic intent had, as stated, been an evolving aesthetic ever since the Ballybofey event that took place a decade before the publication of *The Emancipated Spectator*. The fracture of the extra-scenic binary as a means to realise an ontological conceit, has been an experiment in the embodiment of the metaphysics of self and Beckettian in scope. The experiment was not (and is not) conducted purely in order to emancipate the spectator, though emancipation of the spectator might be a by-product. My work has been and continues to be an unapologetic I dramaturgy. The aim of the work is self-revelation and self-freedom; l’art pour l’art; the ‘discourse of one’; an ultra-modern project. However, as all *beings* are human, and all texts stem from material events in the aggregate of reality – events that have served to re-frame the sense of self within a community of selves structured by relationality – the texts are charged with a commonality. And politically, being a devolutionary dramatist whose discourse is post-colonial, I have both re-framed and been re-framed by material events pertinent to a life

that has bridged the revolutionary act of devolution. What am I? / What is Wales? /
What is any entity? All is identity.

Being is merely the realisation of formalistic intent.

*

I shall now turn to the evolution of the third text developed in New York, *A / The Biography of a Thing* (the play about the play reading of *Troyanne*). In the course of its development certain ethical issues arose regarding the strategy of 'life theft' that generated the text. I shall consider one particular instance and detail its outcomes. I shall then interrogate the hybrid nature of a text that evolved to a point where it compromises the formalistic intent. In conceding the flawed nature of the text, I shall offer an alternative form for the text; one that rationalises the stylistic leaps in order to generate a text more in keeping with the intention of *Being*.

TROYANNE

A WOMAN LIES IN THE FRONT YARD OF A HOUSE, CORNER OF TROY AND INDIANA (SUBURB OF WOODLAWN) IN THE CITY OF TROY, OHIO. WE HEAR THE CHIRP OF INSECTS, CARS PASSING ALONG NORTH MARKET AND, IN THE DISTANCE, A FREIGHT TRAIN ON ITS WAY TO DETROIT. IT'S HORN SOUNDS FORLORN. A DOG BARKS...

HANNAH: Get up...
Get up, woman.
Damn it!
Raise your face from the earth
Raise your body from the ground
Rise up
Rise up and raise your hands.
Raise them high;
Like roof beams, sky high.
Reach!

BEAT

No!
Never again;
Never reach again,
Reached too often;
Wasted so much effort
Reaching.
For what?
For nothing;
Know that now,
Didn't know that then;
I only reached for...
Suffering.
That's all I've ever reached for;
Pain and suffering
No more...
No, more.
So!
Let him lie down with me
Let him lie in the earth... with me
If he is...

If he is...
He will lie with me
On this earth
He will lie...
Next to me
Lie...
Into me
Lie ...
With me.
In this yard,
Under this hang dog sun...

A DOG BARKS IN THE SILENT HEAT

Nothing
God damn,
Give me reason to keep reaching.
In my misery,
Reach down for me.
Reach down
Now!
To this earth...
To me,
As I lie here,
In this yard,
Before my house;
My home,
My heart:
Burning.
My family:
Blown,
Blown away.
Gone

BEAT

Before...
Before that day,
Before...
Then

SHE STOPS

We were a family;
Raised to raise our hands high,

For God.
Raised to hold our hands to our hearts,
For country;
We were...
The dream.
We were...
The perfect family,
In America's 'most perfect little city' –
Troy, Ohio;
Life circling the square.
The heart of the nation lies here...
Lay here...
Back then.
Back then,
When we'd be packed in the back of a Ford,
Pyjamas on,
Friday nights,
(Out of football season).
And driven to the Dixie Drive In;
Back then...
In dreamtime...
Oh, God...
Let me dream again.
Reach down,
Close my eyes,
Let me sleep...
Please
Close my eyes
Let me dream...
I'm begging you
I'm tired...
Dog tired.
If you are...
If you have any mercy...
Reach...
Please...

BEAT. THEN WITH EXASPERATION MORE
THAN IMPLORING

Damn you then!

A NEIGHBOR APPROACHES

NEIGHBOR: Hell, Hannah!

What are you doing down there?
Here,
Let me help you up.

HANNAH I'm fine

NEIGHBOR You don't look fine to me

HANNAH I'm ok

NEIGHBOR You're crying?

HANNAH Yeah,
I'm crying.
I'm crying, Tory, but my boy...
His eyes,
Shot out,
Doesn't cry anymore...
I'm crying,
But my husband,
Sees nothing.
Yeah,
I'm crying
But I'm ashamed of my tears
Ashamed I've got eyes left to cry tears with.
These eyes...
They've seen things, Tory,
Seen things;
Things, I never wanted to see.
Things a mother should never see...

BEAT

If God was...
If God was compassionate,
I have begged him,
I have dared him,
To take them;
Leave me blind to this world,
Dead to it.
If God is love, he'd take them
Take me.
But no!
I'm still here
In the dust

Crying
With these eyes.
With these bloody eyes!
Give me a scissors,
A knife,
A pin;
Stick it in these eyes and blind me
I have dared him.
If he loved me,
If you love me,
Blind me!

NEIGHBOR Hannah, please...
I know you're hurting,
After what you've been through,
Who wouldn't be?
I know you're hurting bad.
All Troy knows
And feels for you;
Feels with you,
We do.
Troy cries with you.
Your tears are our tears:
Your pain's our pain

HANNAH Why are they dead, Tory?
John and TC?
Why are they gone?
It don't make sense...

NEIGHBOR I know...

HANNAH Why are they dead,
When I'm still living?
And Troy,
The city, you say, cries with me,
(And cries for them),
Lives on.
As if my man and my boy
Had never drank Malts down at K's Diner,
Or shot pool down at Dunaway's...
Troy cries?

NEIGHBOR It grieves with you...

BEAT

HANNAH If Troy grieves,
Why is The Bob Evans open,
The Ruby Tuesday grilling,
La Piazza's serving?
Why, Tory?
Why?
When my man and boy
Are both dead?
Why, in God's name!
Why does Troy keep eating
As if nothing was wrong?
How dare it
Sit there and drink beer,
Eat dogs,
When my John and TC...
Are dust,
Eat nothing.
Why?

NEIGHBOR I don't know, Hannah,
I don't know.
I asked myself the same question.
When my Will died
I...

HANNAH John was fifty three.
Fifty three, for God's sake!

NEIGHBOR I know...

HANNAH TC was only twenty two;
Still my baby!

NEIGHBOR Mmm...

HANNAH Such a waste of life
No reason to it,
Just waste...
Why?

BEAT

NEIGHBOR I don't know, Hannah.

I kept asked myself the same question.
Remember?
Why?
I asked
Over and over.
The same question you're asking now.
I can't tell you why they died.
Same as I don't know why my Will died
But I know why you ask the question.
I know the need,
And I know this -
You were there for me,
When I needed a friend,
And I'm here for you now.
When you need me.
I don't have the answer, Hannah.
I only know life goes on,
It just goes on.
Regardless who dies,
The Ruby Tuesday keeps grilling,
As church is still there for those that need praying...

HANNAH No more prayer!

NEIGHBOR Sure,
Not now, but...

HANNAH I don't think ever again

NEIGHBOR I understand

HANNAH I'm beyond praying, Tory.
No more Amen,
I am a woman;
A wife, a mother...
Life - not an empty word,
But the making of it.
And I've been thinking,
If God is...
If God was a she,
If God was a mother,
She would never have let her son die on a cross;
Would never have let him be abused like that,
Never have let him be used,
Have wars fought in his name

By men who care little for
Women and children

NEIGHBOR Maybe...

HANNAH Would you?

BEAT

HANNAH I have doubts, Tory.
I'm ashamed of them...
But I can't shake them.
Deep doubts;
No dreams,
Just doubts;

THE DOG BARKS AGAIN

HANNAH That dog again

NEIGHBOR There's a storm coming

HANNAH Maybe.

BEAT

HANNAH You know,
Here in the dust,
I remember so much
Believe so little

BEAT

HANNAH Tell me...
Did I meet,
Or did I dream
I met John,
Over that picket fence –
A long time ago?

NEIGHBOR You always said you did...

HANNAH Did I?

NEIGHBOR My house

Was your grandpa's home back then

HANNAH Yeah,
 It was, wasn't it...
 When I met John.
 When I met John we were... ten... eleven;
 Man had just walked the moon.
 I used to sit next to Nancy Decker in Elementary
 "Wow! Space" she'd say.
 She reached for the stars,
 I was always more... rooted.
 Though, adrift now;
 Like clouds across the Ohio plain

BEAT

HANNAH "Hi, John. This is Hannah" Grandpa said
 "Remember, I told you about her?
 My grand-daughter?
 Why don't you two kids go down to Rose Hill
 And play amongst the graves?"

THE DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE

HANNAH That dog again!

NEIGHBOR He can smell a storm

HANNAH There's always a storm coming.

NEIGHBOR The air's heavy

HANNAH It is...

THE DOG BARKS AGAIN

HANNAH Then we grew a bit,
 And for years, we ignored each other,
 As kids do;
 I was a silly girl,
 He was a stinky boy -
 Until one day that smell became...
 Perfume, I guess;
 Intoxicating...

NEIGHBOR Yeah...
I've never told anybody,
But my Will used to smell of strawberries in Summer,
Car grease in the Fall

HANNAH My John used to smell of Swedish fish,
The whole year round.

NEIGHBOR Swedish fish...

HANNAH He used to buy them in that sweet shop just off the Square;
Not there any more,

NEIGHBOR No...

HANNAH Nothing's there anymore
Nothing

NEIGHBOR 'Cept K's Diner

HANNAH 'Cept K's
And the Great Miami

NEIGHBOR Yeah...

BEAT

HANNAH Oh, John...

SHE BEGINS TO LOSE IT AGAIN. TORY TRIES TO BRING
HER OUT OF IT

NEIGHBOR Hey,
Come on...
John wouldn't like to see you crying like this...
You were always his queen; strong for him.
Remember Homecoming,
Fall of seventy-six?

HANNAH Yeah...

NEIGHBOR You were a beautiful Queen;
A real Helen of Troy,
I wanted to be in your court so much...
But hey...

You and John,
King and Queen:
You looked great together

HANNAH He 'Colored my World'
Was that the song that night?
"You colored my world?"

NEIGHBOR No, that was the Prom

HANNAH Oh right..
The Prom
By the Prom,
We were an item

NEIGHBOR You were.
I remember...
The theme was Blue Hawaii;

HANNAH Was it?
I don't remember that.
I only know,
We cut out early and headed for the swinging seats
On the Levee,
John and me.
And looking across the Great Miami river,
Towards Lady Justice on the Courthouse roof,
He proposed
Or rather proposed that at some point...
At some point,
When it would be right...
That we...
That we...

SHE BEGINS TO WEEP

HANNAH Oh, John...
Why?
Why?
Why!
God, why!
Oh, I'm sorry...
You don't deserve my tears

NEIGHBOR Don't worry.

Let it all cry out,
That's what you used to say to me,
Just cry it all out...
Here, sit down,

NEIGHBOR HELPS HANNAH ON TO THE SWINGING PORCH SEAT

NEIGHBOR The heat is...

HANNAH ... memory

NEIGHBOR Intolerable

HANNAH Burning...

NEIGHBOR So hot today...

BEAT

NEIGHBOR There

THEY SIT

NEIGHBOR You know,
It was in The Prom
That Will first kissed me;
I remember a slow dance and
Strawberries...

HANNAH Thank God the Prom wasn't in the Fall;

NEIGHBOR Ah, I wouldn't have minded the grease;
Never did.
Truth is, I miss it

HANNAH We both miss;
Sweet, sweet perfumes...
Gone

BEAT

HANNAH God,
This heat is killing...

NEIGHBOR I'll get us both some iced tea...
It'll cool us down;
Make you feel better.
Stay there

HANNAH I'm not going anywhere;
Not about to leave,
Not yet...
Unfortunately

NEIGHBOR GOES NEXT DOOR TO FETCH THE ICED TEA.
HANNAH SWINGS ON THE SEAT

HANNAH Seventy-nine...
Seventy-nine, John
(Time of that Iranian
Hostage thing.
When you were sent out East),
That was the first time I really prayed;
Sitting here...
On this porch swing.
Yeah,
I'd prayed as a kid,
But I'd prayed for kids things;
Peace on Earth, money.
But, seventy-nine was the first time I prayed with all my heart;
With something to lose;
You,
Us.

BEAT

HANNAH Seventy-nine,
When your ship was deployed,
I prayed you'd come home safe to me.
I raised my hands,
Raised them high;
Clasped them to my heart and sang
Women's songs;
Songs of pain...
Hurt...
Suffering;
Watchers on the shore
Waiting for the boats to come home –
Even in Ohio!

I prayed,
I prayed so God damned hard...
Swinging the long night through to dawn.
God!
And, at the time, I thought
My prayers were answered,
You were saved.
You came home...
You came home safe to me.

BEAT

HANNAH And thirty years on,
Sitting on this swing,
I prayed again.
I prayed for our son,
I prayed for TC to come home safe
From his tour of duty in Iraq.
And he did!
Both you and he walked through the shadows;
You walked through hell,
Only to die in your own home
As I sat here
Swinging and thanking God for his blessing...
Perhaps I shouldn't have prayed at all!
It would've been better...
It would've been better
Had I never sat on this porch swing...
It would've been better if you'd both
Gone down beneath the waves;
And TC'd gone down in the field.
Had you both died in action,
They would've shipped you home in coffins,
Flags draped over them.
At least then the honor...
... the honor would have cracked a heart
But made it whole again,
In time.
If you'd both died with honor,
I might still be praying.
If even one of you had died for something of worth...
I would still be sitting and swinging
God I hate this seat!
No more!

SHE DROPS TO THE EARTH AGAIN

HANNAH From now on, I'll only reach down;
Down into the earth that holds you both,
My man and boy.
I'll reach down into the dust
And muddy my tears with your memory.

NEIGHBOR APPROACHES WITH THE ICED TEAS

NEIGHBOR Hannah, c'mon...
Get up off the floor

HANNAH Why do you keep raising me up, Tory?

NEIGHBOR We are Trojan Women.
We raise each other.
Here, lean on me...

NEIGHBOR RAISES HANNAH

HANNAH Why don't you just leave me in the dust?

NEIGHBOR Dust is no place for the living, Hannah

HANNAH Call this living

NEIGHBOR It's a life;
Always worth the pain
I have faith in that;
Faith enough for both of us,
For now,
'Til you strengthen...

NEIGHBOR GIVE HANNAH AN ICED TEA

NEIGHBOR Sit down

HANNAH No, I'll stand

NEIGHBOR ...ok
You'll feel better after this

HANNAH Thank you

THEY SIP ICED TEA. SOUNDS OF TROY LIVING

NEIGHBOR Look...
A Cardinal.
I love its song
Pretty, pretty, pretty...

HANNAH My pretty pretty...

THE TORNADO SIREN RINGS ACROSS TROY CITY

HANNAH Damn!
Is that a tornado or a testing?

NEIGHBOR LOOKS AT HER WATCH

NEIGHBOR Testing.
But I wouldn't be surprised if soon...

HANNAH Yeah, soon...

NEIGHBOR It's in the air

HANNAH Mm...

THE TORNADO SIREN STOPS
IN THE SILENCE, THE CARDINAL SINGS

NEIGHBOR Listen,
There it is again
Pretty, pretty, pretty...

HANNAH I used to call T,
My little cardinal,
My pretty, pretty baby

NEIGHBOR I know

BEAT

HANNAH Oh he a was beautiful little boy,
Wasn't he, Tory?

NEIGHBOR He was

HANNAH My beautiful son

NEIGHBOR He carried the Summer with him;
Whatever the season;
It was always summer when he smiled

HANNAH It was, wasn't it.
I had such hopes for him, Tory
I always hoped he would...
Well, I don't know what I hoped for really,
(Apart from 'happy'),
I just hoped he'd fly
Whatever he'd do in life...
He'd soar high.
That, after graduation
He'd go to university,
Meet a nice girl;
One with ambition,
Not like Anne.
Nothing against Anne,
She was nice enough,
But she was more your Taco Bell kind of gal;
Nothing special...

NEIGHBOR Sure...

BEAT

HANNAH But I wanted the heavens for my son;
I reached high for them... for him.
I loved him so much.
He was my life,
Trouble was,
I was never his,
That was the problem.
He was always his father's son.
And that part of his love I thought was mine,
Should've been mine, by rights,
(Being his mother),
Anne stole from him,
Leaving him with nothing more to give;
Leaving me with nothing.
No,
Something less than nothing...
Respect

Like
Duty.
Those were the feelings he had for me;
Cold, empty feelings – not fit for a mother;
Not love;
Just, pity...

BEAT

HANNAH I kept praying they'd break up;
But she dug her claws in.
She'd moved across the tracks,
And she knew she was onto a good thing.

NEIGHBOR Oh Hannah...

HANNAH That is the truth of it...
Time went on,
And I prayed for university;
I prayed for anything that would take TC away from her;
Away from the square;
An education
See the world,
And marry a better woman than Anne.
But, despite all my prayers,
In spite of them maybe...

NEIGHBOR Prayer can be a contrary thing.
God always has a reason

HANNAH Is that what God enjoys being then?
Contrary!

NEIGHBOR I wouldn't presume to know what God enjoys

HANNAH Well, let me try...
Me,
I think God enjoys the pain he creates.
He doesn't give a damn.
He just watches us from a distance
Like watching wars on TV...
Not contrary,
He's just indifferent
And bad things just happen;
In spite of,

Despite...
In spite, maybe...

NEIGHBOR I wouldn't know

HANNAH No...
I don't know either,
I just feel...

BEAT

HANNAH One day, we were watching CNN,
Something about statues toppling,
Somewhere far away;
Old worlds tumbling down.
When out of nowhere
“Mom”
“Yeah son”
“After High School, I’m going to join the army” TC said
“The Army?”
“Yeah I want to fight for democracy.”
“Democracy!” I said “Spell that?”
“Dee... Eee... Em... Oh... See... Ar... Something”
“Son,” I said “Forget democracy?
Go to university.
Get an education...”
“No, I’ve had enough of schooling, Mom” he said
“I want to do”
“You’ll have all your life to do”
“I want to do now.
“But son...”
“I’m signing up, Mom.
I’m sorry”
I tried to turn him,
God knows I tried.
But his mind was made up
Or maybe his mind was made up for him...
“And I’m going to marry Anne” he said;
Statues toppling.
“And we’re going to have a child”
Hopes came tumbling down;
Crashing dreams...

BEAT

HANNAH He could have flown
High above the plain,
Out of here.
He could've flown to Dayton,
Or Ohio State,
He had the grades,
But he chose to serve,
As his father served before him,
Brave, principled... stupid;
"I want to finish what's started" he said
"TC..." I was begging him...
"No, Mom,
The world needs democracy
As a son needs his father.
I want to do the right thing"
The right thing!
John was so proud of him...

NEIGHBOR We all were

HANNAH I was numb
I haven't admitted this to anyone.
And I'm ashamed to admit it now,
But I sat on that porch swing and prayed,
I prayed so hard...
I prayed
For a miscarriage...
Or an abortion,
I would've paid for one?

NEIGHBOR God forgive you

HANNAH God forgive me?
Not that he gives a damn!
I just wanted my son to fly from here;
From her.
And not to Iraq
To spread democracy!
But away...
Free...

BEAT

HANNAH When he joined the army,
I should've stopped praying.

Should've realized then
That reaching is 'contrary'.
Almost daring the worst to happen
By just thinking it could.
When he went into the desert,
Like Jesus,
I prayed harder than ever,
And I thanked God
When he came home without a scratch.
Sound in mind,
Sound in body.
A OK
Not like some

NEIGHBOR He was lucky

HANNAH Was he?
To live through Hell
Only to be shot in his own home!
Is that luck?
That's no luck I know!

BEAT

HANNAH I couldn't wait to see TC.
When he phoned to say he was eventually coming home,
After his de-brief thing.
John drove me straight to Walmart
And I stocked up on all the stuff he loved
And on the day he was to arrive
I'd cooked a roast
Mac'n cheese
Cranberry Mouse
And deep dish apple pie;
Just the way he liked it.
We waited,
And waited some more –
John and me...
And Anne came over with little Ethan

NEIGHBOR He's a beautiful little boy

HANNAH I love my grandson.
He's his father's son,
Like TC before him,

And there's a sweet justice in that.

ADMONISHES HER

NEIGHBOR Oh, Hannah

RELISHES THE IRONY

HANNAH Let me take it where I can...

BEAT

HANNAH TC arrived late.
He walked in through the door like someone else's son
Oh, he was mine all right, but not mine.
Before he left for the war,
He was all smiles.
War had shot the smile clean off his face;
Shot the boy clean off...
I held him tight
He held me, but not to his heart...
He held me at a distance,
The war now lay between us.
Things a mother would never understand,
Separated us.
Man things...
Oh, those man things...
All their toys and ambitions...

BEAT

HANNAH "Just a beer, please, Sir" he said.
Pabst in the fridge,
John went to get one.
"And I've prepared your favorite meal as well" I said
But he had no appetite;
Months on army rations,
His stomach wasn't up to home cooking.
Anyways, by then, the food had spoiled.
"Just the beer" he said "Sorry. Mom";
Almost a ma-am!
As if I he was a stranger in his own home;
Sorry ma-am -
Like napalm...
Burning.

“And I bought you flowers” I said,
Pointing to the pot of pansies I’d bought in town.
“A bit of beauty, eh?”
“Mom, I’m looking at the grass and I’m happy”
He said, staring through me,
Out the window, across the city

BEAT

HANNAH Nine months before,
When TC left for Iraq,
I couldn’t eat for weeks.
That’s all I could stomach was Jello and Reese’s Cups

NEIGHBOR I remember,
You were thin with worry.
I never said anything...
But I could see

HANNAH In the end I went to see Dr Reefy.
He me gave a prescription.
I was empty inside.
Now TC was the empty one –
So many things I wanted to ask him straight off.
There’d been no word for weeks after he arrived in Iraq.
Then months of short emails
And the odd two minute call
That talked of nothing much; all censored...
Worse than no word at all.
In 7 months, he’d said nothing, Tory;
Said nothing of himself
But at least it was his voice, I guess.
After he arrived home,
He had even less to say.
I wanted to shake the war out of him;
Like snakes out of a bag.
But I was told to be patient,
So I waited...

THE NEXT SECTION OF DIALOGUE IS ONE OF
TANGENTIAL THOUGHTS

NEIGHBOR I know that waiting well.

HANNAH Waiting

NEIGHBOR When Will was in a coma...

HANNAH On every breath

NEIGHBOR I waited six months

HANNAH Alive but not alive...

NEIGHBOR Just waiting

HANNAH Waiting

NEIGHBOR Six months of waiting on nothing

HANNAH Waiting for the promise of something

NEIGHBOR Hoping

HANNAH Waiting for him to open up...

NEIGHBOR To come alive

HANNAH To be TC,

NEIGHBOR My Will

HANNAH My son

NEIGHBOR My man

HANNAH My boy who'd gotten lost

NEIGHBOR My man who crashed

HANNAH Somewhere

NEIGHBOR For no reason

HANNAH Between Bagdad and Miami County

NEIGHBOR Between Piqua and Troy

HANNAH To come alive

NEIGHBOR To come alive again...

HANNAH Waiting

NEIGHBOR I know that waiting

CONVERGENCE

HANNAH Mm...
Then, one night.
We'd all gone down the Square for a steak and a beer;
Down to The Caroline,
John, Me, Anne, TC and Ethan.
After the meal,
Anne took the little boy to the Rest Room
And TC just opened up,
After all the waiting...

BEAT.

HANNAH "The worst thing" he said,
The worst thing was when he was in some small town,
Middle of no-where;
Could've been Troy, Iraq.
He'd been holed up for a few days, sniping.
And he was heading back to base,
When this girl... seven, eight years of age, walked towards him.
First thing, he thought was,
"Is she a bomb?"
"Sent to kill me? Is she?".
He was trained for that.
"But nothing prepares you for the real thing" he said.
And he looked at her,
And he thought about Ethan,
And he thought about him playing at Kyle Elementary -
Happy and free of all the pain he saw in that little girl's face.
And he wanted to hold her and help her, but, he held her off.
"Coff" he shouted,
That's 'Stop!' in their language
"Coff", he said again, but she didn't stop
"Coff. Coff!" he pointed his gun.
But she kept on coming.
And she was trying to tell him something.
She was real angry,
He didn't know what she wanted;

Didn't understand.
He only found out later.

BEAT

HANNAH "Seems we'd blown up her school" TC said
And she only ever saw her friends there.
So...
No school, no friends.
She was real angry –
Wanting TC to rebuild her school
So she could see her friends again.
That's all she wanted...
To see her friends;
To stop the pain,
To end the loss...

BEAT

HANNAH "That was the worst." TC said
"The worst".
And he looked at me, and he said,
"I'm going back, Mom.
I'm going back to rebuild that school;
Finish what's started".
And he held my eyes for the longest time,
He held me in his gaze,
Wanting approval,
Wanting love,
Giving love,
Not pity,
But love...
And hope;
And life burned in him.
The future flamed in his eyes, Tory
It was beautiful thing,
And I was so proud of him;
At that moment I was so proud,
More proud that I'd ever been
Of my beautiful son...
So alive...
So God damn cruel...

SHE IS ELATED AND PROUD OF HER BOY

HANNAH ‘‘An accident’’, John said.
 An accident...

NEIGHBOR Too many accidents...

HANNAH Yeah

NEIGHBOR This morning, on CNN,
 It said, a boy of seven accidentally shot his father
 Who was teaching him how to shoot.
 Seven!

HANNAH Yeah,
 I saw that
 If that was Ethan,
 I thought

NEIGHBOR But it’s not

HANNAH It could so easily have been.
 TC was wanting to get a twenty two caliber for Ethan.
 Anne told me that
 When the boys were playing in the Den
 Next day,
 After the grill out.
 John had just joined the gun club in Vandalia
 And bought some fancy rifle and sights.
 He wanted to show them off.
 John was hoping they’d go hunting for white tailed deer in the Fall.
 And that he’d bag more than his son next time.
 So the boys were in John’s den,
 Talking boys talk:
 The Season stats for the Cincinnati Reds
 Or the chances of the Trojans rolling over the Piqua Indians again.
 And they were happy.
 And Anne, Ethan and me were content in each other’s company...
 For once,
 Swinging together in the yard;
 On that seat,
 Listening to the cardinal sing
 ‘Pretty, pretty, pretty’,
 Or listening to the freight train passing through Troy
 But never stopping;
 When we heard the shot.
 Crisp...

Cold...
Clean ripped the heart out of me

NEIGHBOR Ripped the heart out of the City...

HANNAH I looked at Anne,
She was sitting where you're sitting now,
Her face was ashen.
And I rushed into the house
And into the den.
And there was John,
Holding his precious gun.
An TC was slumped in a chair
Shot through the eye.
It looked so...
TV.
So CNN!
"It was an accident" John said,
Almost whispering,
"An accident..."
Waiting to happen.
My boy was dead.
My pretty, pretty boy... was dead
"It was an accident. I'm sorry" John said.
Then he turned the gun on himself
And I watched my husband shoot his apology
Back into his mouth
And out the back of his head.
"Pretty, pretty, pretty" the cardinal sang again
Pretty, pretty...
And the ugliness of it,
The ugliness,
Plays over and over in my mind;
The pointlessness of it,
The waste of it,
The sorrow of it,
The pain of it
Playing on a loop;
Just playing, over and over in my mind.

BEAT

NEIGHBOR I'm so sorry, Hannah
If I could take your pain ...

HANNAH I wouldn't wish it on you.
And I wish I'd imagined it all myself,
But I saw...
With these damned eyes;
Things a wife...
A mother, should never see
Oh, Tory...

SHE CRIES IN TORY'S ARMS

NEIGHBOR It's ok
When I was lost,
You pulled me through;
Pulled me up.
Stand, you said
Stand, as Will would want you to do.
That's what you said.
Stand,
As John would want you to do now.
Take my arm,
As I took yours,
And stand.
Stand with me.
Stand.
We are Trojan Women...
We stand together against Piqua and the world

HANNAH Yeah

NEIGHBOR Class of seventy-seven.

NEIGHBOR HELPS HANAH STAND.
A POLICEMAN APPROACHES

HANNAH Who is that Police officer?
I don't recognize him.
Whatever news he has,
I don't want to hear it.
Not from a stranger.

POLICEMAN TALKS ON HIS PHONE

POLICE ... Woodlawn
Corner of Troy and Indiana...

HANNAH I don't want the bother of him
Not now...
You talk to him, please...

POLICE Hannah McElroy?

NEIGHBOR Is there a problem, officer?

POLICE No, ma-am
(TO HANNAH) Mrs McElroy?
You might not remember me...

NEIGHBOR Are you from out of town, officer?

POLICE From Athens

NEIGHBOR I went to Athens once

HANNAH Athens?

NEIGHBOR The moon was red that night

POLICE That would've been the lunar eclipse, ma-am

NEIGHBOR It was beautiful;
Beautiful city

POLICE It is

HANNAH Just ask him what he wants?
And get him out of here, Tory.

NEIGHBOR Sure.
So,
How can we help you, officer?

POLICE I'd appreciate a word with Mrs McElroy, ma-am?

NEIGHBOR She doesn't really want to talk at the moment sorry;
You might not know,
But recently...

POLICE I'm familiar with recent events, ma-am
And, that's why I need to talk to her

NEIGHBOR Can't it wait?

POLICE It's an urgent matter, ma-am

BEAT. HIS INTENT IS PLAIN

NEIGHBOR I think you'd better talk to him,
He's not going away...

HANNAH Damn him...

TO OFFICER

HANNAH How can I help you, officer?

POLICE Mrs McElroy.
Sorry to bother you
At this difficult time, ma-am.

HANNAH Sure

POLICE And I'm truly sorry about Mr McElroy and your son

HANNAH Thank you

POLICE I knew your husband, ma-am

HANNAH You knew John?

POLICE Yes, ma-am
We shot pool together,
Once,
Down at Dunaway's

BEAT

POLICE He took a twenty off me

HANNAH He took twenty off everybody

POLICE I didn't even step up to the table
He just lined them up,
cleared the lot.
He had a real dead eye!

HANNAH A what?

POLICE He was a crack shot, ma-am

HANNAH You came all the way out here to tell me that?
That my John was a crack shot

POLICE No just...

HANNAH I know he was a great shot, officer!
I don't need no Athens kid to tell me that!

POLICE I meant at pool, ma-am

HANNAH Is that what passes for humor in Athens, officer?

POLICE Beg your pardon

HANNAH Did you think,
'Why don't I drive over to that poor old woman
Who's man and boy just got shot, and say
"Pa McElroy was a real 'dead eye'"

NEIGHBOR Hannah...

POLICE I didn't mean any offence, ma-am
It just came out all wrong,

HANNAH You should chose your words better kid

NEIGHBOR It's just the stress talking.
Forgive her, officer

BEAT

HANNAH You know,
I think I remember you now;
I recognize that pity in your eye
Shame my husband didn't shoot that out,
Being he was such a crack shot!

POLICE I'm sorry, ma-am...

HANNAH I hate pity...

NEIGHBOR Hannah, let me talk to him
Maybe another time,
Eh officer...

POLICE I understand your concern, ma-am.
Believe me,
If I could be anywhere else

HANNAH – TANGENTIALLY

HANNAH Where's a gun when you really need one?

NEIGHBOR The things she's seen

POLICE I was the first officer at the scene, ma-am

NEIGHBOR You?

HANNAH You could hear the shot clean across the city!

POLICE Yeah...
I've seen some things in my time, ma-am
Most things seemed to have had a reason;
Hate, love or just the buck;
Mostly the buck.
But...

HANNAH Both shots...

POLICE But, their deaths...

HANNAH Father and son

POLICE ...no reason

NEIGHBOR God has his reasons, officer

POLICE I guess we have to believe that, ma-am

HANNAH My John...

POLICE Their deaths haunts me...

HANNAH Pretty, pretty TC

NEIGHBOR They haunt us all;

BEAT

POLICE I know it's not a good time,
But I need to talk to Mrs McElroy about her daughter in law

NEIGHBOR Anne?

POLICE There's been an incident, ma-am

NEIGHBOR Involving Anne

POLICE Unfortunately

NEIGHBOR Oh, God...

POLICE I'm sorry?

NEIGHBOR If you could tell me what happened, officer.
I'll tell her when she's calmer.

