An Investigation into a
Dramatic Writing Toolset
for the Creation of
a New Work of Drama

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Abstract

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In this exegesis I have attempted to formulate a primary toolset for
dramatic writing that I can apply to create dramatic structure in plays,
the chief example being my play Albatross (included herein).

This toolset is contingent upon Aristotle’s basic tenet of drama, that
“tragedy is an imitation of an action” (2002: 10). This exegesis theorises
that the work of modern writers on drama such as Spencer, Packard,
Catron, Lamott, See, Hicks and many others, fundamentally accords with
Aristotle on this point, such that the tools they espouse can collectively
be considered a standard set for dramatic writing.

Beyond this, my research has led me to believe that there is a primary
subset of tools specific to creating dramatic structure. These tools,
formulated from dramatic theory, best capture my own way of thinking
about my writing practice. I divide them into two types: the first, tools of
creation, comprise Theme and Values; Character and their Values;
Characters and Action; Character Orchestration and Obstacles; and
Event and Significant Change. The second, tools of evaluation, are
Passivity; Stakes; and Premise. Together these eight tools have been
responsible for creating dramatic structure in the play, Albatross.
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**Bibliography**
The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree or diploma at any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

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Chapter One

Introduction

In the dramatic writing community of playwrights, screenwriters and genre writers, considerable efforts have been made to lay bare the fundamentals of dramatic structure. These efforts have provided writers with a number of writing tools, each developed to help them engage with and produce dramatic structure in their own work. Yet for all the successes that have been made in the understanding of dramatic structure and the tools developed to create it, it seems we have not been wholly successful in satisfying that writer’s doubt, that uncertainty we all face when attempting to successfully recreate dramatic structure again and again. As Spencer puts it, “You only learn to write the play you’re writing at the moment … with each new play, you start the process all over again.” (2002: 173)

But is this true? Is there a set of tools that can conquer this feeling of doubt? As writers, do we have to feel that we are learning our craft all over again every single time we write?

For my own part, there must be a primary set of tools, a dramatic writing toolset, which when used together, are best able to create (and
recreate) dramatic structure, easing the writer’s doubt. The aim of this exegesis is to develop and test just such a dramatic writing toolset for the creation of a new work of drama, *Albatross*, a full-length work authored by myself.

One obvious objection to such an aim is the very thought that a primary dramatic writing toolset can actually exist, for surely the creative arts are more dependent upon intuition and inspiration. I respond to such criticisms by quoting Egri, who argues: “one is not supposed to conduct important business on a hunch, a feeling, a whim – one is supposed to *act upon knowledge*” (1960: 88). But what is this knowledge, and is there agreement within the discourses on dramatic structure?

Aristotle in his notes on the great Greek dramatists, *Poetics*, argued that tragedy, and by this he meant serious drama, is the “imitation of an action” (1996: 10). Whilst the work of authors such as Spencer (2002), Hatcher (1996), Catron (1993), Egri (1960), Packard (1997) and many others may challenge Aristotle in some respects, they all hold this basic tenet to be true. In fact, partly because of the similarity in the work of the aforementioned critics, it could be argued that there is indeed such a thing as a universally recognised theory of dramatic structure.

But what of a universally recognised set of dramatic writing tools? It seems far more probable that each writer (and critic) will formulate their
own toolset based upon their experiences, writing practice, and understanding of dramatic structure. Indeed, this is evidenced by the variety of dramatic writing tools found in the texts by the above mentioned authors. It seems that each of these authors have either developed or adapted tools to aid in their writing process. Had any one of these matched my writing process sufficiently then this research project would not have been required. Instead, the approach I offer within these pages is my own formulation of a dramatic writing toolset that complements my own writing practice and conquers my own feelings of doubt, thereby challenging Spencer’s notion that “with each new play, you start the process all over again.” (2002: 173) These tools, then, constitute my primary toolset for dramatic writing; it is my belief that they will prove sufficiently transferable that they may find a home in any other writers’ toolkits which, like my own, have grown out of Aristotle’s fundamental proposition on dramatic structure. To the best of my knowledge, this distinct formulation of tools represents an original contribution to the existing discourse on dramatic writing toolsets.

To achieve the aims of this exegesis:

In Chapter 2 I will first provide a summary of my dramatic writing toolset. To do this will require a brief introduction to dramatic theory including the concepts of dramatic action, stakes, obstacles to action, conflict and event. The tools will then be separated into two kinds - tools
of creation and tools of evaluation, each of which represents different modes of thinking which occur in my writing process.

By placing my research within a broader context of research in the creative arts