POLICE I'm afraid I have to talk to her personally, ma-am;

BEAT

NEIGHBOR Ok...
Hannah...
The officer is here with news of Anne

HANNAH Anne?

POLICE Yes, ma-am

HANNAH What news?

POLICE There was an incident this afternoon...
At the Meijer's

HANNAH Incident...

POLICE Yeah,
Unfortunately.
Your daughter in law was caught shoplifting, ma-am

ALMOST DISMISSIVE

HANNAH Anne?

POLICE Yes, ma-am.
And when a security officer confronted her,
She pulled a gun

HANNAH Our Anne?

POLICE She pulled a gun
And fired off a few rounds.
Luckily, no one was injured...

HANNAH You sure?

POLICE She's on camera
Fleeing the scene of the crime.

NEIGHBOR Doesn't sound like Anne to me

HANNAH Anne is many things,
But she's not a criminal, officer

POLICE No ma-am,
I'm sure, ordinarily,
As you said,
She's law abiding.
But stress makes people do the strangest things.

NEIGHBOR It does officer

POLICE She was crazed, witnesses say,
A look in her eye, not of this world;
As if Aliens were within her...
Controlling.
We don't believe that, of course,
But we have to take it into consideration.

HANNAH Grief is not alien, officer
It's all too human

POLICE I realize that
But, this is a serious matter, ma-am.
I'm sure you appreciate that.

She might not have meant to shoplift;
An accident maybe.
But a fire arm was discharged,
A security officer was assaulted
And those are criminal offences.
If I could change that I would,
But that's a fact

HANNAH A fact...

POLICE Yes, ma-am
Out of character;
Probably
Due to stress;
No doubt
But, a fact.
We need to speak to her...
Urgently.
Not just for her sake

HANNAH For whose sake?

POLICE For the boy's.
Her son was with her, ma-am

HANNAH Ethan?

POLICE He was, Ma-am

HANNAH My little boy...

POLICE It's not good for a son to see his mother like that

HANNAH What?

POLICE Not good, at all

HANNAH Is that another fact, officer?

POLICE Beg your pardon, ma-am

HANNAH That it's "Not good"?

POLICE That is a fact, ma-am

HANNAH Is it?

POLICE Yes, ma-am

HANNAH Full of facts ain't you officer!

POLICE Fact is fact, Ma-am

HANNAH Do you believe in God, son?

POLICE Yes, ma-am

HANNAH Is he alive in your heart?
Does he speak to you?
When the darkness comes,
Does he light the way?

POLICE He does ma-am

HANNAH Is that a fact?

POLICE Yes...

HANNAH TURNS ON THE OFFICER

HANNAH The hell it is!

POLICE Look, Ma-am,
I know it's a difficult time...

HANNAH Do you?
Do you know how difficult it really is?
Do you?
Is that another one of your facts, officer?
Is it?
In point of fact,
You have no idea!
No damn idea at all.
That's the only fact worth noting.

PAUSE

POLICE Perhaps you're right, ma-am
And I'm sorry,
But, if your daughter in law contacts you,

Or calls round,
Please tell her to contact us.
There's an APB out for her,
The whole of Troy's looking for her and her boy.
So, if she calls...

NEIGHBOR If she calls,
I'll make sure she contacts you, officer

POLICE I'd be grateful, ma-am
For her own good
And her son's

NEIGHBOR I understand

HANNAH Get off my yard, officer!

POLICE I'm sorry, ma-am

LEADING THE OFFICER TO HIS CAR

NEIGHBOR It's been a difficult day for her

POLICE I understand

HANNAH Get off my yard!

NEIGHBOR Hannah, please...

AS THEY LEAVE THE YARD

NEIGHBOR If Anne calls,
I'll make sure...

POLICE Much appreciated

NEIGHBOR Take it easy, officer

POLICE (TO NEIGHBOR) I know no other way, ma-am

HANNAH IS LEFT ALONE

HANNAH Has he gone already?
Taken his Athens words home with him?
There's no welcome for his words in Troy.

Tory? Tory?
Both gone...

A SILENCE IN WHICH SHE COLLAPSES TO THE EARTH

HANNAH Alone again
Just the earth and me...
There's eternity in this dust, John
Was it ever worth getting up out of it;
Ever worth the misery,
To be formed only to be unformed?
We should've stayed as dust
Blowing across the world;
Formless,
Painless.
Flesh promises so much,
Delivers so little...
Blown away without reason...
Gone
Only in dust there's hope, John
Living is...
Unforgiving

ANNE APPEARS

ANNE Hannah?

HANNAH Anne?
What are you doing here?

ANNE Are you alone?

HANNAH Where's Ethan?

ANNE In the pick up

HANNAH Where?

ANNE Out back
I thought it best to park there

HANNAH Let me see him

HANNAH ATTEMPTS TO RISE.

ANNE HELPS HER, BUT STOPS HER GOING TO SEE ETHAN

ANNE Not now,
 He's sleeping

HANNAH Is he ok?

ANNE It's been a long day
 I promised him frozen custard up at the Culver's
 I don't want to wake him 'til we get there

HANNAH I'll come with you

ANNE Best not

HANNAH Well...
 Are you ok?

ANNE Uh -huh...

 BEAT

HANNAH Anne,
 An officer called round

ANNE Army?

HANNAH Police;
 Full of ugly words.
 Don't know whether I believed them.
 (Didn't want to believe him.
 Damned Athens man).
 About an incident...
 What happened at the Meijer's this afternoon, Anne?

ANNE Nothing

HANNAH He said you stole something

ANNE I've never stolen a thing in my life

HANNAH Except my son

ANNE He stole me.

HANNAH Yeah...

BEAT

HANNAH Anne,
The officer talked about shoplifting
Is there truth in it?
I can't believe...

ANNE ... depends who tells it...

HANNAH ... then you tell me.
What happened?

BEAT

HANNAH Anne,
I know you've never cared for me...

ANNE I never cared for you!

HANNAH Please...
I don't want to start blaming.
Now's not the time.

ANNE No,
Now's too late

HANNAH Maybe...
Look,
I know you've never needed me,
But you need me now.
You need my help.
So, just tell me,
What happened?
Please

BEAT

ANNE I...
I just...
I just drove to the Meijer's this morning,
Not really wanting anything,
Just...
I just drove...
Don't know what to do with my days anymore...

Just driving round...
Looking...
Not really seeing just...
Just...

HANNAH Yeah, I know

ANNE So, there I was in the Meijer's,
And I picked an MP3 player off the shelf.
Thought,
"It's TC's birthday on Saturday,
Didn't he say he wanted one of these for his next deployment?
It'll be a surprise,
I'll get him one
And I'll wrap it up, fancy like.
Ethan can sign a card.
And I'll keep them under my side of the bed
Until the morning of his birthday.
(He hates birthdays, but he loves them)

HANNAH Still a boy

ANNE Typical man.
Then when he wakes,
Ethan'll come in to our room
and reach under the bed for his pa's present
And...
And by then,
My thinking had carried me clean through the shop door,
Out, into the parking lot.
And the alarm was sounding like the Wednesday tornado siren.
And I thought there was an invasion from Mars
Or Islam or something,
But no.
"Stay where you are, Ma-am"
This security guard shouted
Seems I was the alien.
"It's for my husband" I said
"It's for his birthday"
"Would you accompany me back into the shop, please ma-am"
And he pinched my arm as he gripped;
I've got the bruise to prove it.
"You're assaulting me" I said
"I am not assaulting you, ma-am.
I would appreciate your co-operation"

“You’re hurting me!” I cried;
Tears welling in my eyes,
And Ethan was crying
“And you’ve made my son cry” I said.
“I should sue you!”
“So sue me then!”
He had this grin; as wide as the Ohio;
All bridgework.
I wanted to kill him.
He pulled me again by the elbow,
So I pulled a gun.

HANNAH Whose gun?

ANNE TC’s;
His hand gun
I wasn’t going to use it

HANNAH Then why carry it?

ANNE It was special to him

HANNAH I know TC,
And I would’ve thought,
That’d be the last thing he’d want you to carry

ANNE I know TC as well.
He was your boy
But he was my man;
A good man,
A good father...

HANNAH A good son

ANNE His father’s son;
TC was a gun man,

HANNAH There’s the pity of it...

SHE PULLS A HAND GUN

ANNE This hand gun is him,
When I carry it, he’s at my side;
Still with me.
So when that jerk

Grabbed my elbow,
TC was there to protect me;
Bang, bang!
“Touch my woman again and you’re dead” he said.
That jerk pissed his pants
When TC stared him down.

HANNAH God, Anne...

ANNE “We are a family
And always will be.
And families buy birthday presents for each other” I said
“I didn’t mean to steal that MP3, believe me,
The thought just carried me out of the Meijer’s into the sun.
And before I knew it.
That alarm
Then Ethan crying...”

HANNAH No, Anne...

ANNE I could’ve shot that kid in the Meijer’s;
Acting the jerk when real men are dying.
I could’ve killed him.

HANNAH Don’t...

ANNE But I didn’t...
I didn’t
I saw myself on a chain gang down Dayton way,
In those ugly orange jumpsuits,
Picking up trash along I-75.
Imagined Ethan passing in a car,
Half recognizing his Mom,
And thought,
That jerk’s not worth the bullet
Not worth the time.

SHE LAUGHS, IT TURNS INTO TEARS. THEY EMBRACE

ANNE I’m scared, Hannah

HANNAH Oh, Anne...
I know and I wish...
Oh...
Oh, I’m worried for you

And little Ethan..

PAUSE

ANNE Why has this happened to us, Hannah?
 Were we such a bad family?
 Were we?
 Was I a bad wife,
 Bad mother?
 Bad daughter...

HANNAH No...

ANNE Then why?
 Ethan is an angel;
 The best son.
 He prayed and prayed for his pa when he was in Iraq,
 And God knows I did.
 So, why is god punishing us like this?
 Why, Hannah?
 TC didn't deserve to die like that
 After all he'd been through,
 He didn't deserve to die for nothing,
 Not after all our praying.
 I don't understand.
 Why?

HANNAH I don't know

ANNE I'm hurting so bad.
 There's no stopping it

HANNAH I know, Anne
 I know, I know...
 I'm so sorry...
 So sorry...

THEY EMBRACE AS ANNE CRIES UNCONTROLLABLY

HANNAH Anne?

ANNE Yeah

HANNAH Would you do something for me?

ANNE Anything,
I always would've done,
You just needed to ask...

HANNAH I'm asking you now,
Please give me the gun?

ANNE PULLS AWAY

ANNE No, not that

HANNAH Please

ANNE I'm not letting him go again

BEAT

HANNAH The Police are looking for you Anne

ANNE Always preferred firemen

HANNAH It's not a choice, Anne.
The Police want you to come in.
They've put an APB out for you,
Everyone will be looking...

ANNE Let them...

HANNAH Just give me the gun.
You shouldn't carry one...
Especially with Ethan.
Let me look after it...
Please

ANNE Sorry
I can't just put him down.
We need him

HANNAH We all need him,
But he's gone

ANNE No!

BEAT

ANNE Before TC joined the army,
 We'd sit on the swinging seat on the Levee and talk.
 Should we marry?
 Shouldn't we?
 "Married men get more money" TC said.
 "Get even more when they divorce -
 Highest divorce rate in the country,
 In the Army.
 But we won't go that way,
 Not us".
 We thought we'd grow old together for sure.
 And on summer nights
 We'd sit on the swinging seats on the levee
 Across the Miami from the Courthouse
 And talk about stuff.

HANNAH Just like John and me used to do

ANNE Like you and John...
 Yeah,
 That was our dream

HANNAH Oh, Anne

ANNE "There'll always be the Great Miami...
 And us" TC said
 "Wait for me"

BEAT

ANNE I was so alone after TC left;
 So alone...
 But at least I had the hope -
 That someday, he'd come home.
 But now,
 Without that hope
 I have nothing

HANNAH You have Ethan

ANNE I know.
 I know I have him,
 And he needs his mother more than ever,
 But like TC, he's his father's son,

HANNAH Yeah...

ANNE And I will never be enough for him.
However great he needs,
I will never be enough.
But I was enough for TC
I was his woman,

HANNAH As I was John's

ANNE Without him...

HANNAH I know

ANNE Oh, God,
Without him...

HANNAH I know, Anne

ANNE Why?

HANNAH I don't know...

BEAT

ANNE I know you don't like swearing,
But...
It's a shit storm...

HANNAH Mmm?

SHE CLARIFIES

ANNE It's a bitch,

HANNAH Yeah,
A bitch...

ANNE IS SURPRISED THAT HANNAH AGREES
AND SWEARS

ANNE Yeah

HANNAH A...
Total bitch

ANNE Total

HANNAH A fucking bitch

ANNE A total fucking bitch

HANNAH A total fucking...
Fuck

ANNE Yeah, a fuck

HANNAH A fuck... fuck... fuck... fuck...fuck... fuck!

ANNE JOINS IN AS THE FUCKS INTERSPERSE AND SWELL

ANNE ... fuck... fuck... fuck... fuck!

THEY BUILD TO LAUGH / CRY..

HANNAH Best answer I've heard

BEAT

ANNE I need to get away from Troy;
For a while,
From this County,
Out of this state...
Get my head straight...

HANNAH Sure

ANNE I just called round to say goodbye
And...

HANNAH I understand

ANNE I just need...
I'll call you

HANNAH Please do,
Please...

ANNE GOES TO LEAVE

HANNAH Anne,
If you won't leave the gun,
Leave Ethan...

ANNE Thank you,
But, no.
He'll come with his Mom
He's a good boy,
He'll be fine.
We'll stop for some frozen custard at the Culver's
And we'll be gone.

HANNAH They'll catch you Anne

ANNE Maybe

BEAT

HANNAH Take the back roads,
And take good care of Ethan.
Tell him stories of Troy;
Raise him to be a real Trojan.
And one day, Anne
One day,
When you put down your gun,
Bring him home

ANNE I will

BEAT

HANNAH Give him this kiss from me...

THEY EMBRACE

ANNE Bye...
Mom

HANNAH Oh, my baby...

ANNE LEAVES THE YARD AS NEIGHBOR ENTERS

NEIGHBOR Who was that?

HANNAH No-one

NEIGHBOR Was that Anne?

HANNAH Maybe

NEIGHBOR Where's she gone?

HANNAH Out 'a here

NEIGHBOR Where to?

NEIGHBOR Just gone

NEIGHBOR Shouldn't we tell the Police?

HANNAH No

NEIGHBOR But they're looking...

HANNAH Let 'em look

NEIGHBOR I gave my word

HANNAH Then, don't waste words again.

BEAT

NEIGHBOR Why did she come here?

HANNAH To say goodbye

NEIGHBOR Goodbye!

HANNAH For now

NEIGHBOR Is she ok?

HANNAH What do you think?

NEIGHBOR Was Ethan with her?

HANNAH In the pick up

NEIGHBOR Did you see him?

HANNAH No

NEIGHBOR Is he ok?

HANNAH He's sleeping

NEIGHBOR Anne's not going to do something stupid is she?

HANNAH Can anything be more stupid than this?
Can it?
She'll do what she has to do.
That's all any of us can do

BEAT

NEIGHBOR Hannah,
I think I should call the Police...

HANNAH Just sit down, Tory.
Stop fretting...

THEY SIT IN SILENCE.

TORY IS OBVIOUSLY UNCOMFORTABLE WITH THIS

HANNAH Do you remember that family up state?
Some years back...
It was in all the papers;
All over TV.
Their daughter was in the Army.
She was going out with another GI.
He thought she was stepping out on him;
So he killed her in a rage;
Burnt her body in the back yard.
He'd fled down south before they caught him.
He was put away,
And she was buried with full military honors,
Because she was still a serving officer;
Do you remember?

NEIGHBOR Vaguely...

HANNAH I've been thinking a lot about her lately.
Especially as TC had the same kind of funeral;
Twenty one gun salute,
Flag for the mother

(the twenty one empty shells wrapped inside),
Gold Star Banner
From the Bluestone Mothers of America.
And medals for the father.
Buried with dignity,
However undignified a death.

NEIGHBOR You were so brave at TC's funeral;

HANNAH I couldn't cry then.
I had to be strong.
For TC,
For everyone...

NEIGHBOR You were

HANNAH But at John's
Oh God...
At John's,
I just wanted to scream
Why?
And all through the service,
I kept thinking about that girl's death
I can't tell you why,
I just couldn't shake it.

BEAT

HANNAH I remember reading -
"She died by the grace of God"
Her pastor said.
'The grace of God!'
Is that right!
So, God let those things happen to her, did he?
God let her mother
Give birth to her,
Nurture her,
Release her
So that some sick maniac could
Rape her
Beat her
Set fire to her...
Is that a God I want to believe in?
Is it?
Is that a God you want to believe in?

NEIGHBOR I have faith

HANNAH Faith in what?

NEIGHBOR In his purpose

HANNAH What purpose!

NEIGHBOR I've also been in the dark place.
I know the hurt you're feeling;
The doubt,
The pain...
But in time

HANNAH Not this time.
Sorry, Tory,
No more.

BEAT

HANNAH "Why has this happened to us", Anne said
"We didn't deserve this hurt;
Hurt and more hurting
There's just no stopping it".
Got me thinking, Tory,
Did we did deserve it?
Did we?
Perhaps somehow,
We did something;
Sometime, some place;
Heaped the bad down upon us without knowing;
Cause and effect, is that what they call it?
But I can't for the life of me think what or when?
When all we've ever done is living.
Is that such a sin?
Is sin just life happening;
Year after year
Pain on pain?

NEIGHBOR Man is born in sin
That is why God is there for us.

HANNAH So, God is just fear?
Is that it?

NEIGHBOR He leads us into the light.

HANNAH The fear of no sun;

NEIGHBOR No

HANNAH No Spring.

NEIGHBOR No

HANNAH Is that God?
The fear of the dark?

NEIGHBOR Without him,
Darkness is everlasting

HANNAH The fear of nothing?

NEIGHBOR I have faith

HANNAH Is faith no more than fear then?

NEIGHBOR You shouldn't talk like this

HANNAH God is a terrorist, a virus

NEIGHBOR He's not

HANNAH He is.
And we fear him.
Is that it?

NEIGHBOR Don't...

HANNAH Troy must be one hell of a terrorized city;
A church every second building;
Methodist
Lutheran
Baptist
Brethren.
The fear of two hundred years of lives lived around the Square
From Overfield's Tavern to La Piazza
Troy;
The eternal city of fear;

NEIGHBOR Hannah, please...

BEAT

HANNAH You know what I've been thinking?
Fear is not God's work,
It's the seed of man.
And Troy is its flowering;
A black flower in a dark night

NEIGHBOR Night passes

HANNAH Not this night.
In this dark
There is no God;
No hope of light;

NEIGHBOR There is always hope, Hannah

HANNAH Why?
Why?

NEIGHBOR IS SUDDENLY FORCEFUL / DESPERATE.
IT JOLTS HANNAH OUT OF HER SELF PITY

NEIGHBOR Because there must be!
Every day I fear my Will would've woken,
At some point,
If I hadn't released him.
But I fear ...
I fear I stole a part of his life away from him.
It was my decision to end things.
After six months in a coma,
The doctors said there was "dwindling hope";
Dwindling hope...
I measured that small hope against the medical fees
And, to my shame,
I gave up hope
And signed the form that released him?
Killed him.
I killed him!
I killed my man,
To my shame.
I will never lose hope again.

I need hope, Hannah.
I can't afford to question.
Call it blind faith,
Call it fear,
Call it what you want.
As you said
"We do what we have to do"
To make it through the night...
And I pray to God,
Will forgives me for that...
I hope with all my heart
What else can I do?
What else?
To live...

BEAT

HANNAH I'm sorry, Tory

NEIGHBOR I pray to God...

HANNAH I'm truly sorry...

NEIGHBOR We're not all as strong as you, Hannah;

BEAT

HANNAH In the den, that day,
I could see fear in John's eyes;
The fear that he would never be able to live
The dark nights through.

NEIGHBOR He was brave

HANNAH Not as brave as you.
I'm sorry...

NEIGHBOR It's ok...

HANNAH We're Trojan Women,
Class of seventy-seven...

NEIGHBOR Yeah...

BEAT

HANNAH You know,
You asked about Anne.
You were right to ask about her.
She is full of fear, Tory
I fear for her...

THE POLICE OFFICER APPROACHES

HANNAH God,
What does that Athens rookie want this time?

POLICE Ladies

HANNAH Officer

TO HANNAH

POLICE May I speak with you alone, please, Mrs McElroy?

HANNAH If you can't say
What you have to say
In front of Tory,
It's not worth the saying

NEIGHBOR I'll leave, Hannah

HANNAH No, stay...
Please.
Say whatever you have to say, officer.
It's been a long day
And I think, you're going to lengthen it.

THE POLICE OFFICER IS UNCERTAIN,
BUT BEGINS ANYWAY...

POLICE Ma-am,
I have news of your daughter in law

HANNAH And my grandson?

POLICE And your grandson...
Yes...

HANNAH What news?

POLICE To be honest, ma-am,
As the pastor says,
“I wish this cup”...

HANNAH Close your bible,
And tell me your news, officer!

BEAT

POLICE Ma-am.
Well,
After our conversation,
I was on my way back to town,
When I got a call to an incident West of 75;
Over at the Culvers restaurant.

HANNAH The Culvers?

POLICE Yes, ma-am.
Is there a problem?

HANNAH No

POLICE Your daughter had been seen there;
By the time I arrived,
The situation had escalated into a stand off –
All the customers had been evacuated from the restaurant,
The only people left inside were your daughter in law
And the manager

HANNAH And my grand-son?

POLICE No, ma-am
Somehow,
He'd gotten out

HANNAH Thank, God...

POLICE But because he'd gotten out,
I think your daughter in law panicked.
And that's why the situation turned bad.
She still had the gun,
And was threatening to use it
Unless Ethan was returned to her.

But we couldn't let that happen.
And we were concerned for the safety of the manager,
By then, she was hysterical;
Hurting bad.
And we all knew why,
Not just her son ,
But, everything.
We understood her motives,
But ...
It was a mad situation,
You understand.

HANNAH What are you trying to justify, officer?

POLICE She was a danger, to herself and to others, Ma-am.
She was holding the gun to the manager's head;
She was not herself.
She was ranting on about your son's death,
The pointlessness of it.
When people think things like that,
Crazy things happen...

HE FALTERS

HANNAH Is that a fact, kid?

POLICE Just...
An opinion...

BEAT

HANNAH Did she shoot him?

POLICE Shoot who, ma-am?

HANNAH The manager,!

POLICE No,
The manager was unharmed

HANNAH Was she shot?

POLICE She was not shot

HANNAH Then what happened?

PAUSE

POLICE What happened was an accident, ma-am.

NEIGHBOR Another one...

HANNAH Oh God...

POLICE I'm afraid so, Ma-am.
Your daughter in law wanted her son,
So she came out the front door,
She was screaming for Ethan.
"I want him. I want him!"
And Ethan could hear her,
And he was crying "Mom! Mom!"
I could hear him,
Couldn't see him,

HANNAH Ethan saw the whole thing?

POLICE I'm not sure if he saw, but he heard...
Things moved so fast, ma-am,
We didn't expect her to come out so soon.
We hadn't even cleared all the people from the parking lot.
There was a Classic Car rally,
And some owners were still by their Chevies
And the customers from Culvers were standing around,
Out of the way,
But around.
So when she came out
People started panicking,
And the Sheriff began screaming
"Get those people back!"
And "Get that little one out of here! Now!"
And I don't know why
And I don't know how,
But when things go bad, they go bad,
And things turned bad enough.
Even though there were Police all around,
Bad things happened...
In defense, ma-am,
It's not every day you get a stand off in this City
Troy's not Chicago or DC, is it?

HANNAH What happened, officer?
 Just tell me

HESITANT

POLICE A shot was fired, ma-am.
 From your daughter in law's weapon,
 And in the panic,
 Ethan broke free and made for his mom,
 And...
 And the manager broke free from your daughter in law...
 And they were both running in opposite directions;
 The manager and your grandson,
 And they crossed
 And your daughter in law was screaming
 And other people were screaming
 And above the screams,
 The crack of another shot fired.
 And...

HANNAH And?

POLICE And...
 And I'm, sorry to inform you,
 But...
 Your daughter in law was aiming her gun in the crowd's direction
 And an officer thought she was going to shoot again.
 So he fired,
 Aiming low,
 Just to disable.
 But your grand-son, ran in the line of fire...

HANNAH Oh God...

POLICE And...
 And I'm sorry, ma-am
 I'm sorry,
 But your grandson was shot.

HANNAH My little Ethan

POLICE It was a low angle,
 He was only small,
 And he went down
 And...

IN THE BEAT, HANNAH CRUMPLES

POLICE I'm sorry...
Your daughter in law ran to her little son.
But he was dead before she held him.
Then, turning the gun on herself,
And despite all our efforts to stop her,
She took her own life.

HANNAH Oh God

POLICE I am truly sorry, Ma-am

HANNAH So beautiful;

NEIGHBOR Oh, Hannah...

HANNAH Why?
Why am I left alone;
Left all the sorrow,
All the god damn pain?

POLICE I am so sorry, ma-am

BEAT

HANNAH Such waste;
Death,
Loss.
Is there no end?
Past, present, future blown away,
Down the barrel of a gun,
What have we done?
What have I done to deserve this curse;
To keep living when all else dies?
Death is easy
It's life that kills.
I wish someone would blow my life to the wind,
Someone merciful,
(A Samaritan to put a stop to this sorrow)
And I'll stop enduring

SHE BEGINS TO LOSE CONTROL

HANNAH Shoot me
 Shoot me now, officer
 Have mercy on an old woman.
 End this for me
 End me
 End me now
 Please...
 If you have compassion,
 Kill this old woman.
 I'm begging you

HANNAH FUMBLES FOR THE OFFICER'S GUN

NEIGHBOR Hannah

POLICE Ma-am.
 Ma-am please...

OFFICER FENDS HER OFF. SHE LOOSES ALL DIGNITY

HANNAH Shoot me.
 Finish me.
 Kill me.
 Take your gun, Athen's man
 Imagine I'm a felon;
 The worst kind,
 Whatever the worst is for you,
 And kill.
 Please, if you're a Christian,
 In God's name, take aim
 Pull the trigger,
 Blow my pain apart.
 If you have a heart,
 Please.
 Let pain be a memory on the wind
 A dead echo,
 Forgotten
 Please...

SHE CHANGES

 Then if you won't
 Let me

SHE LUNGES AGAIN FOR HIS GUN.

HE TRIES TO PUSH HER AWAY

POLICE Ma-am,
 Please,
 Have dignity...
 Please

SHE FALLS AWAY

HANNAH Give me dignity then!
 Kill me!
 Kill me!

POLICE You ask the impossible, ma-am

HANNAH Then, I curse you!
 Curse all you men;
 You, and your guns.
 You find a beauty in them.
 You caress them
 Hold them tight
 And squeeze them gently
 Until they shoot off in your hands
 And spread your seeds of hate and death
 All over this earth;
 No one's safe;
 Women, children are infected
 By the virus;
 Aids has nothing on it,
 Ebola is a kiss on the wind.
 It's just man and his inventions
 That destroys the mass of this world.
 But there is no mass,
 There are only people;
 All pain is personal.
 Just little people suffering.
 So god damned American
 I'm ashamed of it
 Of this nation
 And of a God that lets it's flag be flown in his name,
 And planted at the point of a gun.
 That is the real terrorism.
 Damn him,
 Damn you!
 No more,

No more!
Get up woman
Get up,
Raise your face from the earth,
Raise your body from the ground.
Rise up.
Rise up and raise your hands,
Raise them high;
Like roof beams, sky high
And tear down!

NEIGHBOR Hannah...

HANNAH If you won't help me
Leave me.
Leave me!

HANNAH BREAKS FREE AND RUNS TOWARDS HER HOUSE
LEAVING THE NEIGHBOR AND OFFICER IN THE YARD

POLICE Oh shit...
I'll phone the paramedics,
They'll take her down to Dayton...

NEIGHBOR No,
Please, officer
Let me talk to her.
Dayton is unforgiving.
Troy is a good town
It looks after its own.
I'll talk to her, officer
And if she need help,
I'll make sure she gets it.
We share the same doctor, Dr Reefy.
If I phone, he'll come...
Night or day

HE CONSIDERS

POLICE Ok,
I'll call back later...

NEIGHBOR Thank you,
You're a good man

POLICE Maybe,
 Maybe not.
 I'd be lying
 If I said that this tragedy hasn't affected me
 I'll pray for her,
 Whether praying's a waste of words or not.

NEIGHBOR Your prayers are worth it all –

POLICE Ma-am

OFFICER LEAVES, LEAVING NEIGHBOR ALONE

NEIGHBOR Dear God,
 I hope you're listening.
 I have faith you are.
 I want you to know, straight off,
 I'm not praying for myself.
 I wouldn't expect your forgiveness for what I did,
 I know I took what was yours to take –
 We've talked.
 It was my decision,
 And mine alone.
 I just hope Will understands...
 But this prayer's not for me..

BEAT

NEIGHBOR My prayer is for this City;
 For Troy, Ohio.
 Help this town heal the wounds
 Help them laugh in Winan's again
 Help them pick up the conversation under the Coffee Bean ceiling
 Of the Night Sky café.
 But most of all,
 Help Hannah,
 My Neighbor and friend.
 Help her accept the unacceptable...

HANNAH HAS ENTERED THE YARD FROM HER HOUSE

NEIGHBOR Lead her through the Valley of sorrow;
 That hopeless place
 Where mountain tops curve to block out the sun.
 Be her beacon,

Light her way back again...

HANNAH Tory...

NEIGHBOR God, you frightened me!

HANNAH I'm sorry
But don't waste prayers on me.
Save them for another tragedy.
The world is full of them;
Pick a continent,
Pick a country
And you'll have reason enough to pray.
But no more prayers here, in this yard.
I am done with praying,
I am beyond praying
Beyond hope

NEIGHBOR Oh, Hannah

HANNAH Don't pity me!
For God's sake,
You've been too good a Neighbor
To deserve my hate

NEIGHBOR I don't pity you Hannah
I worry about you.
I do.
As a friend;
Class of seventy-seven..

BEAT

HANNAH Sorry...

BEAT

HANNAH I'm sorry about earlier as well.
I wasn't myself.
That rookie was right,
When he said "dignity".
It's all we've got;
All we've got.
I've been thinking,
About what you did.

You gave dignity back to Will,
I'm sure he thanks you for that,

NEIGHBOR Do you think?

HANNAH I'm sure of it...
Dignity is all.
I'm sure Will hoped for that.
John knew that.
And Anne.
They kept theirs... at the end.
I'll keep mine.

NEIGHBOR You're the Prom Queen

HANNAH I won't lose it again.
Dignity...
Means everything.
That's why I've put my house in order
Before I leave.

NEIGHBOR You're going?

HANNAH I don't want to be around
To face the pity of this town.
I'll bury my grandson,
Then I'm gone.
To where?
I don't know.
Just away from here
And the sympathy of Troy;
The shame that'll shadow me down every street,
The embarrassment that will colour every conversation:
Whether it's in K's over a chocolate malt in memory of a son
Or Ruby's on the Square, when I have my hair done.
Every look,
Every conversation I'll have
In every part of this town,
Will kill me with its pity.
So I figure,
Burn it all down;
Burn all the memory and get out
Before the eyes of this town burn through me.

NEIGHBOR LOOKS TOWARDS HANNAH'S HOUSE

NEIGHBOR Hannah!
Your curtains are flaming

HANNAH I know

NEIGHBOR Your house's on fire

HANNAH Burning down

NEIGHBOR Hell Hannah!
I'll call 911!

HANNAH Save your talk time

NEIGHBOR You can't torch your own home

HANNAH It's my home
Full of my memories.
I can do with them what I like.

NEIGHBOR But Hannah...

HANNAH But what?
Would you want to live in a home
Haunted by wasted lives and pointless ghosts?

NEIGHBOR I do

HANNAH Well,
I guess that's your choice.
This is mine;
That's not my home any more, Tory,
It's just a shell;
Empty of happiness,
Hope,
Possibility.
My whole family died for no reason, Tory...
Nothing.
So let emptiness be their memorial;
A charred lot on a Woodlawn street.
And free all the love that was
John, TC, Anne and little Ethan...
Let it swirl in the wind;
Swirl in the wake of a Summer tornado

Ripping across the plain

NEIGHBOR Oh, Hannah...

HANNAH In the house,
I had thought it might be better to die with them;
To burn in memory;
To be ashes, raked over by firemen.
But hell,
That would have stoked the fires of Troy's pity,
Not quenched them.
I would have hated that;
Hated it.
So,
One little spark and,
Troy is no more.
It's already past;
Burnt...
Gone.
But me...
Seems I'm here to cry in the ashes
God has no pity for me,
I hate him;
The thought of him,
His name.
The lie of him,
The nothing.
I've lost everything;

NEIGHBOR You're not lost to him
God is compassionate...

HANNAH Like Hell, he is!

NEIGHBOR Reach out to him

HANNAH Let him reach down to me!
If he is truly compassionate.
Let him come to me.
If he is,
He will lie with me
On this earth
He will lie...
Next to me
Lie...

Into me
Lie ...
With me.
In this yard,
Under this dog dead sun
Lie, God!
Lie!
Reach down!

BEAT

Prove me wrong!
Go on.
Give me reason to keep reaching
In my misery.
Reach down for me.
Reach down.
Now!
To this earth...
To me
As I lie here;
In this yard,
Before my house,
My home,
My heart... burning
My family...
Blown away
Gone!
Reach!

BEAT

HANNAH Nothing!
I feel nothing...
There is nothing...

NEIGHBOR I'm sorry...
Come on, Hannah
Try and get up.
I'll call Dr Reefy.
He'll help you

SHE PULLS AWAY

HANNAH No!

Leave me!
And let that memory house burn.
Let the windows blow out:
Let the walls ignite,
Let a whole life flame incandescent.
And as the fire consumes,
Let it erase all trace of memory;
All birthdays and Christmases,
Joys and disappointments –
Let it torch love.
Let it burn fiercely
Let the fire burn down the years;
Scorch the memory
So that nothing remains,
Nothing can be rebuilt of it,
No pain pieced together from the charred remains -
Not like that slave house in Cincinnati,
Let nothing be...

NEIGHBOR The sparks could burn the whole city, Hannah

HANNAH Let it burn;

NEIGHBOR Troy will cry with you,
But not burn for you, Hannah.
I'm sorry...
I must call 911

NEIGHBOR LEAVES TO PHONE

HANNAH Call...
Recall, as you want.
I just want to forget...

NEIGHBOR I'll be back

HANNAH I'll be gone

A DOG BARKS IN THE DISTANCE

NEIGHBOR Poor dog...

HANNAH Will someone shoot him!

BEAT

HANNAH Oh, my John.
 On your sixteenth,
 Did we drive down Polecat Road...
 Listening to Johnny Rivers on the radio,
 Eating Swedish Fish?
 Did we?
 Was it there your hand touched my heart
 Or did your hand just touch my breast?
 Saying that,
 Was it your hand?
 Was it?
 We didn't go out 'til the Prom...
 Who was that then?
 Whose hand...
 Caressing...
 Fumbling?
 The memory begins to melt...
 Good...
 And in The Bug Inn,
 Out Covington way,
 Leo?
 Leo, Leo, Leo Sayer on the Juke Box,
 Drinking Mad Dog wine 'til we were stupid?
 Was that us?
 That must have been...
 Must it?
 And were we Hans Solo and Princess Leia watching
 Star Wars in the Mayflower?
 An image,
 But unsure...
 Did we dance the Bump down at the Rec?
 And was I wearing Levis Jeans and chunky clogs that night?
 Every night?
 Never?
 Let the flames devour our lives,
 Lived together
 In this perfect little city.
 Cauterize the memory at its root.
 It's time to walk the plain out of here
 Walk up a mountain,
 Walk into the sea...
 Time to walk the ground in front of me
 One foot in front of another.
 Time to forget...

HANNAH Get up Woman.
 Get up,
 Damn you!
 Raise your face from the earth;
 Raise your body from the ground,
 Rise up

SHE STANDS.
THE FIRST TIME SHE HAS DONE THIS
UNAIDED IN THE PLAY

HANNAH God, I ache...
 Full of pain.
 Rise with dignity, woman.
 Rise out of the memory
 And walk this earth out of Troy,
 Walk away from here;
 Away from all the Baptists
 And Brethren,
 Methodists,
 And Lutheran;
 Away from God.
 I'll walk away from Troy,
 Away from...
 And towards...

THE TORNADO SIREN WAILS

HANNAH Tornado's coming...

A DOG BARKS
AS SHE WALKS AWAY FROM TROY, BURNING.

A CARDINAL SINGS

New York
December 15th 2011
(Revised for publication 10 . x . 14)

A / The Biography of a Thing

Contextualising essay 3

A / The Biography of a Thing: As Autobiographical Text

John Sturrock, in *The Language of Autobiography* notes the comment made by Leibniz in a letter dated 1714:

It is good to study the discoveries of others in a way that discloses to us the source of the inventions and renders them in a sort our own. And I wish that authors would give up the history of their discoveries and the steps by which they have arrived at them. (qtd. Sturrock 1993, 105)

This contextualising essay is the giving up of a history; in essence, the autobiography of a biography.

Thus far I have contextualised the self as a devolutionary dramatist, traced the evolution of I dramaturgical polymonologism within my work, briefly detailed the rupture between intent and effect that has occurred when others claimed ‘normal directorial rights’ (in relation to *Desire Lines*), and having detailed the nature of the Trojan Horse model, outlined the performative intent of *Being* (in relation to *Troyanne*). In this chapter, I shall offer a chronological bricolage of devices (inspirations) that impacted upon the morphological development of *A / The Biography of a Thing* in order to illustrate how a text, inspired by an event, was formed out of a particular process, and how that

text demands a near ‘transformational’ performance style that, at the time of its writing, was considered its virtue, but in retrospect, as I shall argue, is its flaw.¹²¹

4.1 A point of Immanence

Following circa six years of association both with the Lark and the director Daniella Topol, a public reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* was given on September 10, 2013 at New Georges, New York. Considering the personal investment I had made, the public subsidy (from Arts Council Wales and Wales Arts International) and the ambition I harboured for the project, the reading proved an anti-climax. Faint praise signalled its failure; a cruel irony given that *A / The Biography of a Thing* is a play about a Thing (a play) destined to remain trapped upon the page; life seemed to reflect art. Suspending both my association with New York and the development of *A / The Biography of a Thing* following the disappointment of that reading, I moved on to other texts and became guilty of the charge the Thing levelled against its creator, the fictitious dramatist, Bill:

Thing: I was only nine thousand five hundred and fifty four words between ‘*Troyanne*’ and ‘A cardinal sings’. I was just words, dead on the page; still am, trapped in the reading. [...] He was God, he had his freedom. He’d already moved on; he’d named other things and written them. He could walk away from me any time he chose. I couldn’t walk away from anything. (Portfolio, 408)

¹²¹ Here, for want of a better term, I am appropriating and upending the term ‘transformational’ as adopted by the Open Theatre, and as referenced by Auslander, where, in postdramatic vein, the sociological style of a scene is transformed e.g. restoration comedy played as soap opera: ‘To some extent, transformational performance in which the actor leaps from style to style or from role to role self-consciously dramatises the construction of the actor’s self from the language of theatre. Inasmuch as the transformations are in themselves and not in service to the meaning’ (Auslander 1997, 37). However, within *A / The Biography of a Thing* in its current form, the opposite is true, transformational performances serve the meaning.

A / The Biography of a Thing, in its current form, is a twenty scene text through which three narrative threads inter-weave. The main thread is the sequence of one to one interviews that an actor, Drew, conducts with five interviewees: Thing (the animistic imagining of the spirit of *Troyanne*), a Director (Freddy) and three actresses (Sarah, Anja and Molly);¹²² the latter four having participated in a fictitious fourth public reading of *Troyanne* after which Drew, owing to a degenerative eye condition, never read again. In the course of the text we learn that Drew felt compelled to conduct the interviews (several years after the reading) in order to recapture a sense of self that was lost along with his sight, depriving him of the ability to read and act; to be audited and thereby seen. The actor therefore exists in symbiosis with Thing. For a dramatic text also only comes into being through utterance. To remain unvoiced on the page (unaudited) is to be an un-located no-Thing. Interweaving these documentary sequences are dialogic scenes that chronicle the rehearsal process of Drew's last public reading. Relationship wise, know that Freddy is an old friend of Bill's who has knowingly cast Anja and Molly for that specific reading despite the fact that both have had relationships with Bill. It is the love triangle between Anja, Molly and the absent dramatist that drives the dynamic within the rehearsal room; however, that is a secondary dynamic, as I shall detail. The final strand, is the *mise en abyme*, extracts from *Troyanne*.

*

The first evidence of an enthusiasm of practice in Public Reading occurs in a note to self, *Ideas in Brief*, dated March 16th, 2009; '*On Page Off Broadway*: A musical about the culture of rehearsed reading in NY'. (I had yet to adopt the term, Play Reading). My first residency at The Lark, May 2008, coincided with the company's Playwrights'

¹²² *A / The Biography of a Thing* in relation to *Troyanne* in terms of cast: Drew / Policeman, Sarah / Hannah, Anja / Tory (the Neighbour) and Molly / Anne (Hannah's daughter-in-law).

Week during which eleven new plays were given public play readings.¹²³ During that residency, I also attended play readings at the Prelude festival, a celebration of new Polish work held at The City University New York (CUNY) curated by Frank Hentschker. It was that initial immersion in the alien culture of Play Reading that was to fire an enthusiasm. For the physical dance upon the stage, a choreography of music stand and actor, caught the imagination; the spectacle of the non-spectacle. The deployment of music stands created character connection and triangulation (between actors and actors and audience), scenic depth and the suggestion of alternative space. As Urbinati notes, their strategic use can ‘create revealing movement and compositions’ thereby ‘enhancing the presentation for the audience’. In addition, their manipulation by actors during readings could be enthralling; the way in which they were angled, adjusted (elevated / depressed), though never removed, for, as Urbinati cautions, ‘actors look awkward when lugging music stands across the stage’ (Urbinati 2016, 54). Within a theatre ecology where Play Reading had become ubiquitous, as Todd London bemoaned (London 2009, 92-99), the choreography and manipulation of music stands provided a new spartan theatre’s mise-en-scène. ‘I love music stands,’ the actress Susan Louise O’Connor confided in Urbinati, ‘they become like a part of my body’ (Urbinati 2016, 47); the pas de deux of actor and prosthetic.

The playwright and academic, Len Berkman, in listing inspirational play readings he had attended, pleads of those that view ‘less as less’ that they ‘grant readings and workshops – alongside productions of whatever desired scope – the status of full and clear aesthetic preference’ (Berkman 2002, 89 - 93). Whilst I would remain ever skeptical of the practice of Play Reading as an administrative tool that condemns many playwrights to ‘Reading hell’ – the state of perpetual development that can be particularly destructive to the play and to the spirit (London 2009, 139) – I developed an alien’s enthusiasm for the act of play reading. I saw it as a maturing aesthetic that the

¹²³ Note that one of those texts read was *Injury Time* by the Dutch dramatist, Jeroen van den Berg (adapted from the dramatist’s own translation of *Blessuretijd* by Chantal Blondieu). I had first been introduced to van den Berg during my exploratory visit in February 2008 (a meeting dramatised in *Fragments of Journeys Towards the Horizon*: a project upon which collaborated).

expediency and creativity of practitioners in the New York Theatre ecology, in lieu of the kinetic release of full production, were, as Berkman suggests, turning into an art-form.

4.2 A Nascent Text

The first emergence of a nascent text occurs on the inside back covers of a copy of Harold Clurman's biography of *Ibsen*. That fragment of 45 lines is titled, 'Prolog(ue) On Script / Off Broadway Draft 1' and dated January 22, 2010. Written from the perspective of a Thing performatively coming into being, it describes the entrapment of a Thing upon a page through the very act of its creation:

Open document

A page

Page one; scroll down, scroll back

Nothing

A title

Underline, bold, centre. A Play!

By line eleven, the *Thing* locates itself (and us along with it) within the very room where it is destined to be freed of its printed form, albeit temporarily, through utterance. By line twenty we can deduce that the room is in New York; in actuality, the old Lark studio at 989 on 8th Avenue where *Desire Lines* was given both roundtable and public readings. New York, Baudrillard comments, is a theatrical city, a city that daily 'acts out its own catastrophe as a stage play' (Baudrillard 2010, 14 - 24). It is a performative city of Words where Things are constantly uttered into being in countless play readings. If Paris is 'the city of a hundred thousand novels' as Balzac christened it' – cited by Pascale Casanova in her discussion upon *The World Republic of Letters* (Casanova 1999, 26) – then New York is the city of a hundred thousand plays. Anecdotally, it is not unusual for actors to do two separate readings in a day. The forty fifth

and final line of the fragment declares, 'A new play. Scene one.' And next to that, an underlined instruction, 'And on, play on'; the catastrophe is ongoing.

On February 25th, 2010, a fortnight after writing this fragment, I returned to New York to participate in a conference on contemporary American theatre, held at the Nuyorkian Poets Cafe: curated by Caridad Svich, NoPassport Press. Around that conference, I organised both formal interviews with stakeholders in the New York theatre ecology, regarding their delivery of Play Reading strategies, and informal meetings with practitioners, both directors and dramatists, who were subject to those strategies. These interviews informed the writing of 'Dramatic Entrapment in Reading Land'. Of all meetings, it was the one held with freelance director, Daniella Topol on the morning of the 27th February 2010 (I believe) that proved eventful, and one around which all future devices would coalesce. During that meeting, as noted, I declared my desire to tackle the culture of Play Reading in dramatic form, but admitted that I was uncertain how to proceed or what form such a project could take; the research into Play Reading I was undertaking being purely a means to interrogate praxis rather than a creative re-imagining of that praxis. It was Topol's revolutionary suggestion of the Trojan Horse model that offered a viable development process.

4.3 The Evolution of the 'A' text

The next step in the development of *A / The Biography of a Thing*, dated March 22nd, 2010, bears the title *The Trojan Woman*. It is a first attempt to marry intra-personal and intra-scenic elements. Four characters are identified in the eleven-page document, the embryonic Thing (given the name, Play), Director, Older Actress and Writer. The document opens with what is ostensibly a repeat of the first fragment; though rather than describing the reading space as 'a place of hearing' it is now 'a place of seeing'; seemingly reflecting a growing interest in the visual aesthetics of Play Reading (a

momentary oversight by one seduced by the spectacle qua non-spectacle).¹²⁴ At the point where the initial fragment ends with the declaration, ‘Scene one’, this fragment continues with a Director entering the reading room. Play offers us a description of him:

Play: A Manhattan man, but born... where?
 Where?
 Winesberg, Ohio;
 packed dreams in a bag and moved east
 Made it, now lives upper West;
 Bought cheap
 before the tide of Harlem was pushed back.
 He carries... what does he carry?
 He carries...
 ...me?
 He carries me...

It is at that revelatory moment – an instant when the semantic system collapses in on itself – that a third character enters, an Older Actress. There follows a section that is a *mélange* of dialogue and monologue intérieur, akin to *Desire Lines*. Within it, implicit stage directions are embedded; ‘She smiles.’ ‘Beat.’ etc. The device was inspired by a specific play reading I attended at the CUNY festival. In *The Death of The Squirrel Man*, an absurdist treatment of the Baader-Meinhof movement by Polish writer Malgorzata Sikorska-Miszczuk, utterance of the implicit intention realises the explicit action of the text.¹²⁵ One can see its echo in the following extract of *The Trojan Woman* as it sug-

¹²⁴ Johannes Fabian notes that consciousness, realized by the production]of meaningful sound, is self-consciousness: ‘The Self, however, is constituted fully as a speaking and hearing Self. Awareness, if we may thus designate the first stirrings of knowledge beyond the registering of tactile impressions, is fundamentally based on hearing meaningful sounds produced by self and others. There needs to be a contest for man's noblest sense (and there are reasons to doubt that) it should be hearing, not sight that wins’ (Fabian 2014, 162).

¹²⁵ *An Anti-Man from an Anti-World* Sikorska-Miszczuk, Malgorzata *The Death of the Squirrel Man* (Trans. Jadwiga Kosicka) www.widok.hmfactory.com (Read as part of the *Spotlight Poland* event organised by The Play Co.)

gests a form *A / The Biography of a Thing* might have taken had it been developed as a stand-alone text:

Play: Enter, an actress, pursued by hair...
Once her crowning glory
Now a dry tinder tiara;
One match and she's aflame,
Ash on the 'cinder heap'.
"I am not old. I am not old"
She screams to herself
But to the word she asks

Actor: Am I late? [...]

Play: She smiles.
He smiles.
They are uncertain
She's thinking...

Older actress: ...the weeks before he died,
his teeth were bigger than his face.
All skin, no flesh;
skin pulled to a tight grin
So tight, you could've played his skull like a drum

Director: So glad you could find the time
I know you're pretty busy [...]

Older actress: I make time for new work

Director: Me too

Older actress: It's important

Play: Beat.
And in the beat he fucks the star of her name
Faded, but still shining

At the tail end of the eleven-page fragment is what appears to be, at first glance, a two-page monologue intérieur delivered by the writer in response to a quip by the director regarding the claim that American theatre is a playwrights' theatre. Spatially separated from the main body, it details the Writer's frustration at being a dramatist eternally condemned to 'Reading Hell':

Writer: I'd spent two years writing that play;
 two years of my life (i),
 Writing; re-writing.
 Two years is a long time coming (ii).
 So, after all the effort,
 I went phishing.
 I emailed and emailed
 And one day I get this call,
 From a small theatre (iii);
 A friend of a friend,
 (somewhere off off off Broadway);
 More 'off' and it would've been New Haven! (iv)

The short and seemingly innocuous extract is however an example of the bricolage nature of the three portfolio texts. Whilst it is beyond the remit of this short document, and ultimately unprofitable to autopsy those texts in order to determine the full impact of the experiential upon them, a brief analysis of the above extract would serve to illustrate the point: (i) In my case, plays do indeed take around two years to write (following a period of gestation), hence, in New York, I wrote 3 plays in six years (ii) *A Long Time Coming* (published by 'amaBooks, Zimbabwe, 2008) is a collection of short stories, to which I contributed. The volume was edited by Jane Morris, who would later be the inspiration for *Ar Fin y Gylllell* (On the Knife's Edge), a three-part drama for BBC Radio Cymru (2012): see below re. documentary realism. (iii) Fellow International Associate at the Lark, Jeroen van den Berg received a request to read

one of his texts in a shop front theatre in Philadelphia. I attended the event with him. The actors that night outnumbered the audience. The hollow atmosphere of that reading reminded me of a reading of *The Ogbu Men* that took place at the Llandoverly Theatre in the late 90s. (iv) At some point (date unrecorded) I gave a talk at the O'Neill Theater Center in New London. En route, I stayed the night in New Haven. I had previously met the Artistic Director of the Long Wharf Theatre, New Haven at a TCG conference in Denver in 2008 (also attended by van den Berg). Before travelling there, New Haven seemed remote. Little did I understand the influence The Long Wharf Theatre (and the O'Neill) has had upon the New York theatre ecology. The chain of associations is long and might appear non-sensical. But it is illustrative of a bricoleur's process.

And then, regarding the direct impact of the Trojan Horse model upon the evolution of *A / The Biography of a Thing*. Opening *Historia* at random, I happen upon Scene 7 (Portfolio, 360). It opens with a recount of a reading of a play about a woman being tortured by the Gestapo. The actress who played the tortured woman was asked whether she would do it naked. Which she did. The whole incident was related in the rehearsal room by an actor who participated in that seemingly perverse reading (and who read Freddy in the final public reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* at New Georges in 2013). The re-telling of the incident prompted an exchange regarding the limits to which actors, hungry to be seen, are prepared to go in public readings: a conversation recounted in the text. Opening at another random page (Portfolio, 386), following a section of *mis en abyme*, Freddy is sincere in his praise of Sarah's reading. Sarah then asks if she can comment upon a minor detail. In Ohio the red cardinal is so common that Ohioans would never mention the cardinal's colour when naming the bird. This is picked up by the ever competitive Anja who draws the distinction between the hyper-competitive theatre scene in New York versus a more human scene in Chicago. Both the formal and the later points were made by Elizabeth Rich in the rehearsal room (echoed in conversations I had with practitioners in 'blue collar' Chicago). A third random page is illustrative both of the fact that I never paginate texts and

explains why the published volume, *Historia* is unpaginated (Portfolio, 377). Mid rehearsal, Freddy states: ‘Ok, let’s circle back to the top of the page... page um... why are there no page numbers in this goddamn script? Pick it up from...’ It was Topol who made the comment. Finally, on page 376 one reads the following exchange:

Anja: Yeah, “In passion, there’s truth,” he says

Sarah: Does he?

Anja: “My words mean nothing,” he says, “actors
must get beyond them; sweep them away to
get at the truth!”

Sarah: That’s really interesting for me, because instinctively, I feel I need
to get beyond the words... even in a reading – to do justice to the
passion.

The passage is a reference to a conversation upon performativity that took place within the rehearsal room. The final comment belongs to Laila Robins who did indeed go ‘beyond the words’. I could continue in this vein, but the point is made, *A / The Biography of a Thing* stems wholly from the process designed to generate it. In addition, all three texts are bricolages: myriad devices accrued around a material event.

Returning to the extract above, what is of note, is that it seems to drift into externalised monologic dialogue as it takes on a more conversational tone with the line, ‘So, after all the effort’. The fragment ends abruptly and, as stated, the Writer is never embodied again in subsequent versions (though the text of *Troy Story* is delivered by Bill, the writer of *Troyanne* as identified in *A / The Biography of a Thing*). However, his brief presence served a dual purpose. Firstly, to suggest that any narrative driven solely by Play (Thing) would possibly prove unsustainable and that a plurality of voices was needed. Secondly, that a chorus of personae not manipulated by Thing, as is the monologue intérieur of the Older Actress, but independent of Thing, though in rela-

tion to Thing, was needed and thirdly, that it could take as its form an extended interview, or other monologic dialogue.

4.4 The Writer as Absent Protagonist

In March 2011, I attended a second NoPassport conference in New York. During that visit I saw *Invasion* by the Swedish dramatist, Jonas Hassen Khemiri: a text that explores issues of immigration, language and identity, forcing the audience to confront the Arab male Othered in post 9/11 Western society.¹²⁶ Brief consideration of that event will serve both to throw a light upon theatre culture in New York (and the spectre that haunted Nuyorkians post 9/11) and contextualise a key element within *A / The Biography of a Thing*, the nature of the absent Bill.

Khemiri's text begins with an extract from C. J. L. Almqvist's *Signora Luna*, a Swedish historical verse drama written in 1835. It is the romantic tale of the title character who escapes Sardinia with the aid of an Arab corsair, Abulkasem Ali Muharrem. There is contemporary irony in the role reversal: a Muslim man aiding a refuge-seeking Christian woman. After a few minutes of watching what appears to be static and verbose amateurism, described in the text as '(t)heatric tone, big gestures' (Khemiri 2013, 8), one's mind turns to plotting escape routes out of the theatre. It is at this point that a couple of young ethnic students (dressed in hoodies in the Play Co. production) begin to shuffle and audibly comment upon the action. As their vocal confidence grows and their comments become more cutting, the actors visibly react to the criticism coming from the auditorium yet continue their turgid performance. The audience is forced into an ideological dilemma. Does it agree with the young transgressors of convention whose adverse comments are justified on both aesthetic and economic grounds – considering the price of Off Broadway tickets – thereby accepting the value system of the outsiders, or does it force the ignorant young immigrants (damned on all three counts) to conform to normative behaviour shaped by the gen-

¹²⁶ This was the original production staged at Walkerspace; a 2011 Obie Award Winner New York Times Critic's pick; see www.playco.org and www.khemiri.se for reviews.

eral system of cultural relations of which they stand on the outside. Without realising it, we, the audience are witness to a striking piece of meta-theatre that, at times has prompted intervention from members of the normally passive audience, (as it did during the performance I attended, an intervention akin to the actions of those who attended Peter Handke's *Offending the Audience* in 1966¹²⁷), for we are party to an act of social revolution; it is the invasion of the precincts of privilege by the presence of the Othered. However, unbeknownst to us, we are subject to a Futurist strategy Marinetti would have lauded; the animation of the culinary audience through direct action. The friction in the auditorium builds to the point where confrontation seems inevitable. At which point, a paradox is generated. Does the audience act in defence of the theatrically indefensible, for institutional theatre, being the cultural expression of the hegemony, institutionalises the hatred of the mass (the Othered), and challenge the presence of the Other, or does it rise up with the Other and challenge the hegemony?¹²⁸ It is upon the third invocation of the name Abulkasem by the actors on stage that the off stage students become most voluble, prompting a reaction from the actors who confront their detractors. Immediately, the two students cross the picture frame and invade the stage, thus apparently violating the traditional subject-object relationship, and for a moment, one is caught in a state of terror. For in their act of *invasion*, the ultimate transgression in the city of spectacle, 9/11 is revisited, and this time, the Arab is in the room: 'Yousef and Arvind rush up on stage, knocking down Actor 1, who is helped off stage by Actor 2. The play is interrupted, the lights come on, the stage manager yells "Call security!" as Yousef and Arvind take over the stage and tear down the scenery' (Khemiri 2013, 9).

The reflective stain of the Other forces us to confront our prejudices, our compliance and our privilege; how the West, by dint of temporal advantage, claims the right to

¹²⁷ As described by Fischer-Lichte drawing upon, Rischbieter, H. (July 1966) "Experimenta. Theater und Publikum neu definiert," in *Theater heute* 6, 8–17. (qtd. Fischer-Lichte 2008, 21 - 22).

¹²⁸ The 'mass', as famously defined by Raymond Williams in *Culture and Society 1780 - 1950*: 'The masses are always the others, whom we don't know, and can't know [...] Masses are other people [...] There is in fact no masses; there are only ways of seeing people as masses' (Williams 1979, 287 - 290).

dominate the primitive Rest through Othering, through exclusion and economic sanction: the triumph of the allochronic discourse over coevalness, as the anthropologist, Johannes Fabian might term it (Fabian 2014, 149 -150).¹²⁹ And yet the moment of our pensiveness is fleeting. We are, after all sitting in a New York theatre whose business is the ‘entertainment of rich people between dinner and bedtime’ (Wells 2015, 171). With relief, we realise that the students *are* the action; merely actors rehearsing revolution. Boal was correct in his assumption, the bourgeoisie prefers the frisson of weak reflection to the provocation of a reflective (Bennett 2005, 209).¹³⁰ Of Khemiri’s text that follows, whilst challenging sensibilities, it never threatens to invade the senses again in the visceral way that the initial attack upon convention did. In a series of scenarios the figure of Abulkasem, given multifarious attributes and forms, gradually evolves into the personification of the hydra Arab Other: the ultimate terror, simultaneously everywhere and no-where: arguably the invention, by the United States of the object of the external threat necessary to maintain the stable internal state.¹³¹ In an interview published in the *New York Times* a decade to the day after 9/11, Khemiri stated, ‘Abulkasem represents a diffuse menace, perceived but not quite embodied’ (Grode 2011).

Though Abulkasem might seem an odd inspiration for the absent dramatist, Bill in *A / The Biography of a Thing*, one must remember that Bill is also an alien; a trespasser from ‘Old Europe’ (as Donald Rumsfeld termed it) in America. He has no place in the New World; he is a mnemonic of melancholy, only allowed to stay if he leaves his old identity, his sense of self (fact) ‘over the horizon’. As Molly comments of Bill in Scene 8: ‘His work is so full of loss... and losing; he’d lost his life even before living it.

¹²⁹ Re. Allochronic discourse: Johannes Fabian in conversation with Anselm Franke <https://www.manifestajournal.org/issues/souvenirs-souvenirs/architecture-anthropological-time#> Regarding 'the temporal contingency of imperialist expansion' (see also Fabian 2014, 149)

¹³⁰ ‘Perhaps theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution.’(Boal’ 1979, 155)

¹³¹ ‘During eras of safety, the United States loses its preoccupying focus [...] Americans are less sure of their national identity. Social cohesion may be replaced by a mood of fractiousness’ Dominic Tierney in asking *Does America Need an Enemy* quotes from Lincoln’s Lyceum Address (1838): ‘If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher’ www.thenationalinterest.org. Correcting a draft of this text on the 7th of January 2021, following the storming of The Capitol by the American mob, Lincoln’s statement, stripped of irony, seems prophetic.

“You’re so un-American,” I’d say to him. And he’d get pissed at me for that. But it was true, he really did come from “beyond the horizon!” (BEAT) Well maybe, just maybe, he should’ve stayed there’ (Portfolio, 372). His absence (his fiction) is demanded of him, even when present. It is all that is demanded of him; as it is all that is demanded of Abulkasem in order that Americans can define themselves in relation to absent presence.

4.5 Emergence of a Thing (A Second Fragment)

The second handwritten fragment dated October 26th, 2011, was written seven months after having seen *Invasion* in New York. It marks a stylistic break with the abandoned document and the first sign of the form that the play would eventually take. However, before considering that second fragment, note must be made of a text written on the inside cover of the notebook in which it is contained. It is a quotation taken from the exhibition notes of the Welsh artist, Peter Finnemore who, in May 2011 held a two-week residency at Oriel Myrddin, the municipal art gallery in Carmarthen, Wales. Finnemore’s exhibition was of a collection of 45rpm records mostly from the 1960s and 70s and relating to Carmarthen itself. Those objets trouvés he saw as ‘democratic markers of cultural history’, as ‘vinyl bones, and as vernacular folk art’. Likewise, my texts are cultural markers of their times; historic even at the point of writing, their meaning is constructed retrospectively, if constructed at all. Enigmatically, C.F. von Weizsäcker wrote, ‘the past is presently factual’ or as Fabian succinctly put it, facticity ‘is autobiographic’ (Weizsäcker 1977 qtd. Fabian 2014, 89); thereby echoing Wake’s theory of witnessing. The questions Finnemore asks regarding the biography of an artefact are pertinent to the background history, of any signifier. For any sign is the product of a culturally determined process. As such, a sign is open to new and emergent meanings at a future point of encounter. That point will possess a

different set of referents to the generative referents. And it is that future point that will dictate the ‘usefulness’ of a sign both in and through time:

In doing *the biography of a thing*, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people. Where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such a thing? What were the recognised ages or periods in a thing’s life and what are the cultural markers for them? How does a thing’s use change with its age and what happens to it when it reaches the end of its usefulness? [my emphasis]¹³²

Were it not for the evidence to the contrary, one could posit that the performance text is a dramatic riff upon Finnemore’s programme notes. Chronologically, that is not the case. However, I will concede, that the phrase *biography of a thing* was appropriated from Finnemore’s text; though the title of the artefact I would later develop would vacillate between *The Trojan Woman*, *Documenta*, *Historia* and *Biography of a Thing*, before settling upon *A / The Biography of a Thing* prior to the publication of *Historia* in 2015.

The extract, over the page to the quote above, is the recollection by an unnamed narrator of a conversation it had with an individual identified as Bear. Bear, we are told, is a native American Indian; ‘When he was born, apparently you couldn’t give birth to a half breed (native) in the county, his mother crossed to county line (to West Virginia) so that a Bear could growl’. Bear describes, to the narrator, the accidental shooting of a young man by his father, who, we are informed is Bear’s brother. The text, a near verbatim account of a conversation, would, in time and in a more nuanced form, constitute the first scene of *A / The Biography of a Thing* and also the material event that actuates the re-framing of Hannah’s world in *Troyanne*. Having listened to Bear relate his family tragedy, the narrator states, ‘I’m ashamed of what I did next. I walked out of that room with another man’s grief and used it for my own

¹³² my italics. *Project Object: Groove* Oriel Myrddin (4 - 14 May 2011) (www.artrabbit.com). See also bird-in-the-house.blogspot

good.’ Given the newly acquired title, one could assume that the narrator is Thing. However, there is an ambiguity inherent in the confession. For, in stating, ‘I used it for my own good,’ one could assume that the narrator was present at the event and subsequently created a Thing inspired by the event. However, a Thing cannot create itself, it does not possess aseity (the ability to generate itself). And so, one wonders whether the narrator is in fact the Writer. The fragment ends in a brief dialogic exchange:

- A writer uses whatever he can
- Will you use me?
- That’s a good question
- That’s the thing

If the narrator is the Writer then the first line could be an ironic comment delivered by Thing to its creator. However, the reply, ‘Will you use me?’ is not a question a writer would ask of a text. But it could be a question a text would ask of a writer. And therefore, we flip characters again and assume that it is indeed Thing that delivers the narrative. However, as stated, a Thing cannot write itself into being. Unless, that is, we consider that a Thing exists in ‘attentive involvement’ with its creator during the period of its gestation. Thing could therefore have been witness to the event prior to it being fully formed and separated from its creator. The dyadic analogy draws upon the concept of the ‘original unity’ of Adam and God (within man), prior to the Fall, as outlined by the German philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk. In *Bubbles*, Sloterdijk begins his theory of spheres with a simple allusion to the picture *Bubbles* (G.H. Every 1887, after Sir John Everett Millais, better known as the ‘Pears soap’ boy). In the act of ‘inspiring’ / breathing an entity into being (such is, I would posit, the act of writing), a bubble (a text) and blower (dramatist) coexist in unity: ‘attentive involvement’ (Sloterdijk 2011, 18). However, once a bubble is fully blown and released (a text is written), whilst a part of the bubble blower remains within the bubble – as is a part of a dramatist ‘spirit’ in the act of writing – the bubble (text) is no longer attached to, or

rather in ‘attentive involvement’ with its creator; as man, expelled from Eden no longer carried God within. Once a bubble flies free, it is destined to ex-pire (burst) or in the case of a text, possibly to remain forgotten (un-uttered), as ultimately, are the majority of texts that undergo processes of Play Reading in New York. A lay reading of Sloterdijk coupled with animistic whimsy lay at the heart of my creative inquiry: what could a Thing’s thoughts be, regarding the nature of its mortality and isolation once it is bereft of its original unity? The imagined ontological terror experienced by a birthed text – the existential terror of all entities – would become the basis of *A / The Biography of a Thing*.

To return to the fragment, if Thing existed in ‘attentive involvement’ (was in the process of being written) at the time of the event, then it could indeed confess to the shame, as it shared that shame with its creator, Bill, prior to its dis-involvement with him. The ambiguity is clarified in a subsequent draft when recognition of the material event, as genesis point, is made by Bill when he identifies Thing, as his yet, unwritten text. In the following, Grizzly is an anonym of Bear:

We got out of there leaving The Grizzly alone in his office; in shock... in despair. And as we walked through the door, I looked at Bill and he smiled at me and said “Now I know you! I know you now...” Is that enough of a beginning for you, Drew? (Portfolio, 346)

Implicit in the question ‘Will you use me?’ Thing identifies itself as both subject and object; a text that can only come into being through the performative act. From this we may assume that Thing is talking to an utterer, an actor, (the proto-Drew / Policeman), an entity that did not exist prior to the drafting of *Troyanne*. The short exchange therefore constitutes a direct symbiosis between ‘A’ and ‘B’ text as per Topol’s model; though the mention of Winesberg in the ‘Evolution of the ‘A’ text (p. 294) pre-dates this symbiosis.

A twelve page / four scene document generated sometime after October 26th but before November 8th, titled, *The Biography of a Thing / Draft 1*, provides evidence of a transition state between the second fragment and *Documenta* - a skeletal first draft text. In it, Scenes 1 and 3 correspond to the first and second interviews conducted between Drew and Thing, as per *Documenta* (Scenes 1 & 5 in *A / The Biography of a Thing*). Scene 2 (also Scene 2 in *Documenta* but Scene 3 in *A / The Biography of a Thing*) is the first interview conducted with Molly (unnamed in the fragment). In the transition between Scene 3 and Scene 4, the text betrays its creative pedigree and also sets up the dramatis personae that remain up to the present draft (though names have obviously changed). Finally, the last line introduces the *mise en abyme*:

- (HE SETTLES, THEN...) Do you remember your first reading?
- I remember them all. First, second and third, were readings held 'round tables; a bit of reading, lot of sitting, too much talking. But the fourth... the fourth reading was special for me...special for him as well, though he wasn't there...
- Why was that?
- Why do you think?
- (SUDDENLY UNDERSTANDS) Oh, right
- (SMILES) Yeah... but he should've been there, because the fourth reading was when I flew off the page for the first time...

SCENE 4

(The Fourth Reading)

- (AS LIGHTS EVOLVE ON A REHEARSAL SPACE) ...in a rehearsal room, a few floors up, in a building, somewhere mid-town. You were there (Drew), that god-dam director, Krijs was there. And as I said, *he* wasn't, because both his girl-friend (Anja) and his wife (Jen) were there...
- For sure

And also Rikk was there, that actress from out of town; the one who flew me off the page until I soared like a lark... (RIKK BEGINS READING THE OPENING SECTION OF TROY STORY. SHE IS STANDING READING FROM A SCRIPT [PLACED ON] A MUSIC STAND)

- Get up... Get up, woman...

Before considering the key period in the development process of the text following the writing of the two fragments above, the question arises regarding why the narrative suddenly shifted into quasi-documentary prior to the visit to New York in November 2011. Whilst I cannot offer an empirical reason, I can offer a plausible cause.

In September 2011 (a month prior to the writing of the fragment above), I travelled to Bulawayo, Zimbabwe in order to conduct writing workshops as part of the Intwasasa Cultural festival. Whilst that activity was nominally under the auspices of the British Council, the visit had an ulterior motive: to covertly interview artists in that city about creativity in a totalitarian regime for a documentary commissioned by S4C (the Welsh language fourth TV channel) on strategies of artistic resistance in Zimbabwe; amongst them, the afore mentioned Jane Morris.¹³³ The openness of the interviewees in front of camera was a demonstration of the power of the lens to elicit confession; the lens as secular priest. In concluding his volume *The Language of Autobiography*, John Sturrock writes: 'narrative is a prime means of cultural bonding which we use both to integrate ourselves with our culture and also to make sense of what is going on around us' (Sturrock 1993, 291). Despite a genuine fear of being compromised, caught and tortured by the CIO (secret police), Zimbabwean artists – or more specifically, Ndbele artists (who see themselves in opposition to the ruling Shona), wanted to reach beyond the lens to ensure that both they and their culture were au-

¹³³ A programme in *Pethe*; a series of single docs. Produced by Cwmni Da. Director: Sian Boobier.

dited.¹³⁴ I was privileged by the trust they invested in me. The immediacy of the filming experience prior to the drafting of the second fragment, and subsequent drafting of the first skeletal draft would suggest a link between the experience in Zimbabwe and the writing process, for the stylistic shift into interview, as a means to invite disclosure, whilst not unheralded (c.f. the interview of Bear within the second written fragment), is marked and specific. Unable to identify any other inspiration, I believe that the Zimbabwean experience provides the plausible cause for the drift towards a documentary turn in the evolving narrative that would demand multi-media realisation.

4.6. *Documenta* and The Ethics of Life Theft

On multi-media production, Patrice Pavis, having seen Robert Lepage's *Zulu Time* (a techno-cabaret about flying and Lepage's fear of flying), wrote, 'Every machine, every technology, every computer is a foreign body at the heart of theatrical performance [...] So much technology talks so much it forgets what it was talking about, it becomes an end in itself and exhausts us' (Pavis 1999, 188 - 189).¹³⁵ Whilst Pavis later retracted his negative reaction to that specific spectacle of technological obesity, his central tenet holds. Within the meta-theatrical, 'the *mise en scène* no longer guarantees the coherence of the aesthetic artefact, it is reduced to montage, construction, scenic practice, signifying practice, *encuentro* [an encounter] or installation' [my parenthesis]. Pavis stands against Lehmann and the whole postdramatic project where 'the dramatic text is seen as a banal subsidiary of the *mise-en-scène*' (191).

¹³⁴ Interviews were mainly conducted in and around the National Gallery in Bulawayo. There, a banned exhibition by the artist, Owen Maseko was in situ in the Delta gallery but inaccessible to view. www.archive.kubatana.net

¹³⁵ Pavis saw the production in Crèteil in October 1999. *Zulu Time* was due to open in New York on September 21 2011. It was cancelled on the day of the 9/11 attack. 'Lepage said, "I don't want to sound pretentious or anything [...] (b)ut you know, our company [Lepage's theatre troupe Ex Machina] when we immerse ourselves in new work, sometimes things like that happen. I'm not saying we have psychic powers but there are moments where we're obsessed with things that are going on. Any subject matter we treat, we find a reflection of.'" qtd. Hays 2001

However, adopting a more conciliatory and optimistic tone upon reflection, Pavis hypothesised that the crisis of both representation and *mise-en-scène* within technological theatre has resulted in a renewed confidence in dramatic works in Europe, especially in France, ‘made up as much of a reaction and defiance against the media and communication machines as it is the desire to confront them, even to integrate them’ (192). He writes in defence of the text and of text based theatre in a mediatised world, and in the hope of a re-balance between the theatrical (where the media is indissoluble) and the dramatic, where the media dissolves and ‘merges into the scenery, becomes hardly recognisable’, assimilating itself ‘into the flesh and blood of the text’ (201). As an ultra-modernist, I would side with Pavis, for, whilst I have used digital media to realise my texts several times since *Glissando on an Empty Harp* (1994), arguably allying their production with the meta-theatrical, when I have deployed multi-media techniques, they have never served to enslave content to form. The quest has always been (as per Pavis’s ambition *vis a vis* the recuperation of writing) to marry form and content (Rowlands 1999, 243).

The *mise en scène* of *Documenta* is made explicit in the opening of the secondary text: ‘A documentary in the making. 5 cameras record five individuals: A theatre director, Thing, a middle aged actress, another middle aged actress and a younger actress. We do not need to see their faces, the camera images are projected.’ A sixth figure, Drew (the interviewer), flits from camera to camera, but remains a figure in the shadows throughout; his face barely glimpsed. The effect, would, one could say, be akin to an elementary ‘live cinema’ (the multi-media technique developed by the theatre maker Katie Mitchell through the exploitation of digital technology within live performance; her self styled, *The Language of the Machine* (Cornford 2020, 186-192)). I envisaged that Drew would operate the cameras and frame shots. Whether or not Drew would also be responsible for live vision mixing remains conjecture; though vision mixing could be construed as an extension of Drew's fractured memory (yet another nod to Beckett). I also envisaged multiple flat screens placed amongst personae at various angles and in several planes (where the live and the ‘already dead’ images of the selves could

be mirrored and juxtaposed etc.).¹³⁶ Above the action would be the projection of the media onto a large screen; at times this would be single image, at times, composite.

Conjecture aside, the primary interview within the text is conducted with Thing, whom Drew interviews because he is ‘fascinated by failure’; the closest we get to ascertaining Drew’s motivation in this draft. This is interwoven with interviews conducted with the director and the cast of the fictitious fourth reading of *Troyanne*, when the play ‘soared’ off the page, yet never flew again. The following exchange between Thing and Drew included in that draft, echoes a conversation I had with the director, Sturgis Warner about a text he had had been trying to develop over a period of years. Thing bemoans, ‘Twelve readings, twelve casts, twelve interpretations...’ to which Drew cruelly adds, ‘... but not one production.’ This eventually found its way into the text as an exchange between Sarah and Drew (Portfolio, 382), though it is also discussed by Drew and Thing (Portfolio, 407).

The secondary interviews detail the relationship each individual (director and cast) has with the writer, Bill and their relationships with each other. Interviews also state their opinion of Thing as a play and the culture of Play Reading within which it is trapped. Much of the text finds its way into the current draft of *A / The Biography of a Thing* i.e. the director, identified as Hunter (Freddy in *Historia*) reminiscences about ‘the seventies when Papp was at the Public and writers wrote with the expectation... the expectation, Drew... of being put on, and we put them on!’ (this draws directly upon Todd London’s comments, as previously referenced). All the elements are present within this proto-text: interview, mise en abyme and the seed of dialogue within the rehearsal room. However, it is doubtful whether *Documenta* would have evolved into more than a superficial elaboration upon form and content were it not for a second material event that occurred during the New York Theatre Workshop Public Reading of *Troyanne* (November 28, 2011). The event is noteworthy, not only

¹³⁶ John E McGrath writes: ‘Under surveillance, I re-encounter my body as other, and discover that it is already dead’. I would posit that any captured image of the self is an image of that which is already dead (McGrath 2004, 214).

for Robins's visceral performativity as previously detailed, but also, for another truly unrehearsed accident, as I shall detail below. Indeed, of all the events that occurred during my several residencies in New York, that rehearsal and public reading at NYTW truly constituted a material event; one that resulted in an immaterial reframing of praxis and reconsideration of the ethics of the development process I had undertaken, and would continue to undertake, in order to develop *A / The Biography of a Thing*. And it is to the ethics of life writing in relation to that process, that I now turn.

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On the morning of November 28th, 2011, the following cast gathered in a New York Theatre Workshop rehearsal room in order to read *Troyanne*; Laila Robins (Hannah), Kelly McAndrew (Tory) and Jenny Seastone Sterne (Anne). Uncharacteristically, the actor playing the Police Officer (whom I shall anonymise as Caleb) was absent. Eventually he turned up in a distressed state. He proceeded to inform the group that, earlier that morning, he had seen a specialist who had diagnosed him with an eye condition that might result in his premature blindness. For one who was (and thankfully remains) much in demand on the New York theatre scene, the prognosis was understandably devastating. Sympathising with him, we offered to cancel the reading, but Caleb was adamant that it should continue as planned. This is referenced in the text of *A / The Biography of a Thing*. Whilst it would be Laila Robins's performance that would transfix the room in the afternoon, it was Caleb's terror that dominated the room in the morning. All present were aware of his discomfort and fear; the potential silencing of a great actor through his dislocation from the Word. Unbeknownst to Caleb, his predicament, or rather my perception of it, served to re-contextualise both the text and the self in relation to that text.

Absorbing Caleb's prognosis into the text post facto, radically altered the narrative. Rather than desiring to document the inciting fourth reading due to a facile fascination with failure, Drew's elemental need to retrospectively recapture events surround-

ing that fictitious fourth public reading of *Troyanne* (his final public reading) became a means for the character to rescue the self through the recapture and manipulation of his life narrative. That radical shift from impersonal to personal resulted in the text morphing from quasi-documentary (with little drama *per se*, merely juxtapositional positions) into a more nuanced piece of memory theatre. Out of this shift, a trinity of Creator (Bill, the dramatist *in absentia*), creation (Thing) and saviour (Drew, the utterer) suggested itself around which the orbiting action (the secondary interviews and the public reading that furnished the original enthusiasm of practice) was relegated to mere ornamentation; the dance of music stands.

With regard to the re-framing of the self in relation to the text, I have outlined that the genesis points of all I dramaturgical texts were material events that, in turn, actuated immaterial re-framings both of the past and the future self. Whilst those were solely solipsistic re-framings of the self, I did not consider that there were any ethical issues to redress. Whilst it is true that texts did, at times contain unfavourable portrayals (though anonymised) of others, I believed that those texts constituted the accounts of one who had been, to adopt Wakes' taxonomy, a primary witness to the unrehearsed accidents of his own life. My authority was based upon the experiential; my project, autoethnographic. I was, according to Phelan's definition of primary witnessing, a 'survivor' traumatised by events. However, as I increasingly deployed 'life theft' as a material gathering strategy, my status as primary witness to unrehearsed accidents shifted from that of 'survivor' to that of 'bystander' (Etchells's definition; being in the 'presence' of an accident) who, in retrospect, appropriates the material events of Others in order to immaterially re-frame his own life. In the short essay 'Elliot Forgot the Reluctant Vampires', that briefly outlined the development of *Fragments of Journeys Towards the Horizon* (2013), and allying myself with Sarah Kane – who wrote in *Crave* of being 'an emotional plagiarist, stealing other people's pain and subsuming it into my own until I can't remember whose it is any more' (Kane 2001, 24), – I termed myself a 'soul sucker' (Svich et al 2015, 90 - 97). With that drift into life theft, I began to question the ethics of my own actions.

Nicholas Ridout opens his short monograph, *Theatre & Ethics*, with a reference to the dilemma faced by Neoptolemus, a character in Sophocles' tragedy, *Philoctetes*.

In brief, Ulysses convinces Neoptolemus to deceive Philoctetes (an archer abandoned by Ulysses on a desert island ten years previously) in order that Ulysses might take possession of Philoctetes' bow and arrows and thereby secure victory for the Greeks in their war with Troy. Upon discovering and befriending Philoctetes, Neoptolemus quickly feels genuine pity for the abandoned man as he suffers from an incurable snake bite resulting in tortuous spasms. When he is seized by one such spasm, Neoptolemus, in finding himself suddenly in possession of his prize, Philoctetes bow and arrows, experiences an ethical crisis. He asks of himself, 'How shall I act?' (Ridout 2009, 1 - 6). Should he continue to deceive (and carry out Ulysses's will) or should he act honourably, cease all duplicity and rescue a man whose trust he had won and for whom he had come to feel an empathy. Neoptolemus asks of himself the fundamental question of ethics: What is 'just' action?¹³⁷ Likewise, I questioned and continue to question whether I had acted justly in appropriating the narratives of others.

Philoctetes' invocation is apposite to the praxis undertaken to generate *A / The Biography of a Thing* for, in deploying the Trojan Horse model, I hid what I should not have hidden and possibly forfeited my 'virtue' with my written word. It would be absurd to suggest that Topol was my Ulysses, but having settled upon a course of action that was tacit from the outset (The Trojan Horse Model), I always felt compromised by my acts of 'life theft', a guilt voiced by Anja's condemnation of Bill's fictitious actions (my actions) in Troy, Ohio:

¹³⁷ The question lies at the core of my latter play *Water Wars*: what is 'just' action with regard to retribution for past (colonial) offences? In the closing paragraph, Sophia (as metaphor for nation) considers whether she should take revenge for her mistreatment at the hands of Harry, an Englishman: 'A part of me is wondering whether cutting off your cock is 'just action' or just an 'action' ? There is the precedent, as you pointed out, but... but, I think not. Because I don't seek gratification; as you said, it's ugly, as ugly as resolution. I seek... What do I see? I seek... revolution' (Rowlands 2020, 114).

Look, Drew, people just want to talk. And people trust without knowing who they're trusting or if they can trust them at all [...] Read that play again! He was almost jacking off on their pain. It sickened me, because there was something voyeuristic about that play... pure pornography and I hated it. Still hate it, hate him; hated that reading. (Portfolio, 360)

Even though, as stated, I believe that my intentions in *Troy* were honourable and that *Troyanne* honours those that shared their testimony with me, the course of action I undertook in order to generate *A / The Biography of a Thing* – the appropriation of Caleb's trauma in particular – possibly transgressed the ethics of reciprocity: 'do unto others as you would have them do unto you'.¹³⁸ In private correspondence, Topol (who has consented to her comments being placed in the public domain) wrote, mindful of #MeToo developments, '(M)y hunch is that there is no way that this process could have existed the same way today as actors are increasingly empowered to speak up if they feel even mildly taken advantage of [...] There is a complicated and fine line between what is appropriating someone's story and what is just inspiration [...] I think you were walking on very complicated terrain in writing a piece about the process that couldn't help but use people's real lives.' However, this simple binary of appropriation and inspiration is, as Grace Sherill voices in *Theatre and AutoBiography*, not the reality of autoethnography and autobiographic practice, for, '(n)o autobiographer can tell his personal story without infringing on the biographies of others, without in fact tacitly acknowledging what Paul John Eakin calls the 'relationality of identity'' (Sherrill 2006, 17). We are social constructs, as such, one cannot polarise appropriation and inspiration for they are analogous. However, with relationality comes responsibility towards the other; such is the Levinasian life lived face en face where the obligation to the other is, according to Levinas, the 'foundation of all philosophy and the heart of human existence'; 'ethics as first philosophy' (Levinas 1969, 81 & 194 qtd. in Deal and Beal 2004, 128). Whether I took advantage of others and therefore

¹³⁸ Or rather, as C.F. Volney expressed it in defining justice as the fundamental principle of society: 'Do not to another what you do not wish to be done to yourself' (Volney 1991, 2020).

acted unethically in the course of praxis, concerns me. However, I would note that the creative process that resulted in *A / The Biography of a Thing* was undertaken prior to embarking upon this PhD by Portfolio. Whilst I have ensured that this contextualising document adheres to the ethical code of academic research, I am aware that the praxis upon which it comments could have contravened best practice had it been conducted as part of an academic inquiry. Nevertheless, what follows is an attempt to address certain ethical issues appertaining to praxis. In order to do so, I shall borrow from the grammar of 'Life Writing'.

David Parker in his contribution to the volume, *Life Writing as Narrative of the Good* (ed. John Paul Eakin), analyses the 'moral experience' of a young man, in the auto/biographic novel, *Father and Son: A Study of Two Temperaments*. That novel, written by Edmund Gosse in 1907, details the ethical dilemma faced by the young protagonist wanting to break free of the stymieing evangelical morality of his father. In rejecting his father's narrow horizon of orthodoxy, the son experienced a transition after which he adopted an alternative language of moral and spiritual discernment (LMD). Having transitioned, the protagonist's ethical position, with regard to What is right to do? lay in opposition to his father's fundamentalism.

Parker, in his reading of Goose's novel draws heavily upon the work of the Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor. According to Taylor, transitions are, or result in, 'implicit stories, about where we are 'at' in our lives' that offer us *epistemic gain*. Such a gain is 'a move to a new way of seeing [...] a gain over the previous one which need necessarily be superior, just an alternative position' [my emphasis] (Eakin et al 2004, 57). One could draw the comparison with material events (transitions) and I dramaturgies (stories). Of relevance to our inquiry, is that epistemic gain, as defined by Taylor, is neither good nor bad, it is just a gain of indeterminate value. Indeed, Parker notes that a subject might 'see an experience as one that resulted in epistemic loss, but the final move to *that* perspective must be gain' [emphasis in the original] (58) If so, how can one make a value judgement with regard to epistemic gain thereby ascertaining

whether the gain is good or bad and most pertinently, is ethically acquired? In *Sources of the Self*, Taylor offers us an answer, we 'know ourselves "through the history of [our] maturations and regressions"' and those only in relation to the self within 'webs of interlocution' (Taylor 1989 qtd. 58 - 59). It is our dialogic 'webs of interloction' (our relationality) that define us and tie us to those with whom we are ethically bound, and from whom we gain our languages of moral and spiritual discernment (LMDs). Each modern possesses an ethic based upon a social and, according to Taylor, a 'pre-articulate' morality that governs a modern's value of epistemic gain and in turn what a modern perceives as What is it right to do? (to which David Parker adds the 'broader formulation' What is it good to be? (53)¹³⁹

In relation to theatre, and the issue of life theft, the Canadian theatre practitioner, Sharon Pollock asks of herself, whether her relationships with those from whom she thieves their lives in order to dramatise them, are 'intimate, respectful and mutually beneficial?' Her fear is that she simply pries from another life 'what is of value to me and consign the rest to the slag-heap?' (Grace and Wassermann 2004, 296). Hers is, in essence, a retrospective conscience (akin to mine). Dramatists such as Pollock (and I), walk a thin ethical line. The over-riding concern of Pollock, it would seem, is whether she portrays those from whom she steals life narrative in order to feed her narrative with respect for their 'difference' according to her own sense of relationality based upon her inculcated language of moral and spiritual discernment. If she does, then, to Pollock, all is fair game.

Citing Janet Malcolm on Life Writing, John Paul Eakin posits that life theft per se is not unethical for in a social universe, 'we do not' own' the facts of our lives at all. This ownership passes out of our hands at birth, at the moment we are first observed' (Eakin et al 2004, 9). As a consequence, 'self-fashioning is ontologically impossible: the sympathising other of self-conscious subjectivity gets its real force from others, real interlocutors, who come to inform self-consciousness in all-pervasive ways'

¹³⁹ 'Pre-articulate morality', we are informed by Craig Howes, was a concept that proved contentious in the colloquium at Indiana University in 2002 out of which the volume *The Ethics of Life Writing* arose.

(70). The act of life theft, is therefore, the act of life construction; the identification of self through others.

Accepting this, I would argue that in appropriating Caleb's narrative, I did not dis-abuse him, rather I was writing the self: working out my own residual pain through him, and seeking connection with him in so doing. For I saw in his horror the mirror of mine, having feared at one point that tinnitus, a chronic condition from which I have suffered for over twenty years, would have done for me and I would never have worked again; in the same way that he feared his condition would do for him.¹⁴⁰

Ruthleen Josselson in discussing reflexive practice wrote that 'it is with our anxiety, dread, guilt and shame that we honour our participants' (Josselson 1996 qtd Etherington 2004, 226). In like manner, I believe that I honoured Caleb and that my actions, resulting in personal epistemic gain were 'just'. In relation to this, as a young actor, my co-director in a community theatre company was diagnosed with an aggressive form of macular degeneration in his early twenties. We worked through this; he needed to work through this, as Caleb needed the show to go on; to be audited, to be seen: to be 'credited'. Whether I unconsciously played out a past anxiety through Drew, Caleb's avatar, I cannot answer.

Of specific note with regard to 'just' action and 'What is right to do?', is the section in that initial draft of *Historia* where Drew confesses to Thing the reason why he set out to interview all those who took part in that fourth fictitious reading. Two versions of the speech below were drafted; the first exploited Caleb's terror, whilst the second was based upon my own condition. The apposite point is that the second version was only drafted when it was confirmed Caleb would participate in the in camera reading of *Historia* (held at the New York Theatre Workshop on Monday 12th December.) Had he not been able to attend that reading, then the following would have been read by another actor:

¹⁴⁰ *Fragments of Journeys Towards the Horizon*, whilst being in part a meditation upon friendship is a text shot through with tinnitus. The account of contracting tinnitus is nakedly autobiographical (Rowlands and van den Berg 2016, 33 - 35)

Drew: The morning of that reading, I went to a specialist, I'd been having trouble with my eyes for some time. I had two black spots in the middle of them; like holding your fists in front of your eyes and not being able to see round them, wherever you look, they're there. She told me that I would slowly go blind due to death in the retina and pretty soon I would not be able to act... or read again. Reading was never hell for me. It was a heaven full of beautiful ideas and possibilities... like *Troyanne*... a fabulous thing.. I barely made it through that reading. I had so much fear in me; fear of darkness, fear of loss, fear of losing my god damn mind. But I couldn't say anything. You don't take yourself into the rehearsal room, that space is sacred... a Dionysian fucking grove. [...] *Troyanne*, was the last reading I ever did. After that I... I was not in a good place for a long time... a darkness ever darkening. I want to write out that reading so that I can move on... see hope

However, knowing that Caleb was to participate, I hastily drafted an alternative speech to the one above on the eve of the reading. It is contained within a document titled, *Historia for Laila Ref. with Tinnitus* (dated, December 11th), and reads:

Drew: The morning of that reading, I went to a specialist. One night, the week before, I went to bed with flu, woke up in the morning and there was a hive of bees buzzin' in my head. Viral tinnitus, the specialist said, no cure for it. I barely made it through that reading. I had so much fear of the sound in my head, fear that I would never reach peace again. But I couldn't say anything. You don't take yourself into the rehearsal room, that space is sacred. I could barely read; so much fear inside me [...] *Troy Story*, was the last reading I ever

did. After that I... I was not in a good place... a place of sound and fury. I need peace again...¹⁴¹

All subsequent readings (Cardiff, Galway [both in 2012] and New York [2013]) and publication of the text in *Historia* [2015]) use the former version based upon Caleb's predicament, or rather my perspective upon it.

As a dramatist I could qualify my exploitation of another person's life narrative by appropriating the argument used by Pollock: 'My primary ethical obligation (if one can prioritise ethics) is to the integrity of the work.' Pollock bullishly confesses '(t)he more autobiography emerges in the work and the more biography is manipulated in text, the more parasitical I am revealed to be' (Grace and Wasserman 2006, 299 - 300). Craig Howes supports this. With regard to literary autobiography (though true for all autofiction) he writes, 'Autobiographers become biographers whenever they represent another person, which can sometimes amount to eighty percent to ninety percent of a memoir' (Eakin et al 2004, 248). However, to admit to parasitic 'life theft' and claim the Romantic primacy of *l'art pour l'art*, does not absolve the self from ethical considerations, for, as Paul John Eakin notes '(e)thics is the deep subject of autobiographical discourse' (6 - 8). We are ethically tied to those from whom we appropriate narrative and who, through relationality, inform our sense of self.

Eakin asks two key questions: 'Is the life writer guilty of a fundamental lack of respect for the other? Has the life writer transformed the other "into a *thing* or an object?"' (Post 1991 qtd. Eakin 1990, 166). Did I objectify Caleb? To which I would answer, no; for Caleb is not Drew, neither is Drew Caleb. Despite the fact that Caleb's trauma was appropriated by the self, apart from within this document, nowhere is the connection made between Caleb the person(ality) and Drew the persona. In addition, Drew's post-evental actions are not the actions of Caleb, they are pure fabrication oc-

¹⁴¹ This speech was developed and constitutes the key section in *Fragments of Journeys Towards the Horizon*; a monologue ostensibly about tinnitus (Rowlands & van den Berg 2016, 33 - 34).

casioned by the post evental re-framing of my life narrative through relationality. One can ask the same question regarding Bear's testimony, did I turn both him and his family into things: make objects of them? Yet again, I would use relationality in my defence. Honoured with the testimony, I strove to honour the loss and the memory; for that memory offered epistemic gain to the self. For witnessing possesses a causality. Relationality shapes all our lives. Witnessed events, experienced by others are absorbed into, and inform our own life narratives. A material event may be purely a device to the person who experiences it directly, whilst it might occasion an immaterial re-framing in the witness to that event. Who then, as Eakin points out, can claim that the events of one's life – the life of *I* in a 'social universe' – are purely one's own? I cannot control the events in my life that have proven material events to others, for that would diminish their life narratives. In the same way, they cannot control the events of their lives that have served to re-frame mine. Caleb's trauma proved a material event for me. It served to re-frame both praxis and the sense of self as dramatist: a true immaterial event. And so, I would posit that 'life theft' is not theft per se, in fact it is the opposite, it is life impacting upon and forming the *I*. Rather than being a case of 'What was right to do?', it is more a case of, 'what else could I have done?' Such is the essence of *I* dramaturgy: relationality.

The ultimate irony of the Trojan Horse model, employed with the full knowledge and support of Topol, was an incident that happened prior to the in camera reading of *Historia* at the New York Theatre Workshop (where the alternative speech would be read by Caleb). Upon arrival I was taken aside by Topol (aware of the fact that I had written an alternative speech for Drew) who expressed her concern with a particular passage within the text where Sarah (in interview) talks about the loss of a child:

Sarah: I felt him alive within me, Drew. But he got still late on and I lost him... [...] The worst thing was, I had to give birth to him and... God.... I held him in my arms...I held him, Drew. And he was so... ... all those words that mean nothing; peaceful, beautiful... perfect. (Portfolio, 384)

Topol believed that I had stolen a part of her life narrative. She accused me of having broken the trust of a friend; a *true* friend rather than a *utility* friend (the distinction is made by Aristotle).¹⁴² I am unsure as to whether I convinced her at the time, that the incident related in the text by Sarah was based upon two other tragedies known to me; the first, experienced by a Quebecois acquaintance, the second by a relative, who had to undergo an emergency procedure to extract a dead infant from her womb. It seemed that paradoxically, both Topol and I had been judged and found wanting according to our own ethic.¹⁴³ Having re-set the parameters of engagement, it was ironic that the ultimate mistrust would be between us. In recent correspondence Topol explained, ‘I am sure I was very sensitive at that moment – my loss(es) were still quite raw – but I do understand that you didn’t steal my story.’ In reply, I assured her I had not consciously used her tragedy as inspiration at the time. And yet, what I cannot guarantee is whether her tragedy unconsciously played into the mix; as one device amongst a conglomeration of devices. Reflecting upon an ethically questionable process, Topol, in private correspondence questioned whether there was ‘a clear enough one-on-one conversation with each person to explain and ensure that they would feel comfortable being observed and written into the play?’¹⁴⁴ I recall that, before commencing that reading, with Caleb in the room, Topol outlined new rules of engagement. Re-affirming our desire to use the experiential in order to craft an artefact that would eventually come to be known as *A / The Biography of a Thing*, Topol suggested that, during the process, all in the rehearsal room should henceforth declare whether anecdote, memory or action be open and usable or should be kept in confi-

¹⁴² See Eakin et al 2004, 102.

¹⁴³ The event took its place within the text, see Sarah talking of Bill’s magpie nature. (Portfolio, 403)

¹⁴⁴ From a series of emails sent December 8 2011 it is clear that Robins was obviously aware of the nature of the process. To her I wrote: ‘Just a brief note to thank you for your reading the other day. It was so visceral / you changed into animal at one point – brilliant. And so a second request. As you know, *Troy Story* is not the main event as such, as there is a mother play – The reading of *Troy Story* (possibly to be titled *Documenta*).’ However, to Caleb I confessed to process – having covertly exploited his narrative beforehand (as noted): ‘Just a brief note to thank you for your reading at NYTW the other day – you were great. [...] What both Daniella and I have not divulged when we have been reading *Troy Story*, is that *Troy Story* is not the main thrust of the two-play project I’m developing with her. The main play is the play about the reading of *Troy Story*. That is why I am in NY to develop this ‘mother’ play (possibly to be titled *Documenta*) and that is why I am emailing you now.’

dence and off limits to the dramatist. Ours was a post facto conscience (as per Pollock), and such is the nature of these reflections upon the ethics of praxis. I realise that my argument has been less a dialectic and more of an apologia. However, I would claim the rights of reflexivity; the prerogative Kim Etherington reserves for critical subjectivity, as the means by which we, as reflexive researchers ‘co-create multifaceted and many layered stories that honour the messiness and complexity of human life [...] and enable us to create meaning out of experience’ (Etherington 2004, 27-28). We are witnesses to the accidents of our own lives.

4.7 *Historia: An Initial Draft*¹⁴⁵

Following the eventual nature of the NYTW reading of *Troyanne*, I set about reframing *Documenta*, which, as stated, given renewed focus, evolved into a three strand text that took on a new title, *Historia*; one better suited to its new narrative structure and its nature as a piece of memory theatre; a history of failure. In drawing this chapter to a close, I will briefly revisit that process and, in so doing, identify elements that proved problematic from the outset but were maintained (and are maintained still) out of respect to those who contributed to its evolution.

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The Winter Writers’ Retreat (2001) at The Lark consisted of seven group sessions conducted between December the 7th and 14th (generally held between 18.00 and 21.30), where work generated that day by the six participating writers would be read and discussed amongst the group, composed of the writers, two actors, a facilitator

¹⁴⁵ *Historia*, as a title, is a nod to Herodotus’ *Histories*. However, in terms of autobiography, it could easily refer to Abelard’s *Historia Calimatatum* (Story of my Misfortunes), for *Historia* (later known as *A /The Biography of a Thing*) proved to be a failure /a mis-fortune. Abelard’s disgrace for loving Héloïse and for his intellectual superiority was castration and the burning of his treatise on the Trinity at the Council of Soissons (Sturrock 1993, 45). My disgrace, for my European cynicism and hubris, was obscurity; the very hell the text cautions against.

(Sturgis Warner), a dramaturge (Lloyd Suh) and an intern. We writers worked on stylistically diverse projects, as Caridad Svich recalls in '(An / The) Introduction to... a thing' her introductory essay to *A / The Biography of a Thing* contained in *Historia*: '[T]here was a farce [Vern Thiessen], a political comedy [Lila Rose Caplan], a shape-shifting noir-inflected fantasy-thriller [Aditi Kapil], a darkly tragic romance about amoral beings afloat in the contemporary world [Anton Dudley], a play about working class fishermen and the women in their lives trying to make a go of it in the wreckage of a massive environmental disaster [Caridad Svich], and this thing, which kept playing games of disorientating hide-and-seek with us for the duration of the retreat.' The 'disorientating game' was the extension of the established modus operandi that would generate the reflexive text, *A / The Biography of a Thing*. Whilst the other five writers strove to tease truth out of their texts, I sought truth within the room in order to generate text. Svich added, 'Rowlands admitted then that he was deeply interested in the process of interrogating play-texts and staging that interrogation in an active manner. It's almost as if the writing of the previous play *Troyanne* and the process of its development with actors and director sprung this text into being.' It was not a case of 'almost', it had been a deliberate strategy though I am uncertain as to whether, yet again, I divulged the true scope of my activity with the participants in the Writers' Retreat. Though I was careful not to include incidents and impressions that took place during the Retreat in the extracts that were read and discussed there, some would find their way into the text post facto. Whilst the process undertaken generated a text, I sensed, even during that creative process that it was flawed (as I shall discuss in relation to the transformational demands it makes upon actors). However, having committed to process, I pursued process, even though a re-evaluation of the process should have been conducted; not on ethical grounds but on creative grounds.

It was during the Retreat that the third strand, the dialogue within the rehearsal room took its full place within the narrative. The resulting text was composed of three interwoven, and as I believed at the time, balanced registers: (i) the documentary inter-

views to camera; confessions that veer between conscious rhetorical prosopopoeia (face making; or in theatre terms, mask making), and unconscious disclosure (mask slipping) (ii) the dialogue within the rehearsal room that aimed for a quotidian American realism (the performative evocation of mundane reality) and (iii) excerpts from *Troyanne*, the mise en abyme (semi-vocative, delivered in part to an absent Creator). Svich styled the text ‘discordant, unsettling, funny, dark, lightning-fast, uneasy with itself and poetically meta-theatrical in a post post-modern way’. Whilst discordant and unsettling could be attributes of an ultra-modern aesthetic, it is Svich’s description of a text ‘uneasy with itself’ that is most perceptive. For *Historia [A / The Biography of a Thing]*, was a troubled text and consequentially ill at ease with itself and with those who interacted with it. Yet again, I shall rely primarily upon subjective reflection in analysing the nature of the discord, for nothing exists that refers to the interplay of registers bar a few pertinent comments made by Chris Durnall (following the reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* by the cast of *Troyanne* in Cardiff) and Topol’s brief reflection made in private correspondence: ‘My sense is that it was unclear what experience the audience was meant to have. Perhaps the three forms needed to be more interwoven as opposed to being two separate full experiences that were meant to co-exist.’ With reflexive hindsight, I now take the opposite view to Topol and to my view at the time. Further interweaving would not have solved the antagonism of registers. In considering the individual registers I shall identify the issues of concern that possibly account for the ‘unease’ unconsciously identified by Svich, and, in concluding, suggest a less anxious form for the text were it to undergo a re-focus and further development.

Documentary Realism, Quotidian Realism & Epic Lyricism

(i) Documentary Realism

At its most basic, the documentary interviews within *A / The Biography of a Thing*, as stated, can be split into two: the primary interview with Thing (the spirit of *Troyanne*), and secondary interviews with the cast and director of the fictitious fourth reading of *Troyanne*. Dealing with the secondary order first, and as stated, in the course of his interviews with Anja, Molly, Sarah and Freddy, Drew establishes both the exact relationship each persona has with Bill (the absent dramatist), and their memories of that fourth reading. The register of delivery, in keeping with the medium, would be documentary realism that vacillates between the self-mediated self and total disclosure, when the desire to reveal and the seduction of the lens conjoin. All interviewees of the secondary order claim a degree of intimacy with Bill. However, proximity to Bill, whilst contested, is invariably unsatisfactory and of lesser importance. Of true importance is the individual claim each has to Bill's Word. Along with Abulkasem, whether Bill exists or not is irrelevant. It is the signification of Bill that is of relevance. Bill both defines and is defined by his seductive absence, leaving only his Word as signifier to be interpreted, to be enacted by those that claim it and desire to come into being through it. As Baudrillard, wrote in *Fatal Strategies*, 'Everything comes from the object and everything returns to it, just as everything started with seduction, not with desire. The immemorial privilege of the subject is overthrown. For the subject is fragile and can only desire, whereas the object gets on very well even when desire is absent' (Baudrillard 1990, 111).

And so to the primary order of interviews, those conducted between Drew and Thing. In the proto-text *Documenta*, Drew's reason for interviewing Thing, as noted, is his fascination with the text he once saw fly (off the page) and come into being. Thing is an exemplar of failure endemic to the culture of Play Reading in New York. In

Documenta, Drew is cast in the role of a quasi-documentary journalist investigating the improbability of any one text realising kinetic form in the New York theatre ecology. In that draft text, the registers of both primary and secondary order interviews were in harmony. However, within the initial draft of *Historia* (completed during the Retreat and, as a direct result of the eventual reading at NYTW), Drew's life-narrative began to impact upon the text and a discordancy began to be felt (as later noted by Svich). In the course of the singularisation of Drew, his role began to shift from that of an investigative journalist to that of an autobiographer, a 'life narrator,' who writes 'simultaneously from externalised and internalised points of view' in order to re-construct the traumatised self (Couser 2004, 247-249). G. Thomas Couser in his essay on euthanography, drawing upon the writing of Carolyn Ellis, comments, 'the acquisition of disability may be considered an inherent impediment to autonomy insofar as "losses can numb and shrink the self." [...] (U)nder such circumstances, meaningful respect for autonomy may mean allowing and enabling individuals to develop new centres and new equilibria' (213). Whilst Couser writes on inherited disease and the right to euthanasia (hence euthanography), his comments are apposite for having experienced trauma, resulting in a loss of self, Drew seeks a new equilibrium in order to re-establish his autonomy. In the end Drew confesses his true intention to Thing who believed, up to that moment, that Drew's interest in him was due to an intention to read him; to utter Thing into being:

Drew: I need to write about you, about that reading of you, so that I can move on. I need closure and this is the only way I feel I can attain it... to mark where one life ended and this, darkness began. You understand?

Thing: I'm trying to

Drew: I'm sorry it's you, but you were there - at the end and at the beginning. It was just "fucking providence" as Bill would say

Thing: Yeah

Drew: I'm sorry, but I guess, you could have been any Play...

Thing: Oh, that makes me feel great. (Portfolio, 412 - 413)

One could read the above as the intention of life-writing as therapy; writing the fear of loss through Drew, as Couser suggests (and as I would subsequently do in *Fragments of Journeys Towards the Horizon*, where I wrote tinnitus – the loss of silence – through the Dutch dramatist Jeroen van den Berg). However, one must re-read the above, knowing that in early 2012 I applied to embark upon this PhD by portfolio. Whilst this did not impact immediately upon praxis, it would eventually supersede it. Drew's speech is both an autobiographical act (the self living vicariously through Caleb / Drew) and the declaration of a reflexive practitioner's intent; to document a process. I had begun to walk away from my flawed text even as the first draft was being completed in January 2012, yet I felt obliged to periodically return to it, culminating in one final play reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* in New York in 2013, by which time, process had long since ceased to serve the text, rather the text had come to serve this reflexive document.

To return to the transition of Drew from biographer to autobiographer, I have already remarked that, as Eakin et al note, autobiographies have become increasingly biographical in relation to the high representation of others within autobiography (and autofiction in general; pertinently, memory theatre and polymonologism in particular).¹⁴⁶ Accepting that, one could ask whether *A / The Biography of a Thing* should,

¹⁴⁶ In discussing the reflexive oeuvre of the Canadian playwright Michel Tremblay, Louis Paul Leroux considers the term for life writing adopted by Serge Dubrovsky on the back cover of his hybrid autobiographical fiction, *Fils*. Dubrovsky called his reflexive text 'autofiction, a term according to Leroux that can also be prescribed to autobiographical works of drama which, 'after being interpreted by actors, who add multiple degrees of separation and interpretation, rarely conform to the original "authentic" autobiographical objective.' Leroux adds that Dubrovsky further defined 'autofiction' as the "fiction of real events as facts" where language of an adventure is given up to the "adventure of Language." 'Neither autobiography nor fiction, in the strict sense, autofiction rather functions as a go-between in the undefined interstice – that place which is impossible and which can only exist in writing' or in the staging of, as Laroux suggests. Laroux, searching for a theatre specific neologism, draws upon Patrice Pavis' theory of the three forms of autobiographical drama; life-story (highlights of a life), confessional (generally about a terminal disease or troubling admission) and identity-play (toys with gender and the very sense of self). To Pavis' tripartite classification, Leroux adds a fourth, memory play; 'a specified spatiotemporal representation of the self: "un espace memoire permettant un lie de des retrouvailles avec soi.'" Laroux defines the memory play as a 'recreation for the benefit of the author (where the audience is invited as voyeurs) of a time / space continuum where self and former self can meet. 'Memory play' seems slightly inelegant as a term (Leroux 2006, 108 - 119). Mateusz Borowski & Malgorzata Sugiers, in discussing Quebecois drama, suggest memory theatre is 'a type of theatre (where) the catastrophe has already happened and one can return to it only by following very faint and incomplete traces.' Also see Simon Critchley's novel *Memory Theatre* (2014). Here we have Szondi's 'empty time' – the basis of circular narrative structures that defines much of my work (Wallace et al 2006, 29).

in fact be read as Drew's autobiography thereby making it a biography of Thing through relationality? For knowledge that the text came to serve thesis, potentially re-frames the identity of Drew, and the nature of the trinity; Bill (the creator), Drew (the Saviour) and *Thing* (the Creation) within the text.

In *The Language of Autobiography* Sturrock, when reflecting upon Augustine's *Confessions*, notes that autofiction is the 'rendering of a life figurative' (Sturrock 1993, 30). To Sturrock, 'the relation of rememberer to memory may thus be assimilated to that of Creator to Creation, the rememberer standing outside his memory and willing it into existence as language' (45). He further informs us that Augustine, 'identifies Jesus with the Word, as the mediator between the empirical and the immaterial world', a role Augustine plays in his *Confessions* where, with irony, he is reduced to using the language of the Fall in order to indicate to us the 'supernatural realm of the Word'. In that realm, where the eternal Word of God is a 'language beyond languages' man will once again have direct knowledge of God. Until such a time, man must endure 'indirect knowledge through sign' (41). Drew and Thing, are simultaneously both signifier and signified, the embodiment of evidence that once there was process / creativity given meaning. For both can be read as existing in trinity with Bill the absent creator / Word giver. However, in reality, I am both Bill (the dramatist – loathing his failure), and Drew (the researcher – chronicling that path to failure) existing in opposition to Thing (my failure). The relationship cannot therefore be read as a trinity. Rather, the relationship is secular and binary. The primary documentary strand in the text, is, in actuality, the dramatisation of the dyadic nature of the self in the first subjective position. It is the dialogue of self in a god-less world in thrall to the tyranny of the Word. It is *Being; I* in relation to *the Other*; though the roles are unstable, for though I wrote the Thing, it speaks back to me.

Could this therefore explain the certain 'unease' pointed out by Svich that exists within the text. For *Being* is an un-reality / exists in its own reality: an in camera realm of intent. Whereas the interviews conducted with other interviewees on camera take

place within the physical realm of effects and are delivered to the seductive lens: disclosure desiring audition. The ‘unease’ within *A / The Biography of a Thing*, I suggest, could be the discord between both realms; each genre competing for dominance; the performative pitted against the (re-)presentational. Might it be the presence of antagonistic registers in the same frame that is a cause of the ‘unease’? I would suggest that it is a contributing factor, as I shall detail. I shall now briefly consider the quality of dialogue within the rehearsal room.

(ii) Quotidian mundanity

The aim of the New York visit in 2011, as detailed, was primarily to elicit material from the development process in order to feed this strand; the quotidian dialogue within the rehearsal room that, in performance, demands a mode of American realism that does not quite possess the same quality as that of documentary / film realism. Confessing in front of the lens, the self, I would suggest, self-consciously presents the self: aware of the scopophilic nature of the determining gaze. Whereas, in the rehearsal room, the self performs (re-presents) the self (Goffman n. 89). The ensuing realism possesses a more theatrical quality for the self mediates the self in a live audited environment that does not diminish the self, or, if it does, it can be countered, and face saved (‘credited’), gaze averted / gaze reflected.

Having previously participated in workshops and readings in New York that had resulted in the generation of both *Desire Lines* and *Troyanne*, I possessed a certain bank of material upon which to draw inspiration. However, as we (Topol and I) had concentrated, up to that point, on the development of *Troyanne* and on identifying personae to inhabit the hypothetical ‘A’ text, I had yet to systematically mine the rehearsal room for detail with which to furnish *A / The Biography of a Thing*. Between the readings at NYTW and the Winter Writers’ Retreat at the Lark, I hoped to achieve this. My search for the marked as well as the mundane, was reflected in the dialogic quality of the strand that hopefully approached the authenticity of quotidian American Real-

ism: the national genre.¹⁴⁷ The use of realism in *A / The Biography of a Thing* was to mirror the integrity and virtues of the American practitioners I had the honour of working with, yet I could not avoid mirroring their sincerity with a certain European cynicism. In addition, and in the spirit of honest reflexivity, I always felt the strand to be inelastic, for realism is not my natural register as previously detailed. Any alteration was vetted by cast, colleagues or director before inclusion in the text in order to maintain authenticity. And yet, in truth, this is the most inauthentic register within the text.

The initial draft of *Historia* (and subsequent drafts of *A / The Biography of a Thing*) is a testament to those who either knowingly or unknowingly participated in that process for it is a weave of their comments, actions and guidance. I tried to respect those from whom I stole lives by reflecting the truth of their lives as I perceived them: as they impacted upon mine. I might have travelled to America with a European cynicism, however, that cynicism was never directed at the people with whom I worked to achieve this text. In committing to honour all those who contributed to process, I never forgot that I was stealing a part of someone's life narrative, as previously detailed. In reflecting upon that process, I now see that I inadvertently shackled myself to it. Svich wrote that *A / The Biography of a Thing* was the dramatisation of 'how a play resists its own creation'. Whilst the play possibly resisted its own creation, it is also the dramatisation of how a dramatist resists his own play. I now see that whilst the rehearsal room element, which is predominantly quick-fire and comic, reflects the culture of Play Reading – the original enthusiasm of practice –, it challenges the documentary element (its own integrity compromised) for the right to be the core register of the text. Whilst the rehearsal room element could exist in symbiosis with the secondary order of documentary interviews (for both elements exist in the physical realm

¹⁴⁷ Katie Pearl in *Innovation in Five Acts*, critiques the critics, and in particular, the NY Times drama critic, Charles Isherwood who has historically championed American Realism: 'Over the years, Isherwood has consistently expressed his position on new writing, favouring work that hones more closely to realism over that which experiments with form and content [...] the mindset it represents becomes embedded in the national system that is evaluating our work' Pearl continues, challenging the dominance of realism and its grip upon the imagination of creatives working within the corporatised American theatre, 'The assertion that we shouldn't bother to imagine if it leads to failed innovation is both a stupid and dangerous stance – not just to our art form, but to our country as a whole' (Pearl 2015, 60 - 61).

/ the second subjective position), the primary order of interviews – the dramatisation of the ontological conceit between Drew and Thing – is antagonistic to the quotidian realism for it exists in an ontological realm (a dialogue conducted in the first subjective position); for Thing is a noThing, it is Drew in conversation with himself; myself in conversation with a text; a möbius strip of Words.

(iii) Epic Lyricism (the mise en abyme)

The New York theatre maker and co-founder of Gun Control Theatre Action, Zac Kline in conversation with a colleague, acknowledges what excites him in theatre, ‘The ferocity of an animal on stage’. Championing the elemental, Kline expresses his regard for Ivo Van Hove: ‘Being innovative is being aggressive and Van Hove is surely aggressive, and not just physical grappling [...] He’s aggressive with his intent’ (Kline 2015, 141). Likewise, *Being* is aggressive in intent. Coming into being is a visceral act (as Robins demonstrated); it is causal, not the effect. It is difficult for actors to reverse engineer that which has been inculcated within them. To say that actors bring their preconceptions to a text, is a truism that need not be stated, were it not for the fact that it has been actor preconception that has proved most problematic in the reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing*. On the occasions when drafts of that text have been read coldly by those unfamiliar with the source of the mise en abyme, the extracts from *Troyanne* were delivered as parody, as documented in the introduction to *Historia*: ‘Each time an actress began to read Sarah (reading Hannah), without being aware of *Troyanne*, she would invariably hit a melodramatic note as the register of one text impinged upon the presumed register of the other’: compare with the delivery of the extract from C. J. L. Almqvist’s *Signora Luna* in Khemiri’s *Invasion*. I tried to combat this tendency through specific stage directions (an orthography of performativity) but was still (and am still) left with a dilemma. Should I alter the lyrical style of the extracts so that they are more in keeping with the quotidian realism of the rehearsal room sections in *A / The Biography of a Thing*, thereby alleviating the necessary transformation in style and allaying any misinterpretation? As you will see from the portfolio text, I

did change the orthography of the text; it does not prescribe rhythm in the way that the fractured orthography of both *Troyanne* and *Desire Lines* does.

The misconception of those without knowledge of *Troyanne*, contrasts with the in camera reading of the initial draft of *Historia* at the NYTW. Four of the cast of six had participated in the Public Reading of *Troyanne* at NYTW. As a consequence, they were able to transfer their active memory of performing that play into their reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing*. It also contrasts with the Public Reading of *A / The Biography of a Thing* conducted in 2012 with the cast of the production of *Troyanne* in Chapter, Cardiff. Chris Durnall (the director of that production of *Troyanne* offered these impressions in private correspondence:

Resonance. Massive of course between the plays. A third layer created by us as actors in a rehearsed reading, reading a play about a rehearsed reading of a play which we were performing that evening. (...) Many of the things dramatised by the writer in *Biography* as being said by actors in rehearsal for *Troyanne* were things that the actors or [I] had actually said during our rehearsals for *Troyanne*. For example, the actress playing Hannah commenting on her arc as a performer emotionally was eerily reminiscent of what [she] actually said in rehearsal.

In both cases above, connections were made that enabled transformational renditions. However, without any prior knowledge of the true interdependence of both texts, when the lyrical *mise en abyme* emerges out of the comic realism, it seems to jar: it is

‘uneasy’ and American actresses assumed that it was parodic for how could such epic lyricism sit alongside quotidian realism without collapsing into irony.¹⁴⁸

With hindsight, I believe that I should have resisted fully developing *Troyanne*, as Topol cautioned: certainly there is too much of it embedded within the text. For once developed it was a Thing to contend with. Some Thing that existed less in symbiosis with and more in opposition to the meta-narrative. Had *Troyanne* purely been a *mise en abyme*, written, as originally planned as a device rather than artefact, it would have been slave to *A / The Biography of a Thing*. I acknowledge that I protected the integrity of *Troyanne* possibly to the detriment of *A / The Biography of a Thing*.

To summarise:

¹⁴⁸ Note, vis a vis the development of *Being* and antagonistic registers, in *New South Wales* – a devolutionary text set on the eve of the Welsh referendum for devolution (September 18th 1997) – a young Welshman, standing in line at Heathrow airport decides not to fly to New South Wales but to return home having realised that freedom is to be realised through the ballot box the very next day not found in the antipodes. The production opened at the Edinburgh Fringe on August 8th, 1999: though it was originally read in its one-act form in the Bristol Old Vic – produced by Show of Strength – both on the day of the referendum and the following day in 1997. Though singled out as a Critic's Pick prior to the festival by Cameron Robertson in the *The Stage* (August 5th 1999), it received mediocre reviews: 'Quietly satisfying' wrote Robertson in his follow up review. Generally, it proved to be a three star production. Frustrated, I went to see the influential Scotsman critic and academic, Owen Dudley Edwards. In conversation, I discussed theories of communication and how they influenced my direction. Know that the main action takes place in a black cab as it journeys from London to Wales in the early morning on the day of the referendum. The first twenty minutes of the text is ostensibly a monologic dialogue delivered by the Cockney Cabby to Alex, his young Welsh passenger, as they speed west along the M4. I directed Alex to ignore Cabby and be lost in his own inner narrative: a monologue intérieur absent, though, in hindsight, necessary were the text to facilitate a coming into *Being*: though *Being* at the time was an unformed desire rather than a formalised intent. Edwards asked 'What is the purpose of theatre?' To which I replied, 'To communicate.' To which he responded, 'Communicate then.' Leaving Edinburgh I instructed my assistant to sit on the play for a week in order to identify its flaws. Upon returning to Edinburgh, he stated that the issue was possible the lack of interest demonstrated by Alex in the Cabby's monologue. Having fractured the extra-scenic link, the audience were denied access to the action. In establishing an intra-scenic link, the extra-scenic dynamic came into play and the audience accessed the Cabby via the newly engaged passenger. Five minutes of redirection and the play went on to receive glowing reviews in both Ireland and Wales: 'Rowlands is a trailblazer in tune with the new Wales [...] try really hard not to miss it' (Tony Heath, Western Mail September 18th 1999). Steve Blandford identified it as 'one of the first dramatic engagements with the prospect of a devolved Wales and what such a place might feel to live in' (Rowlands 2011, ii). Though, considering the one act form read in Bristol, it could lay claim to being *the* first. In bowing to convention, the expectation of the audience / reception contract, I had compromised the nascent intent of *Being*, which both worried me at the time and served to focus future intention. Looking back upon the production, there were other fundamental flaws: (i) the lyricism of the text jarred with the realism sought by both actors schooled in The Method and unfamiliar with my previous work (I had mis-cast) and (ii) the literal design – a three quarter scale skeletal frame of a black cab – negated the un-real. Two chairs in an empty space would have sufficed and would have freed the action of all mimetic constraints, for the *mise-en-scène* generated the expectation of realism. My initial direction of the first twenty minutes was antagonistic to that expectation. Though the text was published in an edition of 100 by Bydbooks to coincide with the production, it is currently unavailable.

- (i) The documentary register has a split intention whilst the primary interview is partially (potentially wholly) ontological (un-real), the secondary interviews are wholly functional (real).
- (ii) The realism of the rehearsal room, whilst it could accommodate the secondary documentary interviews, exists in opposition to the primary documentary interviews for the reason given above.
- (iii) The lyrical mise en abyme, arising out of realism is problematic. When parodied it drags the performative into the ironic with the consequence that the text is simultaneously performative, representational and presentational. Hence, registers are antagonistic. One strategy would be to cut the mise en abyme down to the minimum necessary. However this would not remedy points (i) and (ii) above.

To return to Topol's observation made in private correspondence, 'perhaps the three forms needed to be more interwoven as opposed to being two separate full experiences that were meant to co-exist.' Having considered the issue, I would argue that an 'ease' can only evolve out of a unity of register. Considering this, I shall briefly outline a new form for *A / The Biography of a Thing* for, though currently flawed (the ultimate irony given the nature of the initial enthusiasm of practice), it is still a text in transition and potentially could realise kinetic form. As I noted in the introduction to *Historia*, as testament to those who were key to the development of both texts:

Both (texts) now lie silent and dormant within these covers, but I have seen them scream and fly. I witnessed Laila Robins' reading of Hannah (*Troyanne*) at NYTW. [...] At points, she became feral; so ugly, so 'pretty pretty', she rose from the dust, soared above Troy, then plummeted back into the unformed. I also recall Kelly McAndrew's contribution to (*A / The*) *Biography of a Thing*. Her constant flights of invention shaped Anja into who she has become, a 'Narcissus on Parade' :

not the victim of some dramatist, but the victim of her own drama within a dysfunctional model of theatre.¹⁴⁹ With awe I have also watched Jenny Seastone Stern dissipate into spirit and, Caleb blowing across plains of ‘terrible beauty.’ Yes, I have seen them fly.. once, and, I would love to see them fly off the page again. But the irony of condemning them to constant reading is the ultimate bitter-sweet irony. Both Topol and I came to the conclusion that it was ‘... time to move on, to name other things’.

4.9 *Re-formation of a Thing*

The initial enthusiasm of practice resulted in a first fragment that demonstrated an inherent performative intent. It was the dramatisation of a thing coming into being (though the Thing had yet to be written). During its development, that purity of intent was compromised at several stages, resulting, to borrow from Baudrillard, in the ‘foetal obesity of the text that became pregnant with its own body but unable to deliver itself’ (Baudrillard 1990, 27 - 28). One is left wondering, what is the true frame of the text? For it evolved beyond itself to a point where it has ‘lost its rule’, it has become obscene; its form no longer frames it. In 2017, in conversation with Chris Durnall, I mentioned that I was unhappy with *A / The Biography of a Thing*, I set about extracting both the rehearsal element and the mise en abyme from the text; a reversion in certain ways to the skeleton draft, *Documenta*. This left me with a text that had the simplicity of *Documenta* but benefitted from the complexity of the process that had re-

¹⁴⁹ In his essay ‘How empty is the Vessel?’ Todd London discusses the dangers of narcissism in relation to resting actors: ‘The largely democratic process of making plays, and the requirements of the day to day business of acting, demands the same self (ego) that the actor can suspend. When this collaborative counterforce fails and the actor is cut adrift - either through lack of consistent work, absence of a safe home base or hospitable creative environment - his or her isolation within the community grows... Narcissism, then is a response to powerlessness. Deprived of control over his or her own life, the narcissist constructs a grandiose self-image and scrambles to keep that image sturdy’ (London 2013, 59).

sulted in a clear split between both registers of the documentary element. Whilst certain key bits of information were lost in the cut, they could easily be re-inserted into the narrative. Extraction of extraneous elements also served to re-focus the remaining text.

One moment in particular signals the way forward were it to be developed further. At the end of Scene 11, when Sarah admits that the play touches a chord within her heart as it reminds her of her lost child, ‘Each reading was an act of... remembrance, if you like... of dreaming and mourning. (BEAT) God, I wanted that play to live, Drew. I wanted it to fly!’ Thing comments to Drew, ‘Did she say that? Did Sarah want that for me, Drew? Did she? I guess I knew she felt that way, because when she read me... when she read me, I... (RE-THINKS) Hell no, she never read me, Drew, she didn’t need to read me, she was me. When she was me, there was no artifice, no acting, no reading, just being – pure fucking being; she flew, we flew – like to the lark at break of day, Drew, together, we soared!’ (Portfolio, 385). It is an evental moment. The re-contextualisation of narrative suggests that Thing could be party to all interviews (as he was party to Bear’s testimony). Contemplating that turn proved revelatory; a moment of epistemic gain. If Thing was party to all interviews, all interviews would therefore be subsidiary to the Drew / Thing interview as opposed to being of equal weight i.e. subordinate to the primary narrative rather than in parallel with it (as they are within the current text). The question then arises, if the dyadic relationship is the main thrust of a text, is there a need for the live rendition of the subsidiary interviews or, could they be pre-recorded and reviewable by Drew in the way memory is ‘resuscitated by electronic means’ in Samuel Beckett’s *Krapp’s Last Tape* (West 2010, 13) i.e. in a fractured manner and not necessarily as linear narrative, though always as supplement to the dramatised discourse of the dyadic one? For Thing is a no-Thing, hence Drew (whether Thing itself, is live or mediatised) is, in effect, conducting an interview with himself: *I* in relation to *the* Other and, by extrapolation, this writer in relation to his text.

The second point to consider is the way in which that heuristic inquiry came to dictate process and continues to dictate process, of which this postulation regarding a possible new form for *A / The Biography of a Thing* is an extension. From the proto-draft, *Documenta*, the text existed as slave to a meta-narrative. Thus, the whole project takes on the form of a Babushka doll: a small text (*Troy Story*) within a text (*Troyanne*) within another text (*A / The Biography of a Thing*) contained within a volume (*Historia*) framed within a contextualising meta-text, *A Dramatist's Intent: Performativity, Relationality & Being*. *A / The Biography of a Thing* is a triumph of process over product and I must confess, it is a curate's egg of a text. However, despite its flawed nature, I am confident that it could still achieve kinetic, albeit, as stated, in an alternative form. However, in order for it to do so, it will need to free itself of the process out of which it evolved. Only then will it come into *Being* and fly, 'like to the lark...'

In Conclusion

‘Self discovery requires *poiesis*, making.’

(Taylor 2018, 62)

In drawing this document to a close, I find that I am left with a series of reflections rather than empirical conclusions; for the bricolage nature of this reflexive, arguably analogical document, would preclude any empirical conclusions *per se*.¹⁵⁰ Arising out of an ‘enthusiasm of practice’ rather than a ‘sense of problem,’ whatever insight it offers is predicated upon the fact that it stands as a subjective record of process undertaken by this writer at a particular point in time.¹⁵¹ ‘Biographical memory’, as Kim Etherington informs us, ‘is social process’ (Etherington 2004, 70). The works evolved out of a unique interface of sensibilities – the result of an unrepeatable causality – hence the chronological nature of this contextualising document and its claim to particular rather than substantial insight.

Initial resistance to the perceived narcissism of heuristic inquiry stymied formal commencement of this thesis: it has indeed been ‘a long time coming.’ It was not until I encountered Etherington’s defence of autoethnographic practice (Etherington 2004, 141) that the fears I possessed regarding the use of the first-person pronoun in academic research were partly assuaged. And yet it still troubled me, what credence could the I who writes about an historic I, who wrote of the *I*, possess? I felt, along with many reflexive researchers, an anxiety regarding the acceptance of self as both subject and object of research (Etherington 2004, 242). A subsequent reading of Bradley

¹⁵⁰ Analogical thinking, as defined by Oliver Feltham in his translator’s introduction to Alain Badiou’s *Being and Event*, ‘determines its own structures and then ‘discovers’ them outside itself, in the real of other discourses’ (Badiou 2007, xxii). Possibly this admission would reduce this contextualising document to the worst that Robin Nelson fears for PaR practice, where a practitioner, having first engaged in practice, plucks theory out of the air ‘in an attempt to lend gravity to practice’ (Nelson 2013, 32).

¹⁵¹ See Bradley Haseman’s ‘precondition of engagement in performative research’ (Haseman 2006).

Haseman's counterarguments to detractors of performative research, suggested a way forward. Haseman contrasted the imperative of a literature review in qualitative research with an alternative 'contextual review' as the basis for performative research stemming out of practice. Out of which, a 'web of connection' arises through intertextuality resulting in a 'messy' form of research that has, as Haseman informs us, citing Denzin and Lincoln, 'reshaped entirely the debates around [...] the meaning of research itself' (Haseman 2006). This document constitutes the messy account of a bricoleur.

As stated at the outset, my aim in writing this contextualising overview has been twofold. Firstly, I have attempted to detail the hitherto instinctive practice within my work, the unarticulated givens that lay at the heart of my creative process that in toto constitute the intended enactment of *Being* as event. In so doing I have discovered a vocabulary for the self. And, in the process of attaining that vocabulary, I have achieved epistemic gain, for the drafting of this overview has proved to be a true transformation; or in Žižekian terms, a material event in itself that has actuated an immaterial reframing of self. Secondly, I have attempted to articulate that gain, so that others, who choose to approach this writer through his texts (either within this portfolio or without) might better understand the nature of my formalistic intent: the cry of one in the communal cry of humanity in and through time. In that, both the portfolio texts and this text (as one unified meta-narrative) are historic monuments: though not in a monumental sense, as granite mnemonics of the past. Rather they are monuments as defined by Rancière (drawing upon Deluze and Guattari), sensory weaves that are 'always in the process of becoming' / *coming into being* through relationality: Things that await to confide in 'the ear of the future' (Rancière 2011, 55 - 57). They stand in expectation of those that seek to approach the work and / or the person who executed that work and the broader I dramaturgy, of which, this work, is merely one station along the line.

Approaching a conclusion of sorts, I ponder once again upon split-subjectivity in the context of creative writing. Carl Rosen quotes the dramatist, Sam Shepard, 'I begin to get the haunting sense that something in me writes but it's not necessarily me. At least it's not the 'me' that takes credit for it' (Rosen 2004, 54 - 55). In essence, Shepard was asking, who forms the self? Who writes the text? The *I* or *the* Other? Roland Barthes famously wrote in *The Death of the Author*, 'The author is never more than the instance writing, just as *I* is nothing other than the instance saying *I*' (Barthes 1977, 145). Did I write this autoethnographic text, or did it re-write me (as all I dramaturgical texts do; witness testimonies to the unrehearsed accidents that result in transformations, the material events that have re-framed the self)?

Making his case for coeval practice within anthropological research, Johannes Fabian notes in *Time and the Other*:

An ethnographic past can become the most vivid part of our present existence. Persons, events, puzzlements and discoveries encountered during fieldwork may continue to occupy thoughts and fantasies for many years. This is probably not just because our work in ethnography constantly turns us towards the past; rather it is because our past is present in us as a *project*, hence as our future. (Fabian 2014, 93)

Whilst my project, as stated, did not adhere to traditional academic practice, it was fieldwork of sorts, and this reflexive text, that takes its place within a matrix of texts, has been my future for many years. I have been re-formed in opposition to it; been located and audited by it. I have existed in thrall to it, as much as it has existed in thrall to me in our state of 'attentive involvement'. Having 'haunted' me for close on a decade, it truly is time, to walk away from it; time to let this particular memory house burn down, and name other Thing

A / THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A THING

SCENE 1

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE THING (1)

DREW INTERVIEWS THING. HE SETS UP HIS CAMERA

THING How long has it been?

DREW Ten years

THING I'd almost given up hope

DREW Nearly there

THING Take your time, I'm going no-where. That's a handy thing...

DREW It is.

THING ... handy little thing

DREW Yeah. Would you mind just uh... just saying something so that I can check the level

THING What?

DREW Anything

THING Like what?

DREW Like whatever comes to mind. What did you have for breakfast?

THING I don't eat breakfast

DREW Ok, so how was your journey here today?

THING Long

DREW Tell me about it

THING How long have you got? (THING LAUGHS WITH IRONY)

DREW (ALSO APPRECIATES THE IRONY) Ok... let me just play that back

THING (TALKING OVER PLAYBACK) It's really good to see you again, Drew.

DREW Yeah

THING Yeah. I've often wondered were you were, what you were doing. God, I hate the sound of my own voice..

DREW You have a good voice

THING I've heard it too often...

DREW Yeah, I guess...

THING Yeah...

DREW Ok. (SETS UP TO RECORD) So uh, if you're ready?

THING Sure thing. Fire away (HE DRINKS LONG FROM A CAN OF PABST)

DREW (BEGINS TO RECORD) Ok. So uh, if you don't mind, I thought we could start at the get go

THING The what?

DREW Start with The Grizzly

THING The Grizzly?

DREW Yeah, that incident with The Grizzly. After all, that was the beginning

THING The beginning...

DREW Mm

THING Yeah... well, that day, um... well we were both there that day when The Grizzly walked in

DREW Both?

THING Yeah, Bill and me. We were always together back then; inseparable, like a man and his shadow. Though who was the shadow and who was the man? We'd argue about that.

DREW Mm

THING So, yeah, we were both there then. (HALF BEAT) Such a long time ago now... a lifetime. I feel a strange kinda distance... and loss. Do you understand?

DREW I understand loss

THING Yeah, I guess you would. (HALF BEAT) Because a part of me wants to be sitting there, with Bill again, waiting for The Grizzly to walk in, part of me wants to forget... everything,. But that would be... suicide, I guess.

DREW I guess

THING Suicide...

DREW Yeah

THING Painful (HE STOPS HIMSELF)

DREW (BEAT) Look, if at any point you want me to stop recording, I'll understand; if you don't want to speak..

THING Hell no, it's time I spoke again... (DELIBERATELY INTO CAMERA PLAYFULLY) it's time

DREW Yeah

THING Show time (HE CRUMPLES A CAN OF PABST AND OPENS ANOTHER ONE) Are you sure you don't want one?

DREW No thank you

THING No? Where are you from? (BECAUSE DREW DOES NOT DRINK) California? (HALF LAUGHS AT HIS OWN QUIP)

DREW No. Army kid; from everywhere, from nowhere.

THING Is that a fact?

DREW Mm

THING So many of you army kids are actors.

DREW Yeah...

THING What is it about army kids and acting?

DREW We move around, we act to fit in, I guess

THING Yeah, I guess that's it. I've always wondered about that... always wondered. Anyway, where was I?

DREW The Grizzly walking in

THING Yeah, The Grizzly. Have you met him yet?

DREW No

THING Are you gonna interview him?

DREW Maybe

THING You should. He's one helluva good guy. If you talk to him, say hello from me

DREW I will

THING The Grizzly is... a bear of a man, you know. When he walks into a room, he fills the doorframe; fills it. But, when he walked into the office that morning, it was... oh, I don't know... as if he'd shrunk or some thing. And he was white...

DREW White?

THING Yeah, all the Indigenous'd drained out of him. He was... how do you say?

DREW Ashen?

THING Yeah, that's it, ashen... unexpected, like a, like a black man's blush; not that Black men don't blush, it's just, unexpected.

DREW Yeah

THING Yeah... Anyway, turns out The Grizzly had a brother, and that brother had a son; The Grizzly's nephew, a good kid, they say; a crack shot. Even as a boy, hunting in the woods of Ohio, he had the eye and stillness to kill with compassion; almost an act of love, to kill cleanly like that. That's a gift, a true gift. The family were so proud of him; Quarter back of the college team, Prom King, all the girls loved him – he was a god! Perhaps the other gods were jealous of him! That's why they took him so young. He was back on leave after his second tour of duty in Iraq. He'd brought his rifle home to show his Pa.

DREW He'd brought it home with him!

THING Yeah, I think.

DREW Right...

THING Maybe I'm wrong. Does it matter?

DREW No

THING A rifle's a rifle... and The Grizzly's brother was checking the sights when he accidentally fired the thing, killing his son...

DREW Why was it loaded?

THING I don't know, Drew... why anything? I just know the bullet went straight through that kid's eye; into his brain...

DREW (HALF INTONED) Wow...

THING ... only twenty-one, his whole life ahead of him. I know everyone says that, but... Can you imagine how his Pa felt, to have killed the promise of everything he'd ever hoped for? Or what about his Mom, for having to live with a husband who killed their only son? One mistake... and, all their hopes were blown away! Gone... God, you just don't want to imagine things like that, do you? You don't even want to be told them. But we sat there that morning as The Grizzly told Bill and me about his nephew and his brother who was inconsolable, and his sister in law, who was hysterical ... and The Grizzly was crying. And we didn't know where to look or what to do. We felt we should hug him. But how do you hug a bear? A bear hugs you! So we just sat there, afraid... thinking about ourselves; about all the things we wanted to do with our lives; lives which, until then, had seemed never ending... but suddenly felt so fragile and short. "Give me an hour to collect my thought and I'll start work" The Grizzly said "There's no rush, it's just theatre." Bill

said “It means nothing.” (AN IRONIC LAUGH) Nothing. Then we got out of there leaving The Grizzly alone in his office; in shock... in despair. And as we walked through the door, I looked at Bill and he smiled at me and said “Now I know you! I know you, now...” (TAKES A SIP FROM HIS PABST) Is that enough of a beginning for you, Drew?

SCENE 2
THE REHEARSAL ROOM (1)

WE SEE A BARE ROOM – A REHEARSAL ROOM WITHIN WHICH PUBLIC READINGS TAKE PLACE. IN IT ARE FIVE MUSIC STANDS, A TABLE AND 8 TO 10 CHAIRS. THE DIRECTOR, FREDDY, SITS ALONE. HE’S IN MID CONVERSATION...

FREDDY ... what do you mean you have lice, Dad? I don’t think lice bite. Fleas bite, right? What? It’s probably just beg bugs, Dad. (BEAT) Dad, I can’t fly to Wisconsin just to see your bites. Yeah, I know Mom would’ve known what to do... (UPSETTING LISTENING) Sure, I know... I know, Dad... yeah...

SARAH ENTERS. FREDDY ACKNOWLEDGES HER AND IS EAGER TO HANG UP

FREDDY ... look, I’m in the middle of something here. I’ll call you back, ok. (LISTENS) Yeah, yeah... don’t worry, Dad. Yeah, bye, (CHANGES) Sorry about that. I’m Freddy, the director. You must be Sarah

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY it’s good to meet you...

SARAH ... and you

FREDDY ...you know, I saw you in a Steppenwolf show...

SARAH Really? Which one?

FREDDY Uh, I forget... it was a few years back now. All I remember is, you were great...

SARAH Thank you

FREDDY Yeah. I was so surprised that you were in New York. Since when?

SARAH A couple of months

FREDDY That's great. Great for New York, I mean; bad for Chicago.

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY Yeah. (HALF BEAT) I was thrilled you could make this reading

SARAH It's a good script

FREDDY Yeah, Bill's a good writer

SARAH I don't know his work

FREDDY I don't think he's ever been done out of New York; he's barely made it above Fourteenth

SARAH Right

FREDDY He's a Downtown sort of guy, you know

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY Doesn't travel well; like some fancy French wine

SARAH Right...

FREDDY ... an acquired taste. (HALF BEAT) So where are you staying, Sarah?

SARAH Upper West side,

FREDDY Nice. I've never lived there myself. Never will in this job, I guess. But, had I made other life decisions, Sarah, you know... I wouldn't have minded living up there

SARAH It's a great Neighborhood

FREDDY Yeah, it is, and I love the Fairways and Zabar's

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY Yeah, great... (HALF BEAT) So, uh, have you been busy since moving to New York?

SARAH So, so

FREDDY Ah, it's so, so for everyone these days, Sarah. There's less money around; not a lot of production, just a lot of readings, one hell of a lot of readings

SARAH I love readings

FREDDY Hell, yeah, me too and work is work...

SARAH Yeah...

FREDDY Yeah, gotta keep working; most times, for nothing, but you gotta keep...

ENTER ANJA (PRONOUNCED ANJA NOT ANYA).
SHE IS AN ACTRESS AROUND THE SAME AGE AS SARAH.

ANJA God, I am so cold!

FREDDY Anja!

ANJA It's like Alaska out there, Freddy

FREDDY Anja, this is Sarah

ANJA Hi, Sarah

SARAH Hi

FREDDY Sarah's just moved to town from Chicago

ANJA Chicago! (AS SHE TAKES OFF HER COAT ETC)

SARAH Yeah

ANJA I love that town

SARAH Yeah

ANJA Yeah, all those little neighborhoods

SARAH Yeah

ANJA And great theatre

SARAH Yeah (THEY SMILE. THEY SIZE EACH OTHER UP)

ANJA Hey, were you in August on Broadway? Loved that show

SARAH No

ANJA No? Oh, I thought I recognized you, sorry. But, great to meet you

SARAH Yeah...

ANJA Yeah, so cold...

FREDDY Has Bill called you this morning?

ANJA Mm?

FREDDY I was supposed to meet up with him before rehearsal, but he didn't show

ANJA No? I just got a text from him

FREDDY Where is he?

ANJA At home

FREDDY What in God's name's he doing there?

ANJA He's got a virus

FREDDY A what?

ANJA Twenty four hour thing

FREDDY Today!

ANJA Yeah

FREDDY Why didn't he text me?

ANJA I don't know

FREDDY Jesus!

ANJA Yeah, real bad timing

FREDDY Can he make the reading?

ANJA He's not sure (AS IF EXPLAINING) Bill's ill; the writer

SARAH Oh...

ANJA Yeah...

SARAH I was so looking forward to meeting him

ANJA It's the first public reading of his play as well

FREDDY And it's a backers reading

ANJA Is it?

FREDDY Well, not quite. But there'll be folks there, and you never know.

ANJA You never know

FREDDY It's not good

ANJA Never is with Bill

FREDDY Always something... always, something. Sorry about this, Sarah.

SARAH It's ok

FREDDY No, it's.... typical

ANJA The show must go on, he said

FREDDY It's not a show - it's a god damn reading. We're only here for him. I'll give him a call (HE REACHES FOR HIS CELL AND HEADS AWAY FROM THE TWO ACTRESSES)

ANJA You either love Bill or hate him

SARAH I love his play...

ANJA Yeah?

SARAH The language is so rich, so many layers, so much pain

ANJA Bill does pain real well

FREDDY Bill, it's Freddy. I hear you're ill...

ENTER MOLLY CARRYING A COFFEE. FREDDY MOTIONS A 'HI' THEN TURNS AWAY – THE FOLLOWING EXCHANGES ARE OVER FREDDY'S DIALOGUE

FREDDY ... so, how ill is ill?

MOLLY Hi

ANJA Hi. Are you Molly?

MOLLY Yeah

FREDDY Can you drag yourself in for the reading? Because uh...

ANJA I'm Anja. This is Sarah

SARAH Hi

MOLLY Hi

ANJA Freddy told me about you. He said you were pretty

FREDDY ... because I don't see much point reading without you. It's kind of like the Mountain without Mohamed. Just give me a call, Bill. I'll keep my cell on. (DISCONNECTS) Molly, hi! Good to see you again. This is Anja and Sarah

ANJA We're introduced already, Freddy

FREDDY Good

ANJA Did you get his voice mail?

FREDDY Yeah

ANJA He never picks up

FREDDY No

MOLLY Is there a problem?

ANJA The writer can't make it

MOLLY Oh, no

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY Too bad

ANJA Yeah

FREDDY Mmm...

MOLLY I was so looking forward to meeting him as well

ANJA So was Sarah

MOLLY Oh, damn...

SARAH Yeah...

ANJA Yeah...

SARAH Say, have I got time to grab a quick coffee, Freddy?

FREDDY Yeah, and we're waiting on Drew as well, so uh...

SARAH Can I get one for anyone else?

ANJA No

MOLLY (SHE HAS A CUP) I'm good

FREDDY Um, would you?

SARAH Sure

FREDDY Can you get me a Chai Latte please? (HE REACHES INTO HIS POCKET FOR MONEY)

SARAH I'll get that, it's ok

FREDDY Sure?

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY Thanks, Sarah (SARAH EXITS) She's great; a fabulous actress

ANJA You've said

FREDDY She really is.

ANJA Great, just what New York needs, Freddy; another fabulous actress, like a hole in the head

FREDDY But you're the best

ANJA Best what? Hole in the head?

FREDDY You know what I mean (FREDDY TURNS AWAY SLIGHTLY EMBARRASSED)

ANJA Yeah, sure...

MOLLY Are we still going to read?

ANJA God knows. Freddy?

FREDDY What?

ANJA Are we still going to read?

FREDDY I don't know... without Bill...

ANJA You should know him by now

FREDDY I know, I just live in hope

ANJA We all live in hope (TO MOLLY) Bill's hopeless

MOLLY Right

ANJA And he wonders why he's never made it big!

FREDDY Sorry about this, Molly...

MOLLY No, it's ok

FREDDY No, it's...

ANJA Wait! (HER CELL WARNS HER OF AN INCOMING TEXT) I got a text. It's Bill

FREDDY What does it say?

ANJA God... it just says "Read"

FREDDY 'Read' Is that it? Has god spoken?

SCENE 3
THE INTERVIEW WITH MOLLY (1)

MOLLY ... on the N line, heading down to Coney Island. I used to love walking the boardwalk in the rain. Have you been there?

DREW Yeah

MOLLY Yeah? Isn't it great; in the Winter, when all the shops are boarded up and the fair's closed?

DREW Yeah, it's...

MOLLY It's what?

DREW It's ... I don't know, it's ... got a small town feel, I guess?

MOLLY Yeah, that's what I like about it; a world away from Manhattan

DREW Yeah, it is

MOLLY When I first moved to New York, I lived up in Washington Heights, got a day job filing stuff in a bank Downtown, and I hated it. So, on Sundays I'd put my Hunter boots on, thinking I was a someone, and I'd catch the subway all the way down to Coney Island and dream I was back in New London again

DREW New London?

MOLLY You know New London?

DREW I know the O'Neil

MOLLY Yeah, I guess you would. It's beautiful there, isn't it, the beach below the house?

DREW Yeah

MOLLY Yeah (BEAT. THEN, ALMOST OFF HAND...) I nearly drowned there once

DREW No

MOLLY Yeah

DREW No

MOLLY But I didn't, obviously

DREW Thank God

MOLLY "He saved you" my father used to say, "God saved you for a special reason, my special, special girl" (HALF BEAT) He left my Mom and me when I was ten; obviously, I wasn't special enough for him! And. I'm still waiting for God to bless me

DREW But, you have a beautiful son

MOLLY Yeah, I know, and I love him, but I always thought I was destined for more than just being a Mom, you know. (REALISING) God, that's a terrible thing to say, isn't it?

DREW Actors say worse

MOLLY Yeah. Guess we're all damned

DREW Yeah (BEAT) So you were on the the N line...

MOLLY Yeah, the N line, and the train was heading South through Brooklyn... and this Chinese woman got on. She sat next to me and took a drawing of a horse out of her bag; like a child's drawing; but not a child's, just a bad drawing, I mean really bad. And she was tracing the lines of the horse with a finger tip... tracing them, like this (SHE TRACES THE AIR). And I was fascinated by this. And I looked up, and Bill was sitting opposite, and he was fascinated by her as well. And I'd avoided his gaze up until then, but there was a moment... of meeting, you know... and we uh, we both rolled our eyes, like that, and... and half an hour later we stood together on the boardwalk

DREW Right

MOLLY “That’s where I come from” he said, pointing out to sea. “I come from beyond the Horizon; long time ago” And I remember, his finger traced the line between sea and sky – so grey, they were almost one. (BEAT) And that’s how we met... on the N line heading down to Coney Island...

DREW Nice

MOLLY Nice? That’s not a word I’d use in the same sentence as Bill. It’s uh... what’s the word? Oxy something?

DREW Oxymoronic

MOLLY Yeah, that...

DREW (BEAT) Where was Bill living when you met him?

MOLLY (TAKEN ABACK A BIT) Where was he living?

DREW Yeah

MOLLY In Brooklyn

DREW Brooklyn?

MOLLY Yeah

DREW Oh, I thought he was still on Bowery

MOLLY When we met?

DREW Yeah...

MOLLY No, he’d left her by then

DREW Oh, right...

MOLLY Why do you ask?

DREW Oh, it was just something Anja said

MOLLY You’ve talked to her?

DREW Yeah

MOLLY And?

DREW She lives in Chicago now...

MOLLY I don't care where she lives, what did she say?

DREW That um... well, she said that Bill met you when they were still living together on Bowery. And that you stole him from her, that's why he moved out

MOLLY That's crap. Crap! Whatever she's said to you, Drew, and actually, I don't really want to know, but I'll tell you this. By the time I met Bill, he was well rid of her and living in Brooklyn

DREW Sorry. I misunderstood

MOLLY She misunderstood

DREW Sure

MOLLY She never understood... the bitch!

SCENE 4
THE INTERVIEW WITH ANJA (1)

ANJA I hated that play - *Troyanne*. I didn't say anything at the time... especially not to Bill; not that we were speaking by the time of that reading, just texting. He said he wanted to know everything that happened in the rehearsal room. I felt important. I felt he needed me again. I should've know. The bastard! God, I hate him, and I hated that play, still hate it

DREW What do you hate about it?

ANJA The... the pornography of it

DREW Pornography?

ANJA Yeah, not sexual... but emotional pornography – which, I think, is a hell of a lot more offensive. I mean, anybody can fuck naked on stage, where's the shock in a limp cock? There's literally no point in it! But when someone is stripped bare of all dignity, flayed before your eyes and you're forced to watch all their pain and misery laid bare before

you, that is pure and utter pornography...absolute degradation, Drew. And Bill specialized in that! He degraded everyone, always has done. It's what he did with *Troyanne*. He abused them

DREW Who?

ANJA Those poor people of Troy

SCENE 5

AN INTERVIEW WITH THING (2)

DREW So why Troy, Ohio?

THING Why, Ohio? Yeah, that's a good question. Well Bill was lecturing on Greek tragedy in Athens, Ohio at the time

DREW Athens

THING Yeah, pretty, pretty place. That's where we met The Grizzly. He was a designer; working on a show Bill was directing... the *Trojan Women*. Do you know it?

DREW Yeah

THING Well, Bill saw, in the merging of Bear's tragedy with the Greek tragedy, the play he wanted to write; it was a Zen moment, a knowing, you know? He was gonna write a version of the *Trojan Women* and set it in 'a' Troy, somewhere in the U.S. of today. But, which Troy? I mean, he'd heard of Troy, Michigan and Troy, New York State. But, Troy, Ohio? Had you heard of that place?

DREW Not before the play

THING Exactly. But, as Bill was lecturing in Athens at the time, he took a long shot and googled Troy, Ohio. He just googled it, and there it was...

DREW Coincidence

THING "Fucking providence", he called it "Fucking fate." So, this one day, we caught a Greyhound down to Dayton, where the 'Accord' was signed. And when we got there, we were wandering around looking for a bus to this mythic Troy, but we couldn't find one. And we couldn't find one, because there wasn't one; not one bus or train to a city of fifteen thousand! And that got Bill going again. "Fucking America. Fucking

car culture!” Anyway, there was this little deli and we went into it to see if we could get a cab - which we could, if we robbed the bank! And we were counting our bucks, when this black guy said “I’ll take you”

DREW That’d be Jessie?

THING That’s right

DREW *Jessie, without whom I would not have reached the Square*

THING Yeah, that’s him, how did you know?

DREW The dedication on the title page

THING Yeah, yeah of course, the dedication. So, we cut a deal and he drove us all the way to the Square in the heart of Troy. And a few days later, when all the interviews and research was done, and by then, I had a name, he picked us up again.

DREW You had a name?

THING Yeah... you see, before Troy, I was just an idea in Bill’s head; a play to be written. But after our trip to Troy, Ohio, he didn’t just know me, he could put a name to me, and he could begin to write me...

DREW *Troyanne*

THING POPS A CAN OF PABST

SCENE 6

THE INTERVIEW WITH ANJA (2)

ANJA He went to that town, he’d never been there before, and he exploited the poor people who lived there. They trusted him with their lives... trusted him with real deep things. And what did he do? He abused their trust; he took their pains and laid them bare on the stage in front of everyone

DREW Yeah... but didn’t they knew they were being interviewed for a theatre project

ANJA Yeah, they knew...

DREW Ok, so... so how is that pornographic... if they knew...?

ANJA Look, Drew, people just want to talk. And people trust without knowing who they're trusting or if they can trust them at all. People trust blindly, Drew, you know?

DREW Sure

ANJA Now, I'm not trying to do them down, but the good people of Troy were honest God fearing people; welcoming. They'd no idea he'd take advantage of their welcome and exploit them. Now had he exploited them with compassion, you could almost forgive him that, but he didn't; believe me, he never did. Bill used them, as he used everyone - deliberately... deliberately, Drew. Read that play again! He's was almost jacking off on their pain. It sickened me, because there was something voyeuristic about that play... pure pornography and I hated it. Still hate it, hate him; over him, but hate him, hated that reading for what he did to me, hated it... sorry... (SILENCE)

SCENE 7

THE REHEARSAL ROOM (2)

THEY ARE STILL WAITING ON DREW – THE GOSSIP IS PACED AND TUMBLING

FREDDY Bill? It's Freddy. Are you on your way? Just call me, ok...

ANJA ... a play about a woman who was being tortured by the Gestapo. And she was supposed to be naked. So, they'd had a couple a days rehearsal and the director asked her "Would she do it in the nude?"

SARAH In the nude?

ANJA Yeah

SARAH And did she do it?

ANJA Yeah. Though with her legs, she should've thought twice. But, saying that, she's a great actress, and she nearly got past her cellulite...

SARAH And this was just a reading, right?

ANJA Yeah, but a reading's a reading, you know

SARAH Sure

ANJA (TO MOLLY) This is New York. You never know who's going to be in the audience. You never know

SARAH I guess you never know

ANJA You never know, eh, Molly? (TO MOLLY)

MOLLY No

ANJA No. You never know. So she was naked and then she had to be ducked in water

SARAH Script in hand!

ANJA I swear to God. Freddy was there. Freddy, tell them

FREDDY Tell them what?

ANJA About that Gestapo play

FREDDY What about it?

ANJA Was it a reading or what!

FREDDY A reading, yeah

ANJA And at one point, she was all wet and naked, like some kind of mermaid or...walrus or something. And the actor playing the Gestapo officer had to pick her up. And he was holding her and holding his script (EXTENDED ARM) like that, trying to read... because he was far sighted. And I thought, oh my God! Any moment, he's going to drop her. And I just kept thinking, What's he going to do? Save his page or save her!

SARAH Dilemma...

ANJA Yeah, it was pure theatre; absolute pure theatre. Wasn't it, Freddy?

FREDDY Yeah, but it just wasn't a clear reading, you know, I didn't get a sense of the play. So what was the point?

ANJA Exactly, it was embarrassing

FREDDY It was a shame, because she's such a great actress

ANJA In clothes, maybe

FREDDY She's got a great body, Anja

ANJA I've got better legs than her, Freddy! And I read for that part

FREDDY Did you?

ANJA Yeah

FREDDY I didn't know that.

ANJA Well, I did

FREDDY You would've been better

ANJA You don't have to say that, Freddy

FREDDY No, you would've. She lacks your subtlety

ANJA She works more than I do; the bitch

MOLLY RECEIVES A TEXT – SHE WILL RECEIVE
TEXTS PERIODICALLY DURING THE ACTION

MOLLY Sorry

SHE TAKES OUT HER CELL, READS IT AND REPLIES

FREDDY Didn't she used to have longer hair?

ANJA Yeah

FREDDY Why did she cut it? Did she split up with her boyfriend or something?

ANJA No, she cut it for Locks of Love

SARAH Locks of Love?

ANJA ...the cancer charity

SARAH Ah, yeah...

FREDDY Has anyone seen that play about cancer? The one everyone's talking about

ANJA I hate plays about cancer

SARAH I haven't seen it

FREDDY Molly?

MOLLY (TEXTING) Mm?

FREDDY Seen that play about cancer?

MOLLY Yeah

SARAH I'm thinking of going

FREDDY I wouldn't bother

SARAH No?

FREDDY No. God, this Chai Latte's good...

THING COMES INTO THE ACTION – UNSEEN BY ALL

THING If we were a play, Drew, that exact moment was our beginning

ANJA Didn't you direct a few readings of that, Freddy?

THING I was a new draft upon a table waiting for you to walk in

FREDDY Yeah, it's still a problem play

THING ... a text waiting to be flattered

ANJA All plays are problems to you.

THING ... interpreted

ANJA Bill liked it

FREDDY Did he? (FREDDY IS PIQUED)

THING ... then massacred with kind intentions

ANJA (TO MOLLY) Did you, Molly?

MOLLY (DISTRACTED BY HER PHONE) Mm?

ANJA Did you like the play?

MOLLY Yeah, it was ok...

FREDDY Yeah, it was ok (WITH IRONY), but it needed cuts and the direction was uneven... (HE MOVES AWAY. A LOOK FROM ANJA)

THING Scene 1. Freddy, a theatre director, in a pique of jealousy backs into a corner to ponder his own inadequacy. Enter Drew

DREW ENTERS IN 'REAL TIME'

FREDDY Drew!

DREW I'm sorry I'm late

FREDDY Wow, at least you're here, not like some

DREW Like who?

FREDDY Bill's AWOL

DREW Bill?

FREDDY Yeah...

DREW Damn

FREDDY But it's good to see you...

ANJA (FINISHING A TEXT AND PRESSING SEND.) We have the same phone case

MOLLY Oh, yeah

ANJA Neat

MOLLY Awesome

ANJA Hey, sweet boy!

FREDDY I didn't know you two knew each other already. (ANJA AND DREW)

DREW Hell, yeah

FREDDY And this is Molly

MOLLY Hi

DREW Hi, I'm Drew

FREDDY And this is Sarah from Chicago (HE THEN SITS AT THE TABLE)

SARAH Hi

DREW Hi

ANJA So how ya doing? (THEY HUG)

DREW Ok

ANJA You're shivering (SHE RUBS HIM WARM)

DREW Am I?

ANJA Good to see you

FREDDY Ok, well I don't think we can't wait on Bill for ever, so we might as well make a start.

DREW Yeah. I heard about you and Bill... sorry

ANJA I'm over it

FREDDY Sarah, if you could just sit opposite

SARAH Left or right?

FREDDY My left. And Anja, if you could sit next to her

ANJA Ok (TO DREW) It's good to see you again...

FREDDY And Molly, if you sit the other side of Sarah, and Drew, if you can sit next to Anja, we should be fine

Drew Sure

FREDDY (LEANS OVER TO DREW) You ok, Drew? You seem a bit distracted...

DREW I just got caught up with a few things, sorry

FREDDY Is there a problem?

DREW No. Who am I reading again?

FREDDY The Rookie cop

DREW Sorry (FREDDY PASSES DREW A SCRIPT) Thanks

THING There! That was our 'Grizzly' moment! If we were a play, Drew, that was our 'inciting incident'

FREDDY (FREDDY LOOKS AT DREW - CONCERNED) Do you want to grab a coffee before we start?

DREW No, I'm ok

FREDDY Sure?

DREW I'm fine

FREDDY Ok. (SMILES AT DREW, UNCERTAIN, BUT CONTINUES) Ok, so, um, before we read, I'd like to present a few thoughts. You've all read the play... Drew?

DREW Yeah

FREDDY Good. Well, for those of us familiar with his work, it's a typical Bill play; difficult. Not that it's a problem, Anja (POINTEDLY), it's just a 'challenge' and we need to rise to that challenge. And so, uh... what I suggest is that we shouldn't fear the tragedy or get hung up on the language. We should be brave, embrace the poetry, and go for it! But, saying that, I don't want you to sacrifice clarity for emotion. I know I'm stating the obvious here, but this is not a production. So, what I'm looking for is a clear reading given the lack of time. Is that ok?

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY Mm

FREDDY Ok...

SARAH One thing, Freddy... sorry. Do you want an Ohio accent?

FREDDY No, let's just keep it clean; no accents, no naked torture in this reading

SARAH Sure

FREDDY Right, well we'll work through it bit by bit. So, uh... stop if you have a question. Ok? (THEY NOD IN AGREEMENT). Everybody ready? Sarah?

SARAH Yeah

FREDDY Let's give it a whirl... I'll read the stage directions...

THE CAST CHANGE. WHERE ONCE THERE WAS
FLIPPANCY, THERE IS TRUTH AND INTENSITY

THING You know, Drew, you know what keeps me hoping? Those few brief moments of anticipation before my first words rise from the page. In those moments, everything seems possible... and sometimes, just some times... it is...

FREDDY *Troyanne.* A woman lies in the front yard of a house, Corner of Troy and Indiana (suburb of Woodlawn) in the city of Troy, Ohio. We hear the chirp of insects, cars passing along North Market and, in the distance, a freight train on its way to Detroit. Its horn sounds forlorn. A dog barks...

BOTH A & S Get up... Get up, wom...

THEY STOP. THERE IS A MOMENT OF UNCERTAINTY

ANJA Freddy...

FREDDY Is there a problem?

ANJA Yeah, I thought I was reading *The Woman*?

SARAH Oh, you're reading *The Woman*. Sorry, my mistake

FREDDY No, no, no, Sarah. Um, (TO HIMSELF) oh shit... Did you get my email, Anja?

ANJA What email?

FREDDY The email I sent you

ANJA When did you send it?

FREDDY Yesterday?

ANJA Yesterday?

FREDDY Yeah

ANJA No

FREDDY Oh, that's too bad, because in it, I asked if you could read the Neighbor

ANJA The Neighbor?

FREDDY Yeah

ANJA I didn't know I was reading the Neighbor

FREDDY You obviously didn't get my email

ANJA Obviously

SARAH I'll read whatever

FREDDY It's ok, Sarah. Sorry...

ANJA Do you mind if I say something, Freddy?

FREDDY Sure, presence your thought

ANJA I don't want to presence my though, Freddy. I want a word in private, if you don't mind (TO SARAH) Sorry

SARAH That's ok

FREDDY Sure

EMBARRASSED SILENCE. FREDDY AND ANJA STEP AWAY FROM THE TABLE. (DURING THE FOLLOWING MOLLY REACHES FOR HER CELL AND BEGINS TO TEXT

ANJA Freddy, you know I don't care about the size of my part. I'm a professional, I'll read anything, but this is not anything. Bill used to read this play to me as he was writing it. And I know how it should be read. And I assumed that I would be playing The Woman. Nothing against Sarah, but she's new in town, she doesn't know Bill's work...

FREDDY No, I understand

ANJA I'm sure she's a great actress, some great stuff comes out of Chicago, I mean, I saw August on Broadway, but...

FREDDY But I would prefer it, if she read The Woman, Anja... and if you could read the Neighbor. If you wouldn't mind

ANJA (BEAT) Do you want me to text Bill about this?

FREDDY Bill knows

ANJA He knows?

FREDDY Yeah

ANJA Is that why the bastard isn't here?

FREDDY I don't know

ANJA Is it? Bastard! I knew it was him

FREDDY It wasn't Bill

ANJA You don't have to defend him

FREDDY It wasn't his call, it was mine

ANJA Yours?

FREDDY Yeah, I'm sorry

ANJA Don't you think I can do it?

FREDDY It's not that

ANJA Did you cast with your cock again Freddy? (BEAT) I prepared the part of The Woman

FREDDY I realize that and this is embarrassing

ANJA Damn right, it is.

FREDDY But if you wouldn't mind reading the Neighbor, Anja, I think the part suits you better

ANJA I'll be unprepared

FREDDY You'll be great

ANJA I know I'll be great, but I'm a bit pissed, Freddy

FREDDY I understand that and I appreciate your professionalism

ANJA Sometimes, you're a shit

FREDDY Sorry...

ANJA Fuck you, Freddy

THING (AS ANJA MOVES BACK TO HER SEAT) Later that afternoon, in the margins of my life, Anja drew a dancing poodle. Under the drawing she wrote *'me'*

THEY RETURN TO THEIR SEATS. MOLLY FINISHES AND SEND HER TEXT.

ANJA (AS SHE PASSES SARAH) Sorry...

FREDDY Ok... sorry about that misunderstanding. My fault. So, let's start again, shall we? So if you could continue with The Woman, Sarah. And Anja, if you'd kindly read the Neighbor

SARAH I don't mind, I'll read either...

FREDDY No, it's ok, Sarah. Let's keep it as cast

SARAH Ok. (TO ANJA) Sorry

ANJA (CONTROLLED PISSED) It's ok

FREDDY Let's go from the top again...

THING I tell you, Drew. First, second and third readings, were readings held around tables. behind closed doors; a bit of reading, too much talking. But the fourth...

HE IS ENTRANCED BY HIS OWN EMBODIMENT THROUGH THE UTTERANCE OF OTHERS. HE MOVES AROUND THE ACTION

FREDDY *Troyanne*

THING ...that fourth reading released me for the first time...

FREDDY A woman lies in the front yard of a house, Corner of Troy and Indiana (suburb of Woodlawn) in the city of Troy, Ohio...

THING And for moments...

FREDDY We hear the chirp of insects, cars passing along North Market and...

THING Moments...

FREDDY ... in the distance, a freight train on its way to Detroit...

THING I...

FREDDY It's horn sounds forlorn...

THING I flew...

SARAH STARTS WITH A QUIET INTENSITY AND TRUTH. SHE REACHES BEYOND THE POETIC. THERE IS NO MELODRAMA IN HER DELIVERY, IT IS NOT DECLAMATORY, IT IS INTERNAL CONFLICT...

SARAH Get up... Get up, woman. Damn it! Raise your face from the earth, raise your body from the ground, rise up. Rise up and raise your hands. Raise them high; like roof beams, sky high. Reach! (BEAT) No! Never again; never reach again. Reached too often; wasted so much effort reaching. For what? For nothing; know that now, didn't know that then. I only reached for... suffering

FREDDY A dog barks in the silent heat

SARAH God damn, give me reason to keep reaching. In my misery, reach down for me. Reach down. Now! To this earth... to me, as I lie here,

in this yard, before my house; my home, my heart, burning. My family:
blown, blown away. Gone

SCENE 8

THE INTERVIEW WITH MOLLY (2)

MOLLY Have you read his other stuff? Apart from *Troyanne*...

DREW All the published works

MOLLY “No-one ever reads me”, he’d say.

DREW But people do

MOLLY That’s what I’d say to him “People do. What are you complaining about?” Then he’d start complaining about people misinterpreting him. You just couldn’t win. He thrived on obscurity and misinterpretation. Self-hate was oxygen to Bill. You see, for him, life was Hell; sure as hell was Hell living with him. He... he was born to fail; born to suffer and we... those of us stupid enough to step into his life, suffered with him. His work is so full of loss... and losing; he’d lost his life even before living it. “You’re so un-American”, I’d say to him. And he’d get pissed at me for that. But it was true, he really did come from “beyond the horizon!”. (BEAT) Well maybe, just maybe, he should’ve stayed there. Bill didn’t write with an American heart. You’ve got to understand that?

DREW Sure

MOLLY He didn’t write... ‘The Dream’ I guess, it was all just nightmare to him. He was so god damn European! He lived in the New World, all right; that’s where he wanted to be, but he’d left his heart and soul in the Old one. Up there (POINTS TO FOREHEAD) Bill believed in America, in “the democracy of fucking opportunity”, as he’d say. But in here, (TOUCHES HER HEART) he was so mediaeval. So he lived his whole life in a kind of exile; never quite an immigrant, never fully committing to here, to now, to a future... to me, to any of us... to any thing; just a little boy running scared. I should’ve realized that after that reading, after what happened that day... I should never have moved in with him. But I was young... and naïve. My mother was so pissed off “He’s old enough to be your father.” “And, what’s that supposed to mean?” I said, but she didn’t answer that, she didn’t dare... (HAVING GIVEN SOMETHING OF HERSELF AWAY...) I

remember the call. I didn't care. I was in love and... and anything was better than Washington Heights...

DREW He wrote a lot about you and your life together...

MOLLY Yeah, he did. He wrote about us; Anja, me, others...

A LIGHT ALSO COMES UP ON ANJA

DREW Did the stuff he wrote about you, hurt you... personally?

MOLLY Mmm... (SHE THINKS)

ANJA (SHE THINKS) ... did it hurt me personally?

DREW If you don't want to answer that..

MOLLY No, just thinking about it...

MOLLY AND ANJA ECHO EACH OTHER / DOVE TAIL ENDS OF LINES

ANJA ... just thinking

MOLLY ...if I was honest

ANJA ... honestly

MOLLY ...then I'd have to say

ANJA ...yes

MOLLY ...and then again, no.

ANJA ... and no

BOTH (NOT QUITE IN UNISON) Put it like this. When you live with a writer, especially a vulture like him, you're going to get picked clean at some point

BEAT

MOLLY ...you'll gonna get betrayed... and I'm not talking with other women... I'm talking betrayal on a deeper level than that; a betrayal of your absolute self... your core.

ANJA ...he'd steal your soul, if he could. Bastard! And yeah... knowing he'd do that, hurts.

MOLLY ...that's just something

ANJAsomething you've got to live with...

MOLLY ...or not

BOTH ... if you love him...

ANJA (BEAT) You know, Drew. You asked me earlier 'Why did I stay with him?' I stayed because sometimes, when he wrote about me, it was such a turn on; to be loved enough to be written about. And even the plays he wrote about hating me, when I stopped hating him for writing them, if I was honest, felt good. Whatever the passion, I was cared about, I mattered and that mattered, and that's the turn on. Don't you think?

LIGHT GOES DOWN ON ANJA

DREW (HALF BEAT) So how much of *Troyanne* was about you?

MOLLY Nothing, my life with him was still to come...

SCENE 9

THE REHEARSAL ROOM (3)

WE CONTINUE WITH *TROYANNE*

SARAH We were... the dream. We were... the perfect family, in America's 'most perfect little city' – Troy, Ohio; life circling the square. The heart of the nation lies here... lay here... back then. Back then, when we'd be packed in the back of a Ford, pyjamas on, Friday nights, (out of football season). and driven to the Dixie Drive In; back then, in dreamtime. Oh, God, let me dream again. I'm begging you. I'm tired, dog tired. If you are, if you have any mercy, reach. Please.(BEAT)
Damn you then

ANJA Hell, Hannah! What are you doing down there? Here, let me help you up.

SARAH I'm fine

ANJA You don't look fine to me

SARAH I'm ok

AT SOME POINT MOLLY RECEIVES A TEXT – SHE LOOKS AT IT

ANJA You're crying?

SARAH Yeah, I'm crying... but I'm ashamed of my tears, Tory . Ashamed I've got eyes left to cry with. These eyes...they've seen things, Tory, seen things; things, I never wanted to see, things a mother should never see. Give me a scissors, a knife, a pin. Stick it in these eyes and blind me! I have dared him. If he loved me, if you love me, blind me!

BEAT / BREAKS FROM THE READING

FREDDY That's great, Sarah

SARAH Thanks

FREDDY But, Jesus, it's relentless

SARAH Yeah, it feels like one long howl

FREDDY Yeah, I was reading it last night and I thought exactly that. It's like Lear's "Howl"! You know that "Howl", when he's cradling his dead daughter in his arms; total... utter despair. But then I thought, the intensity of Lear's "Howl", which comes at the end of Shakespeare's play, is just the beginning point for the despair in this one. It reaches the absolute and just keeps dropping.

SARAH Yeah, and that's why it's difficult to pitch at the top.

FREDDY Yeah

SARAH Technically, I want to hold back, but instinctively I feel I want to give everything. But where would I go?

FREDDY Exactly

SARAH I think when we use the stands, it'd help if I read the opening speeches down on the floor. It'd help me to pitch the emotion.(TURNS TO ANJA) Sorry, I mean, would that help you?

ANJA Well...

SARAH If that's ok?

ANJA Freddy?

SARAH I know you want a clear reading...

FREDDY We've only got five hours of rehearsal, Sarah, and it's such a dense play, I think we could lose clarity by beginning to move it

SARAH Yeah, sure...

FREDDY But I share your frustration; the limitations of a reading....

SARAH I understand

FREDDY But...

SARAH But, I think if we could try it, just the once? It might help because, as you said, it begins in such a passionate place

FREDDY Yeah, it does

SARAH So intense (TO ANJA) It's so intense, isn't it?

ANJA (RELUCTANT) It's all about the passion and the intensity for Bill

SARAH Is it?

ANJA Yeah, "In passion, there's truth" he says

SARAH Does he?

ANJA "My words mean nothing" he says "actors must get beyond them; sweep them away to get at the truth!"

SARAH That's really interesting for me, because instinctively, I feel I need to get beyond the words... even in a reading – to do justice to the passion, and the physicality would help me. Would you mind, Freddy...

FREDDY Well...

SARAH It's a status thing, it inverts the natural order between Tory and

Hannah. I won't mind coming back up to the stands once we've found the right pitch... (TO ANJA) What do you think?

ANJA Sure

SARAH (TURNS TO THE TWO ACTORS BEHIND HER) Sorry

DREW (TRULY AFFIRMATIVE, BUT HE IS TROUBLED) It's ok...

MOLLY (MOLLY POSSIBLY QUICKLY LOOKING AT A MESSAGE)
Not a problem

SARAH Is that ok?

FREDDY (BEAT) Ok, when we get on our feet, we'll give it a go, let's just read to the end first

SARAH Sure... Thank you (TO ANJA)

ANJA (NODS AN "OK" BUT IS OBVIOUSLY PEEVED)

FREDDY Ok, let's circle back to the top of the page... page um... why are there no page numbers in this goddamn script? Pick it up from...

SARAH From "We were the dream?"

FREDDY Yeah. "We were the dream". Got that, Anja?

ANJA Yeah...

SARAH We were the dream, we were the perfect little family...

SCENE 10

THE INTERVIEW WITH FREDDY (1)

FREDDY WALK AROUND. HE'S ON THE PHONE. DREW IS SETTING UP HIS CAMERA

FREDDY ...Say, how much? Seventy five thousand! Is that for one or both? God! Look, um.... I'm in the middle of something here, I need to think about this. Yeah, I'll get you back, ok. Yeah... yeah, thank you, bye (TERMINATES THE CALL) Sorry about that

DREW That's ok.

FREDDY Yeah

DREW You got insurance?

FREDDY In this business!

DREW Sure

FREDDY Luckily, I have an inheritance. It just seems wrong to waste my mother's life's savings on a couple o' plastic hips!

DREW Mm

FREDDY Ah, I guess I'll get them done eventually. But, when? Six months out! With my luck I'd lose a Broadway show in that time. You can't risk it, can you, so it'll have to wait and I'll god damn hobble in pain. Do you mind if I move around, doctor says it helps

DREW No, feel free

FREDDY Thank you. (BEAT)

DREW (FIDDLING WITH THE CAMERA) Ah, sorry

FREDDY What's wrong

DREW I need to change the memory card

FREDDY That's ok. (BEAT) 'Work away', as the Irish say. So, where are you living these days, Drew?

DREW Back home in Indiana

FREDDY Ah, right

DREW Yeah, I had to give up my apartment in Brooklyn. I couldn't work any more. So, I headed home

FREDDY Too bad

DREW Shit happens

FREDDY Sure does

DREW It's been some time since then... not a good time, but I'm trying to move on

FREDDY Good for you, Drew

DREW That's why I'm doing this. Something positive

FREDDY That's great

DREW It's not great, Freddy. It's shit, but I've kinda run out of options. I'm not much use to the business any more

FREDDY You never know

DREW No, I know. And I'm not.

FREDDY (BEAT) You were a great actor, Drew

DREW Were! Still am, Freddy. How the hell do you think I keep going! Ready?

FREDDY Sure (BEAT) Hey, one thing. If you don't mind me asking?

DREW Sure

FREDDY Why the camera, Drew? Considering... you know, (HE SHOULDN'T HAVE ASKED) sorry

DREW No, it's ok; it's a fair question. I can still see through the corner of my right eye, not good enough to write notes, but good enough to see faces close up on a screen. This thing helps me remember.

FREDDY Sure (HALF BEAT) You know, Drew, it's ironic that you want to remember stuff when I don't like remembering much of anything these days...

DREW No?

FREDDY No, I find it... ah, you know. What does the Mother say in *Troyanne*? 'Let the memory...'

DREW ... 'let the memory house burn...'

FREDDY Yeah 'Let the memory house burn down'... that's it. It's easier that way

DREW Why?

FREDDY Because, I remember a better time, Drew; a time when theatre was dreamtime, not a corporate fucking nightmare! A time when I used to work

DREW You still work

FREDDY Well, yeah I work... but, how many major shows do you think I've directed in the past five years

DREW I don't know...

FREDDY Guess

DREW Ten?

FREDDY Guess again

DREW More or less?

FREDDY Less

DREW Five?

FREDDY Less

DREW Three?

FREDDY None. Yeah, I used to direct productions now I just direct readings. It's frustrating, I know it's not the same for everyone, some get production after production. But, me, I've been stuck in the circle of development hell; reading plays that develop into nothing. Reading after Reading leads to... just more goddamn reading! You know how it is, Drew. It's so frustrating. I need the release... the celebration of the stage, I need full production... glorious fucking production.

DREW Know that feeling

FREDDY As you said, every potential needs the kinetic... That is the science of theatre; the science of life!

DREW Mmm...

FREDDY Now, call me old fashioned, but when I first came to New York, in the seventies, Papp was at the Public and writers wrote with the expectation... the expectation, Drew of being put on. And we put them on! Shows lived on the stage; some died, but at least they were given the chance of life. That's all anybody can ask of this world... a chance at life. That is America, the chance...

DREW Yeah...

FREDDY But, the last twenty years or so, there's been a lessening of chances and a growing fear, Drew... the fear of failure. It's not good.... not good, I'm telling you. Accountants should stay the hell away from theatre, theatre maybe formula, you know, but it's not fucking math! In this corporate nightmare, there's no place for dreaming. And 'we' dream for the world, Drew. If we don't dream, who the fuck will? Now call me a Jean Jacket Artist, call me a 'has been' if you want, but I'm telling you now, 'Development' is a self perpetuating nightmare, Drew... a decent into "Reading Hell". And we're going down... down! And that fucking frightens me... saddens me... scares the hell out of me. You know?

DREW Yeah, I know....

SCENE 11

THE INTERVIEW WITH SARAH (1)

SARAH It was my first reading since moving form Chicago

DREW The first?

SARAH Yeah I'd been in New York three months or so, but I hadn't had much luck

DREW But you were big in Chicago

SARAH Yeah, I was

DREW So, why move?

SARAH Oh... things...

DREW M-hm...

SARAH Sometimes, it's time to move on.

DREW Sure...

SARAH Don't get me wrong, I love Chicago, I love the theatre scene there, it's so supportive and there's an honesty about it. But, you know, ask any actor, if they would prefer a show at the Goodman or a run on Broadway and you can guarantee the answer. Broadway is still King. And I just wanted to try my luck... to see if I could... 'make it here' before I got too old

DREW And have you? I mean, do you think you have?

SARAH It's been hard, but I'm doing ok now

DREW Yeah

SARAH But, but when I first came to New York, I was unknown, well not un known, just not known in New York. Yeah, I'd played some great roles and won a Jeff back in Chicago. But they counted for nothing, or at least, nothing much in town. New York is a small scene, circles of knowing, and if you're not in the know...

DREW ...you're unknown

SARAH (HALF LAUGH TOGETHER) Yeah. First few months, I found it really frustrating...I wanted to give but no-one was buying... and in New York, if no-one's buying you, you're dead. It's like the play...

DREW *Troyanne?*

SARAH Yeah... I mean, I've read that thing seven, eight times. How many times has it been read altogether? Do you know?

DREW Twelve

SARAH Twelve? And still no production?

DREW No

SARAH God... When you think of all the energy invested in that thing; all the different drafts Bill made; the directors, the actors, the audiences. That's one hell of a lot of commitment to a play that's going nowhere.

DREW Yeah

SARAH I could never be a writer, Drew, never. At least for actors like you and me, it's just a gig, we read, we suggest and we move on. But for playwrights it must be soul destroying - to work so hard and long on something, just for it to sit there...in a kinda no-where place. God!...

DREW You say "just a gig"...

SARAH Yeah

DREW But we've read *Troyanne* together and I've watched you read that play from the audience a few times, and not once has it seemed as if it was 'just a gig' to you.

SARAH No

DREW I may be wrong, but each time you seemed to give everything

SARAH Mmm, perhaps I give myself too freely, like some Restoration whore. But I don't see the point in giving any less. Anyway, *Troyanne* demands total passion; you can't just phone it in. It confronts you like a mountain, you have to climb it to the top. So you give everything, more than everything

DREW Sure... I remember you called it, *Godot* for women

SARAH That was just bullshit

DREW Was it?

SARAH Yeah... I was flattering Bill, and he believed it... typical writer... but I kind of meant it as well. Because women are rarely allowed to reach for God in plays, are they? We play the wives of Brand... we serve the priests and let the men do the reaching! But in some plays like *Troyanne*, we reach, and that's a gift

DREW So it was more than just a gig then?

SARAH Yeah. It was an opportunity and you never know who's going to be in

DREW No

SARAH And I felt something for that play; not that it's a perfect play, few plays are, but it was my first chance in this city and I owed it something. I felt protective of it, I guess...

DREW As if it was a child?

SARAH Yeah, as if it was a child... there's so much pain in the Mother. She loses everything; like *Hecuba* in *The Trojan Women*, she loses her man and her child, yet she has to endure.... live on, somehow. And I've had a man and lost him... and though I've never had a child myself... well... never carried to full term... I could empathize with her.

DREW You lost a child?

SARAH (UNCERTAIN AS TO WHETHER SHE SHOULD CARRY ON EXPLAINING, BUT NEEDING TO) Yeah, a little boy? He'd be six

DREW No

SARAH Yeah.... six...

DREW Oh, I'm so sorry

SARAH I felt him alive within me, Drew. But he got still late on and I lost him...

DREW Oh God

SARAH Sorry (DREW WANTS TO HUG HER AS HE WOULD HUG A BEAR)

DREW Oh, I'm sorry

SARAH It's ok... I'm ok

DREW Do they know why?

SARAH Accidents happen. (BEAT) The worst thing was, I had to give birth to him and... God.... I held him in my arms...I held him, Drew. And he was so... ... all those words that mean nothing; peaceful, beautiful... perfect. I held him, my little boy... and I kissed his little forehead and then they took him away and... and I wouldn't wish that on anyone

DREW No...

SARAH It happens... too often.

DREW Yeah

SARAH That's why I left Chicago really. I needed to move away from that city; all the memory of that place. And so, maybe, because of my loss, I could touch the Mother's pain... deep inside me; something raw... still is.

DREW Yeah

SARAH First time I read the lines "Why is The Bob Evans open, the Ruby Tuesday grilling, La Piazza's serving? When my man and boy are both dead... are dust, eat nothing. Why?" I remembered walking Downtown Chicago thinking the same thing; different city, same pain "Why is Maxim's still serving? The Caribou still brewing? The Loop still turning? When my boy is dead... my perfect little boy is dead. Why?" And so, yeah, I've always given my heart to that play because it touched me at the right time...

DREW Mm

SARAH I know you understand?

DREW (HE UNDERSTANDS ONLY TOO WELL) Yeah, yeah, I do

SARAH So, you're right, it wasn't just a gig. Each reading was an act of... remembrance, if you like... of dreaming and mourning... God, I wanted that play to live, Drew. I wanted it to fly!

SWITCH FOCUS TO THING

THING Did she say that? Did Sarah want that for me, Drew? Did she? I guess I knew she felt that way, because when she read me... when she read me, I... (RE-THINKS) Hell no, she never read me, Drew, she didn't need to read me, she was me; when she was me, there was no artifice, no acting, no reading, just being - pure fucking being; she flew, we flew - *like to the lark, at break of day*, Drew, together, we soared!

SCENE 12

THE REHEARSAL ROOM (4)

FROM NOW ON, THEY READ AT THE STANDS. THE CONVENTION WOULD BE TO SIT / STEP BACK FROM THE STANDS WHEN NOT INVOLVED IN THE ACTION

SARAH So the boys were in John's den, talking boys talk: the Season stats for the Cincinnati Reds or the chances of the Trojans rolling over the Piqua Indians again. And they were happy. And Anne, Ethan and me were content in each other's company... for once, swinging together in the yard; On that seat, listening to the red cardinal sing 'Pretty, pretty, pretty'. Or listening to the freight train passing through Troy but never stopping. When we heard the shot. Crisp... Cold... Clean ripped the heart out of me

ANJA Ripped the heart out of the City...

SARAH I looked at Anne, she was sitting where you're sitting now, her face was ashen. And I rushed into the house and into the den. and there was John, holding his precious gun. And TC was slumped in a chair shot through the eye. It looked so... TV. So CNN! "It was an accident" John said, almost whispering. An accident waiting to happen. My boy was dead. My pretty, pretty boy... was dead, "It was an accident. I'm sorry" John said. Then he turned the gun on himself and I watched my husband shoot his apology back into his mouth and out the back of his head.' Pretty, pretty, pretty' the red cardinal sang again. 'Pretty, pretty.' And the ugliness of it, the ugliness plays over and over in my mind; the pointlessness of it, the waste of it, the sorrow of it, the pain of it; playing on a loop. Just playing, over and over in my mind.

ANJA (BEAT) I'm so sorry, HANNAH. If I could share your pain ...

SARAH I wouldn't wish it on you, Tory. And I wish I'd imagined it all myself. But I saw... with these damned eyes; things a wife... a mother, should never see....

FREDDY She cries in Tory's arms. (BEAT) OK, that's great. Good work, both of you.

BOTH Thanks

FREDDY Shall we take a ten there?

SARAH Sorry, Freddy. Do you mind if I say something?

FREDDY No, not at all

SARAH It's just, in Ohio, they would never say 'red cardinal'. They're so common there, they'd just say 'cardinal'

FREDDY Ah, right, just cardinal?

SARAH Yeah; just a small thing

FREDDY No, it's an important detail. So, uh, let's cut all the 'red', folks. Just cardinal, ok (THEY DUTIFULLY CUT OUT THE REDS FROM THEIR SCRIPT) There are... three in this speech I think. Thank you, Sarah.... and you're mapping the passion real good; great emotion, great subtly

ANJA I thought I was the queen of subtle, Freddy?

FREDDY You both do subtle. It's not a competition

ANJA Everything's a competition

FREDDY It doesn't have to be

ANJA This is New York. It's not Chicago, Freddy! (IT WAS AN HALF JOKE) Sorry... (SHE GOES FOR HER CELL)

FREDDY (TO SARAH) Coffee?

SARAH Yeah, ...I'll walk down with you, I could use a little air

FREDDY AND SARAH EXIT. MOLLY GOES TO TEXT

ANJA Bastard...

DREW Where's the rest room here, do you know?

ANJA What?

DREW The rest room?

ANJA Uh, it's out the corridor, on the left.

DREW Thanks

ANJA Are you ok, Drew?

DREW Yeah

ANJA You seem a bit on edge today..

DREW I didn't sleep well...

ANJA No?
DREW Didn't sleep at all...
ANJA Oh, no...
DREW But Ill be ok
ANJA I'm worried about you
DREW I'm fine...
ANJA Ok...
DREW On the left?
ANJA Yeah

DREW EXITS. MOLLY IS TEXTING

ANJA He is such a good actor ... so versatile; lives off voice over, never cracked that circle. I love him, he's great, but he has his bad times, you know?

MOLLY Yeah?

ANJA Yeah...

ANJA ALSO WRITES A TEXT

MOLLY (BEAT) So, you're Bill's partner?

ANJA Ex. We used to live together

MOLLY Oh, sorry, I misunderstood

ANJA That's ok. We split up a little while ago

MOLLY Oh, no... (MOLLY SENDS TEXT)

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY Oh... was it a... clean break?

ANJA Yeah...

MOLLY Oh, I'm sorry

ANJA Shit happens...

MOLLY Yeah

ANJA And, you move on... but, we're still texting

 ANJA SENDS HER TEXT INDICATING IT'S FOR HIM

MOLLY Oh yeah?

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY Well that's something..

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY So how long were you two together?

ANJA Twenty years

MOLLY That's a long time

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY That's... forever!

ANJA Not quite

MOLLY No... Do you have kids?

ANJA No

MOLLY Oh... Did you want them?

ANJA Yeah... but Bill didn't

MOLLY Oh, well, I guess kids complicate things...

ANJA Yeah

MOLLY For the best, maybe

ANJA Maybe

MOLLY Not that I'd know, but...people say

ANJA Yeah, they say

MOLLY Yeah

ANJA I would've liked that complication, but it wasn't to be. And I'm too old now, I guess.

MOLLY Not these days

ANJA No, but... things take time and I ain't got time on my side

MOLLY No...

ANJA Not any more. Not at my age. How old are you?

MOLLY Twenty four

ANJA Twenty four. God. At twenty four I first met Bill - half a lifetime ago. Sometimes, I don't know where time's gone... time seems wasted on him, now. But I guess I would've wasted it on someone.

MOLLY Sure

ANJA Yeah. (BEAT) You know Molly... I find it strange, after so many years with him, facing a future without him. It's kind of exciting, but it terrifies me at the same time, you know. I'm more of a certainty than a possibility kind of person, which is not a good thing for an actress to be, I guess. I used to worry the hell out of Bill, now I just worry an empty room

MOLLY You'll find someone

ANJA Do you think? I'm a forty four, Molly; a forty four year old actress thrilled just to be reading, desperate for the smallest chance to act so that I can pretend I'm still alive and worth something in this world. It's pathetic, this whole acting thing. Don't end up like me. I have no insurance, no job offers, my hair is grey, my eggs are probably spent and I rent a studio apartment in St George

MOLLY St George?

ANJA Staten Island

MOLLY Staten Island!

ANJA Exactly. I'm hardly a catch, Molly. Look at me

MOLLY Sorry

ANJA God, it's not your fault, girl

MOLLY RECEIVES A TEXT

ANJA Hey, you got an audition?

SARAH AND FREDDY RE-ENTER THE ROOM

SCENE 13
THE INTERVIEW WITH FREDDY (2)

DREW Were you aware of any complications before that reading?

FREDDY 'Complications'?

DREW Problems

FREDDY You mean with Molly and Anja?

DREW Yeah

FREDDY No, and I'm still kind of pissed at what Bill did; for Anja's sake more than mine. He hurt her bad... humiliated her; humiliated us all, but what he did to her was unforgivable. He degraded her, and, you know, I think he did it, just so that some day he could write about her... which he did

DREW Yeah

FREDDY And it was a good play as well. The little shit knows no shame. And I did all the readings on the thing. But, yet again, I didn't get the main gig. I was so pissed about that. Betrayed...

DREW Mm...

FREDDY Bill betrayed me

DREW Did he?

FREDDY Yet again, always did. Even way back, with one of his early plays

DREW Which one?

FREDDY *Little Sagas in Soho*. You know it?

DREW No

FREDDY It's a beautiful piece; basically, about him and Anja. We got a great review in the New York Times, "terrific writing, superb direction" We were a winning team. Then some producer saw it and promised Bill the world. And he betrayed me... without a second thought, he betrayed me when I was the one who had discovered him!

DREW You discovered him?

FREDDY Well he was already there; like America before Columbus, but I directed him when he was a no-one, and he owed me. So what happened, they lined up a new director for the transfer... a 'name'.

DREW Yeah (KNOWINGLY)

FREDDY Bill could've said something, he could've said "No, it's Freddy's gig! Freddy or no-one" but he didn't. He said nothing... nothing and I was out in the cold. But there's a divine justice in this world, Drew. The show just wasn't the same. It had lost something. And I was thrilled when it died and closed early. In the end, Bill betrayed me... betrayed 'us'... for nothing... nothing! He was ashamed of that... and I knew, and he knew I knew

DREW Mm

FREDDY Bastard! I loved that man. I kept forgiving him, and that was his problem. We all kept forgiving him; Anja, Molly, me... Three years of waiting. Three years of embarrassed silence, then he sent me an email; one word "Sorry" and an attachment... a new play, *Troyanne*; a chance to dream again...

SCENE 14
THE REHEARSAL ROOM (5)

MOLLY AND SARAH AT THE STANDS

MOLLY Hannah?

SARAH Anne? What are you doing here?

MOLLY Are you alone?

SARAH Where's Ethan?

MOLLY In the pick up

SARAH Where?

MOLLY Out back, I thought it best to park there

SARAH Let me see him

FREDDY Hannah attempts to rise. Anne helps her, but stops her going to see Ethan

MOLLY Not now, he's sleeping

SARAH Is he ok?

MOLLY It's been a long day. I promised him frozen custard up at the Culver's. I don't want to wake him 'til we get there

SARAH I'll come with you

MOLLY Best not

SARAH Well... are you ok?

MOLLY Uh -huh...

SARAH Anne, an officer called round

MOLLY Army?

SARAH Police; full of ugly words; don't know whether I believed them., didn't want to believe him, damned Athens man. What happened at the Meijer's this afternoon, Anne?

MOLLY Nothing

SARAH He said you stole something

MOLLY I've never stolen a thing in my life

SARAH Except my son

MOLLY He stole me.

SARAH Yeah... (BEAT) Anne, the officer talked about shoplifting. Is there truth in it? I can't believe...

MOLLY ... depends who tells it...

SARAH ... then you tell me. What happened? (BEAT) Anne, I know you've never cared for me...

MOLLY I never cared for you!

SARAH Please... I don't want to start blaming. Now's not the time.

MOLLY No, now's too late

SARAH Maybe... Look, I know you've never needed me, but you need me now. You need my help. So, just tell me, what happened? Please

MOLLY (UNCERTAIN) I... I just... I just drove to the Meijer's this morning, not really wanting anything, just... I just drove... don't know what to do with my days anymore... just driving round... looking... not really seeing just... just...

SARAH Yeah, I know

MOLLY So, there I was at the Meijer's, and I picked an MP3 player off the shelf. Thought, "It's TC's birthday on Saturday, didn't he say he wanted one of these for his next deployment?" It'll be a surprise, I'll get him one and I'll wrap it up, fancy like. Ethan can sign a card. And I'll keep them under my side of the bed until the morning of his birthday. Then when he wakes, Ethan'll come in to our room and reach under the bed for his pa's present and..." And by then, my thinking had carried me clean through the shop door, out, into the parking lot. And the alarm was sounding like the Wednesday tornado siren. And I thought there was an invasion from Mars or Islam or something, but no. "Stay where you are, Ma-am" this security guard

shouted. Seems I was the alien. “It’s for my husband” I said “It’s for his birthday” “Would you accompany me back into the shop, please ma-am” And he pinched my arm as he gripped; I’ve got the bruise to prove it. “You’re assaulting me” I said “I am not assaulting you, ma-am. I would appreciate your co-operation” “You’re hurting me!” I cried; tears welling in my eyes, and Ethan was crying “And you’ve made my son cry” I said. “I should sue you!” “So sue me then!” He had this grin; as wide as the Ohio; all bridgework. I wanted to kill him. He pulled me again by the elbow, So I pulled a gun.

SARAH Whose gun?

MOLLY TC’s.

SARAH Oh Anne...

MOLLY I wasn’t going to use it

SARAH Then why carry it?

MOLLY It was special to him

SARAH I know TC, and I would’ve thought, that’d be the last thing he’d want you to carry

MOLLY I know TC as well. He was your boy, but he was my man; a good man, a good father...

SARAH A good son

MOLLY His father’s son; TC was a gun man

SARAH That’s the pity of it

FREDDY She pulls a hand gun

MOLLY This hand gun is him. When I carry it, he’s at my side; still with me. So when that jerk grabbed my elbow, TC was there to protect me; Bang, bang! “Touch my woman again and you’re dead” he said. That jerk pissed his pants when TC stared him down.

SARAH God, Anne...

MOLLY “We are a family and always will be. And families buy birthday presents for each other” I said “I didn’t mean to steal that MP3,

believe me, the thought just carried me out of the Meijer's into the sun. And before I knew it, that alarm, hen Ethan crying..."

SARAH Oh, Anne...

MOLLY I could've shot that kid in the Meijer's; acting the jerk when real men are dying. I could've killed him.

SARAH Don't...

MOLLY But I didn't... I didn't. I saw myself on a chain gang down Dayton way, in those ugly orange jumpsuits, picking up trash along I-75. Imagined Ethan passing in a car, half recognizing his Mom and I thought "That jerk's not worth the bullet, not worth the time"

FREDDY She laughs, it turns into tears

MOLLY I'm scared, Hannah

SARAH Oh, Anne... I know and I wish... Oh... Oh, I'm worried for you and little Ethan...

THE A BOLT OUT OF THE BLUE

ANJA Fuck!

THE ATTENTION IS DRAWN TOWARDS ANJA, SHE IS OBVIOUSLY DISTRAUGHT

FREDDY Anja, you ok?

ANJA Bastard

SARAH You ok?

FREDDY Anja, what's wrong?

ANJA I got a message (MOLLY SUSPECTS)

FREDDY Bad news

ANJA Yeah

FREDDY From Bill?

ANJA Yep

FREDDY What's wrong?

ANJA I think you know, Freddy

FREDDY Know what?

ANJA About her?

FREDDY About who?

ANJA About her? (SHE POINTS AT MOLLY)

FREDDY (DOESN'T UNDERSTAND. MOLLY DOES) Molly?

ANJA Don't fucking 'Molly' me. Why did you do it?

FREDDY Do what?

ANJA Cast the bitch

FREDDY Anja, I don't know what you're talking about.

ANJA She knows

FREDDY Knows what?

ANJA I picked up a cell. It said, from Bill and I assumed he wanted an up date, so I picked up and...

FREDDY Was it from him?

ANJA I told you it was from Bill... but it wasn't for me. Actually, it wasn't my fucking cell

FREDDY Sorry, you've got to help me out here

ANJA Perhaps she should explain. Sure as hell I'd like to see her try

FREDDY Molly?

ANJA (BEAT) Tell them how much Bill misses you and can't wait to, what was it, "be your little fuck goat tonight"

FREDDY Jesus!

ANJA Fucking tragic!

FREDDY Your Bill's new girlfriend? (TO MOLLY)

ANJA Tell him.

FREDDY Are you?

ANJA Tell us all

THEY WAIT FOR AN ANSWER

MOLLY You've got no right to look at my cell

ANJA (SHE THROWS MOLLY'S CELL) You bitch!

MOLLY My whole life's in that cell!

ANJA My fucking life as well!

FREDDY Whoa, Anja

DREW Anja!

FREDDY For Christ sake!

ANJA What? Shall we take another ten, shall we, Freddy?

FREDDY Look, obviously there are issues here, but not in the rehearsal room,

ANJA Fuck you, Freddy! (ABOUT TO WALK OUT, SHE TURNS)
You knew about this. You knew!

FREDDY I'd no idea, Anja

ANJA I don't believe you, Freddy

FREDDY (TO MOLLY) Why didn't you tell me, Molly?

ANJA Damn you, Freddy

FREDDY (TRYING TO QUIETEN ANJA) Anja, please!

ANJA Did you and Bill think it would be fun to humiliate me? Did you?

FREDDY (TO MOLLY) Why?

ANJA Or did you plan it together; three fucking witches!

FREDDY I don't know anything about this. Honest to god. Please believe me!

ANJA Maybe, but she knew. Why the fuck did you cast her?

FREDDY It was Bill

ANJA Fucking Bill!

FREDDY Writer's vision

ANJA What vision!

FREDDY I had to respect that

ANJA Has he ever respected anyone else? Has he, Freddy?

FREDDY Maybe not

ANJA What about respect for me? Was it funny, to laugh at me? Was it? Laugh at the old woman. You stupid little girl

FREDDY Why didn't you tell me when we met?

MOLLY Bill told me not to

FREDDY Jesus!

ANJA Being all nice to me, acting as if you cared; you false bitch

FREDDY (TO MOLLY) Why did you do that?

ANJA You don't fuck with women over forty. (SHE APPROACHES MOLLY) You've got no right! No right! No fucking right!

MOLLY I'm not fucking with you. No one's fucking with you, Anja. He doesn't love you any more! Doesn't want you.... You're just a sad, old actress...

ANJA Bitch!

SUDDENLY SHE LUNGES FOR MOLLY. THE MUSIC STANDS FLY. MAYHEM...

SARAH Ok, Anja...

FREDDY Anja! Whoa!

SARAH Anja

DREW Anja!

FREDDY (HE STOPS HER IN TIME) Molly! Get out! Just get out Molly

ANJA I am not a fucking sad actress!

FREDDY Anja, please! Molly!

ANJA Just get out. Get out! You don't deserve to be in this space. This space is sacred; a space of truth. Bitch!

FREDDY Anja, please...

ANJA Anja, please what!

FREDDY HOLDS ANJA BACK. MOLLY EXITS

FREDDY Just.... just calm down.

ANJA I am calm! (BEAT. IN THE BEAT, ANJA BREAKS DOWN)

FREDDY Don't let her get to you

ANJA (BEAT) I'm not too old, am I?

FREDDY No

ANJA I'm not fucking sad, am I? I'm not a sad actress am I Freddy?

FREDDY Hell no, you're great

ANJA Am I? (TO SARAH)

SARAH No, God no... here (SHE HAS A TISSUE)

ANJA Thank you... that silly young girl... she doesn't know what she's doing; what she's done, what he'll do to her, this fucking business'll will do to her. Her crying is all before her

SARAH Sure

ANJA She has no idea

FREDDY I need to talk to her. Stay here....

ANJA Where the hell else am I going to go Freddy?

FREDDY EXITS

SCENE 15

THE INTERVIEW WITH SARAH (2)

SARAH Two, three years after that reading, my mother was dying of cancer. She'd smoked all her life... thirty, forty a day. But, the strange thing was, in the month or so before she died, she stopped

DREW Oh, yeah?

SARAH Yeah... So I moved back to Chicago to look after her

DREW Sure...

SARAH And I tried to take care of her in her own home, but the final week... the final week, God. She'd be up all night walking around like a mad woman, which she was, I guess; lung cancer goes to the brain. And I'd have to protect her from herself, and she was strong and she hurt me.... and once or twice, I got angry and I hurt her back... I'm not proud of that... I was just trying to help her

DREW Mm

SARAH I wanted her to die at home... peacefully, but she was beyond peace. She was so distressed and I couldn't ease her pain, I... I wanted to be strong for her, but she needed more than love. I just didn't want to make that call to the hospice, I didn't want my mother to die in a strange bed, but I... I...

DREW Mmm

SARAH In the hour or so before the ambulance, she suddenly became lucid again and she knew where she was going; a dying place and she would never come home. And there was so much fear in her. And she searched frantically for her cigarettes and she was desperately trying to light them but she couldn't co-ordinate and there was sheer terror in her eyes. Horror, pleading me, not to let her go. Oh, Drew... I helped her smoke a final cigarette... steadied her hand... (GATHERS HERSELF) As soon as she reached the hospice, they pumped the morphine into her... and she was never herself again...

DREW I'm sorry

SARAH I should've let her go sooner. I was selfish

DREW You loved her

SARAH Maybe not enough. So anyway, a month or so after she died, I came back to New York and I get a call, would I read *Troyanne* again? A reading up at EST this time. Well, I wasn't sure; wasn't in the right frame of mind. But, it was *Troyanne*, it meant something to me

DREW To us both

SARAH Yeah. So I said "Ok". And the reading went well

DREW Yeah, I was there, it was the ninth reading

SARAH The ninth, was it?

DREW Yeah

SARAH And Bill was there

DREW Yeah

SARAH And after the reading, do you remember, we all went to a bar some where over on ninth?

DREW The Marseilles

SARAH Was it?

DREW Yeah

SARAH Yeah, and the wine was good; too good. And I was sitting next to Bill and all the hurt that had been building up inside had been released by the play and the wine. And I told him all about my Mom. And he listened to me, I could almost see him taking notes behind his eyes! And I knew I shouldn't have said things to him; knowing what he'd do with them, but I needed to speak to someone. And he reached out his hand and touched mine... and I thought for a moment, just a moment, it was genuine compassion. Then, I realized... the guy's hitting on me. He'd just had a child with Molly, for God sake, and he was hitting on me. He is unbelievable...but I let his hand rest there for a while

DREW You had an affair with Bill?

SARAH What do you think I am?

DREW A great actress (WITH IRONY)

SARAH Yeah (SHE LAUGHS) So anyway a year or so ago, I get another call; a new play by him. Would I do a reading? And I said 'Yeah'. And I get sent an email of the script and I open it up and I scan through it and suddenly... suddenly, I'm reading about my Mom and me. And I give him a call and I said I had issues with the play. And he said it wasn't about me, it happened to a friend of his and I said "Fuck you, Bill. I trusted you..."

SCENE 16
THE REHEARSAL ROOM (6)

ANJA I don't know why I did this reading? I don't know what I hoped to get out of it

SARAH Do you want Bill back?

ANJA Don't know what I want, just a chance to act, maybe? Whore myself for a few hours of feeling alive. Perhaps that little bitch was right....

SARAH No

ANJA No, she was. It's pathetic? This acting thing... our whole lives lived hoping that one day, we read the right play at the right time, and we're seen by the right person and... (TIRED OF THE ENERGY EXPENDED) It's just fucking desperate. And it gets more desperate the older we get. Because, the older we get, we only live... we only

really live, when we're acting someone else. I don't think I know who I am any more, you know?

SARAH Yeah

ANJA That's the real tragedy, not this... pornography

SARAH Mm

ANJA But, even now, after what's happened, that desperate part of me thinks "The show must go on" His god dam show! And the irony is, I want to read it... I want to read it because I want my dignity back as an actress; I've played all Three Sisters - and Natasha! I've done Shakespeare in the Park. I am a fucking professional. Damn him, for taking that dignity away from me...

SARAH I don't think he's taken that away, Anja... I don't think he's taken that at all. And if you want to read, I'll read

ANJA No, it's ok

SARAH No, I will

ANJA Will you?

SARAH If that's what you want... if that's what you need... Drew?

DREW Yeah... I'll read

SARAH And we can swap roles if you want?

ANJA God, no... you read great...you're great...

SARAH Thank you...

THEY EMBRACE

SCENE 17

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE THING (3)

DREW So, tell me. Is Bill English?

THING No, I don't think so

DREW But, British, right?

THING Maybe

DREW European then?

THING Possibly

DREW Don't you know?

THING No. Yeah, a few times I asked him where he was from, but he'd just say it's "Beyond the horizon and fucking far away." But hey, that could be Nantucket!

DREW And where is he now? Do you know?

THING No... I'm not much help, sorry. You know he had a kid with Molly, don't you?

DREW Yeah, I met him

THING Oh yeah?

DREW Looks like a mini Bill

THING God help him. Anja was right, kids don't make good fathers. Bill took off a year or so back; couldn't hack the responsibility. And I don't know where he is now. He's probably hunting other bears somewhere, back beyond the horizon maybe... or anywhere. But wherever he is, one thing's for sure, Drew, he lives in perpetual fear and exile...

SCENE 18
THE REHEARSAL ROOM (7)

FREDDY Ok, let's pick up with the final scene. Page, uh...

MOLLY APPROACHES ANJA. THE ROOM STOPS

FREDDY Molly, please...

ANJA It's ok

THE FOLLOWING IS TENSE

MOLLY I'm sorry

ANJA Do you love him?

MOLLY Yeah

ANJA Be careful then

MOLLY TAKES HER PLACE. THERE IS RELIEF

FREDDY Ok... why are there no goddamn page numbers on this script? Let's pick up from the stage direction - The Police officer approaches. You all got that?

ALL Yeah

FREDDY Drew?

Drew Yeah

THEY READ AT THE STANDS

FREDDY The Police officer approaches

SARAH God, what does that Athens rookie want this time?

DREW Ladies

SARAH Officer

DREW May I speak with you alone, please, Mrs Mc... Mrs (HE STUMBLES. HE WIPES HIS EYES) Sorry

FREDDY You ok, Drew?

DREW Yeah. Can we go again?

FREDDY Sure (BEAT) The Police officer approaches

SARAH God, what does that Athens rookie want this time?

DREW Ladies

SARAH Officer

DREW May I speak with you alone, please, Mrs McEllroy

SARAH If you can't say what you have to say in front of Tory, it's not worth the saying

ANJA I'll leave, Hannah

SARAH No, stay... Please. Say whatever you have to say, officer. It's been a long day and I think, you're going to lengthen it

FREDDY The officer is uncertain, but begins anyway

DREW Ma-am, I have news...

SCENE 19

THE INTERVIEW WITH THE THING (4)

BY NOW, PABST HAS DONE FOR HIM

THING The last time I was with Bill, we didn't say much to each other. In a way, we were back in that room again, waiting for The Grizzly to walk in. But there was no bear, there was just Bill and me in a room and the memory of twelve drafts, twelve casts, twelve readings; twelve goddam readings, but, no release

DREW Does that bother you?

THING Does that bother me, Drew! Wouldn't it bother you? I mean, how many other plays go to twelve readings?

DREW Not many

THING Exactly. I mean, if a play's got legs; six, seven readings and it's up and running. But, not me. Not me, Drew. Twelve fucking readings ... "This thing's got potential", they'd say. I hate that word, 'potential'. But, people wanted me, Drew; they wanted me. But, they didn't want me enough, I guess, just enough to torture me.

DREW Maybe it wasn't you they didn't want. Maybe, they wanted you, but, they just couldn't deal with him

THING With Bill?

DREW Yeah

THING Yeah, I know. Though, I never wanted to admit that, but, yeah, he's one stubborn, self absorbed, self pitying bastard. It was all Bill, Bill, Bill. He left no room in me for my own feelings, my own hopes and dreams. It was all about him... all about him and his integrity "What the fuck do they know?" he'd say. "I'm not changing a fucking line!" and 'they'd' pull back from commitment to production. If I could've changed, Drew, I would've changed me. I would've changed anything to fly, but I couldn't, I couldn't physically change anything. I am what he made me... just words... (INTROSPECTIVELY) It's the potential that kills, Drew. (AFTER A BEAT) That night... I remember he had a bottle of Knob and he was pouring them long with wedges of orange on ice. And after a while, the rye released his tongue "Twelve" he said, spitting "Twelve fucking readings!"

DREW Did he always swear?

THING There was a scream in everything he ever wrote or said, one long drawn out 'Fuck' ... and he turned to me, eyes burning "What is wrong with you?" he said "What the fuck is wrong with you? Why? Why don't you fucking fly?" And he was searching me... and I didn't have an answer for him and he wanted one bad, and that frustrated him even more. "Fucking useless fuck!" And he was mindless and screaming; so angry with me, as if he had a monopoly on God damn frustration! I was only nine thousand five hundred and fifty four words between '*Troyanne*' and 'The end'. I was just words, dead on the page; still am, trapped in the reading. I have prayed over and over again for release, prayed for some god damn producer to reach out and stage me so that I can fly in the mouths of actors acting free of the page. I am more than my words! I am a fucking play! What right did he have to be frustrated with me? He was God, he had his freedom. He'd already moved on, he'd named other things and written them. He could walk away from me any time he chose. I couldn't walk away from anything! It wasn't my fault if he kept walking back to me like a God pissed with his creation. It wasn't my fault... It wasn't my god damn fault! From the moment he typed the first T of *Troyanne*, I began suffering; suffering is my whole god damn story, Drew! This is the story you wanted, wasn't it; a story of loss, of pain? (BEAT) "I wish I'd never fucking written you" he said. Then he began to read me; and, by then, he was slurring "Let the memory house burn down..."

LIGHT UP ON SARAH READING. THE FOLLOWING
OVERLAP – SARAH UNDER THING

SARAH ...Let the walls ignite...

THING And he was crying..

SARAH Let a whole life flame incandescent...

THING And angry..

SARAH And as the fire consumes...

THING Losing it...

SARAH Let it erase all trace of memory...

THING I was frightened...

SARAH All birthdays and Christmases...

THING Frightened...

SARAH All joys and disappointments – let it torch love...

THING Frightened because I knew he was going to do something

SARAH Let it burn fiercely..

THING And... he began deleting me...

SARAH Let the fire burn down the years...

THING File by file...

SARAH Scorch the memory so that nothing remains...

THING Until there was no trace of me on his Mac...

SARAH Nothing can be rebuilt of it...

THING And then he opened his email and searched...

SARAH No pain pieced together from the charred remains. Let nothing be...

THING And he deleted all the emails that contained not just me, but every
mention of me, everything that I was, he clean housed me...

SARAH Let the flames devour our lives lived together in this perfect little city...

LIGHT DOWN ON SARAH

- THING And he left me with no eyes to dot or eyes to cry with! And he shouted “I thought I knew you! But I know you now. You are my fucking failure!” Those were the last words he said to me.
- DREW I’m sorry
- THING (SILENCE. THEN...) You wanted the memory... Why, Drew? What do you want from me really? What could you possibly want from a Thing that’s going no-where.
- DREW I saw you fly once...
- THING Hell, the once! Just the god damn ‘once’! I flew and could fly again. I could soar, if only, someone...(STOPS HIMSELF FROM TRULY HOPING) So, what’s it gonna be, Drew? (SLIGHTLY CONDESCENDING) You gonna read me? A thirteenth reading, unlucky for some...
- DREW No
- THING (POSSIBLE HOPE) You gonna stage me? You gonna stage me, Drew?
- DREW (HESITANT) No
- THING (THINKS) What then?
- DREW I’m...
- THING What? (DREW IS UNCERTAIN HOW TO BEGIN) What?
- DREW (VERY HESITANT) I’m... I’m gonna’ write about you, write about the reading of you
- THING What?
- DREW Write about the reading of you
- THING (HALF BEAT) You kiddin’ me, right?
- DREW No.
- THING Write about the reading of me... about the fucking, reading of me!

DREW (HALF PAUSE) Yeah

THING Why?

DREW I need to

THING You need to! What about my needs, Drew! This is my life; my misery

DREW Sure...

THING You've no right to write about me

DREW Look, if I can just explain

THING Explain what! What can you explain you goddam insensitive shit. Do think I have no feelings, Drew. Do you? Do you think I'm dead, just because I'm words trapped on a fucking page; a text to be abused as you see fit? I am a fucking play, Drew! I am life encapsulated and I have to endure this unrequited fucking... existence. I feel; I bleed! Don't fuck with my dignity, Drew.

DREW Look, I know how you're feeling.

THING The hell you do

DREW Please, just listen to me

THING I don't need to listen to your bullshit?

DREW Please... please, just....

THING I think we're done here

DREW Look, I know your life's your own story, ok. But it's my story as well. You're a play. You only live when I breathe life into you

THING Fuck you! I'm outta here...

DREW Please, what I mean is, ok, what I mean is, we have a... a mutual dependency; your story is my story, my story is yours. Because, we only live in the moments when we live together, the rest is to be endured; the endless waiting, the hoping against all hope, that is just existence, but together we live, we fly. (HALF BEAT) I've got this friend, and she's always said that after one particular production she should've

stopped acting, because she left her heart in that play, and she knew she would never act as well again. Well, my heart is yours

THING I never asked for that

DREW You need it. (HALF BEAT) Look...

THING What?

DREW That morning of the reading

THING What about it?

DREW You wanna know why. That morning, I went to a specialist, that's why I was late. I'd been having trouble with my eyes for some time. I had two black spots in the middle of them; like holding your fists in front of your eyes and not being able to see round them, wherever you look, they're there. She told me that I would slowly go blind due to death in the retina and pretty soon I would not be able to act... or read again. Reading was never hell for me. It was like a heaven full of beautiful ideas and possibilities... like, you - a fabulous thing... I barely made it through that reading. I had so much fear in me; fear of darkness, fear of losing the word, fear of losing my god damn mind. But I couldn't say anything. I don't bring my shit into the rehearsal room, that space is sacred... a Dionysian fucking grove. But, I was so full of fear...

THING Yeah, I remember you stumbled

DREW I did, but somehow I made it through... you do, it's what you do, isn't it? Dr Theatre! But theatre is fleeting and life is... well, there's just no cure for it, is there. It never ends 'til it ends, and by then, it's too late. You were the last play I ever read. After that I... I was not in a good place for a long time... I was in a darkness, ever darkening.

THING I know that feeling

DREW I know you know. Look, I need to write about you, about that reading of you, so that I can move on. I need closure and this is the only way I feel I can attain it... to mark where one life ended and this, darkness began. You understand?

THING I'm trying to

DREW I'm sorry it's you, but you were there - at the end and at the beginning. It was just "fucking providence" as Bill would say.

THING Yeah

DREW I'm sorry, but I guess, you could have been any Play..

THING Oh, that makes me feel great.

DREW But you were you

THING Fuck you

DREW Sorry, that came out wrong...

THING No, it came out right! Once an actor, always a goddam actor. I'm just your catharsis, is that it? Is that it?

DREW Well, no. But yeah, but...

THING But, what? But, what! You are one cruel bastard, Drew! You are worse than him. At least, he never pretended to care when he used you. You always knew he was picking you clean. But you are such a good actor, you suspended all disbelief and, for a moment, I hoped. You made me hope. But all along, you were looking to betray me, you bastard; I'd pluck out your eyes if you had eyes worth god damn plucking! You eyeless, heartless fuck!

DREW Look

THING Stop telling me to fucking look! What makes you think you can take my life and use it for your own gain, Drew ? You've got no right. No fucking right at all. My misery is my story. Get your own fucking epiphany! (ANGRY BUT DEFEATED) Fuck you and fuck Bill! Once again... yet again, reduced to nothing..

LIGHTS UP ON FREDDY

FREDDY ... slowly,

THING Nothing...

FREDDY *Troyanne...*

THING No Thing...

FREDDY ...begins to burn

THING Well, this Thing fucking ends now! It ends... it fucking... (HE TRIES TO SWITCH OFF THE CAMERA. HE CANNOT BRING HIMSELF TO DO IT) Bastard! I... I can't... goddam... fuck this thing! (HE PUTS THE CAMERA IN DREW'S HANDS) Turn off this goddam camera, Drew! Turn it off, will you. that thing seduces me with endless fucking possibility... I don't have the strength; turn it off!

DREW I can't (HE CAN'T. WON'T. HE LOOKS AWAY))

THING You can

HE PUTS THE CAMERA IN DREW'S HANDS

DREW I won't

THING You must (DREW IS IMPASSIVE) You cannot do this to me, Drew. Drew, look at me. Straight down the lens. Look at me, Drew! Just because you've lost your eyes, doesn't mean you can't fucking see! Look at me! I am an ugly wounded thing, Drew. If I was a dog, you'd show compassion. So, if you have any human decency left behind those goddam eyes, you'd end this now. We all need closure, Drew. I told you, it's the potential that's killing... twelve fucking readings! So, no more. You can end this misery; for me, for us. You don't really need me, Drew. Write about something beautiful! Forget about this horrible thing. Do it. Just turn off the goddam camera. I'm... (DREW IS HESITANT) I'm begging you. I'm tired, dog tired. If you have any mercy... (BEAT) What are you waiting for? Fucking character motivation! Please!

DREW (RESIGNED) Ok (HE SWITCHES OFF THE CAMERA)

THING (WITH RELIEF) Thank you. (HALF BEAT) Now, show absolute mercy and erase me; (DREW TURNS TO HIM) a clean Ohio kill...

DURING THE NEXT SCENE, DREW ERASES THE DISC

SCENE 20
THE READING OF THE PLAY ABOUT THE READING OF
THE PLAY

WE NOW ENTER THE READING OF THE PLAY. LIGHTS UP
ON SARAH

SARAH ... let the flames devour our lives lived together in this perfect little city. Cauterize the memory at its root.. It's time to walk the plain out of here; walk up a mountain, walk into the sea. Time to walk the ground in front of me - one foot in front of another. Time to forget...

FREDDY The tornado siren wails

SARAH Tornado's coming...

FREDDY Slowly, Troy begins to burn. The fire consumes the Thing, until it is barely a wisp of memory floating across the Ohio plane. A dog barks... a cardinal sings, 'pretty, pretty, pretty'...

THING Are we done?

DREW It's done

FREDDY ... and then... he's forgotten. The end

THE INTERVIEW HAS BEEN ERASED

TROY STORY

BILL

I was sitting in Thompson House - one time home of the inventor of a very efficient sub-machine gun - sipping a bottle of Kentucky Bourbon Barrel Ale. The Mount Pleasant String Band pickin' and dancin' like bluegrass moths around a retro mic; just another Summer evening in the Tri-state.

Next morning I caught a Greyhound down to Dayton, where the Accord was signed, I was on my way to Troy, Ohio, But when I arrived at Dayton, turns out, there was no way for me to get there. "No bus?" "No bus." "No train?" "No train." "But Troy is a city of fifteen, twenty thousand!" "You just don't get there." "Right..." "Well you could call a cab, but that'd cost you a hundred and fifty bucks." "Hundred and fifty bucks!"

I nearly got on that Greyhound and headed back to banks of the Ohio, when this black guy said, "I'll take you there". His name was Jesse – great guy, without him I would not have reached the Square; sure as hell I wouldn't be here now telling you why I wanted to get there.

Jesse was a real gentleman. "One question", he asked of me "Why? Why, Troy?" "Yeah... why? That's one hell of a question. Well, sir..." I said, "One morning, a few years back, I was teaching at a small college in Ohio, when a colleague came in; a great guy; wherever he went, he brought the sun with him. You know that kind of guy; so positive – just, not that morning. Turns out, the night before, his nephew, a crack

sniper on leave from Iraq, was showing his new high velocity rifle to his pa, when his pa accidentally pulled the trigger and shot his son dead”. “God damn.” “Yeah...anyway, as I listened to the tragedy of that boy’s death, I just kept thinking about his mom – wondering whether she’ll be able to lie next to her husband ever again; lie next to the man who killed her only son? That’s the problem with being a writer, Jesse - inspiration. It’s invariably won at the expense of some one else’s misery! Now I know I shouldn’t have been thinking such thoughts at the time, Jesse, but I was” “God has his reasons, son” “Yeah, he sure does...”

“Anyway, years pass and I’m back in NY teaching *The Trojan Women*. Do you know *The Trojan Women*, Jesse?” “No” “No? It’s an old play about war and shit.... and it was around the time of the thousandth US casualty of our ‘Holy Crusade’, and I was thinking about little boys games and their effect upon women, when suddenly, I put the theme of that play and the shooting of that boy together and I think, ‘Adaptation!’ My little protest against these interesting times, I’ll adapt *The Trojan Women* and I’ll set it in a Troy, USA of today!”

“So I start Googling. I knew there was a Troy, NY State and a Troy, Michigan, but I was hoping there’d be a Troy Ohio, because Ohio is *Winesburg* country! And you know what, Jesse, there was a God!” “Hell I know that, kid, otherwise I wouldn’t know where the hell we’re goin’!” Jesse said. “Yeah, sure, but that’s why, Sir, that’s why I want to get there; to write a play - about guns and America...” And Jesse turned to me, and said “Does Troy know you’re comin’?” And I just smiled at him, and... and by then, we’d reached the Square. So, Jesse dropped me off and promised to pick me up in a few days, and there I

was, alone in the heart of Troy, heart of America; spiritual home of mac 'n cheese and apple pie!

So, I check into the Hampton Inn and I turn on the TV and there, on the news was a story about an eight year old boy from Vandalia... turns out he'd just shot his pa dead whilst his pa was teaching him how to shoot a handgun. And, to my shame, the writer in me thought, 'Huzzah!' Thank god, the father in me was more redeeming, and I screamed at the TV. "Why? The 2nd amendment was only written to kill the God damn British!¹⁵² That was two hundred fuckin' years ago! Ok I'm bein' simplistic, but that's why we've got this gun shit. Can we move on? Can we put the gun down? Now? Because it's already too late!"

Later that evening, in a bar, across the road from the Courthouse, where the convicted shoot hoops in a caged court, there was no blue-grass, no joy; the silence took away my taste for beer. And as I walked along the Interstate back to the hotel, I looked up at the wide Ohio skies and I swear... I swear I heard the scream of a mother, and the cry of a young boy blowin' across the plains...

A short play originally written for the volume *24 Gun Control Plays*

(Reprinted with the kind permission of No Passport Press)

c Ian Rowlands January 2013

(Revised 12 . x . 14)

¹⁵² Note that the simplistic reason I gave for drafting the Second Amendment was, as I was to later discover, upon reading Volsky, an ignorant's mistake, and that it was in fact written by James Madison (as I have previously noted) in defence of State's Law and for complex reasons that had little to do with the British.

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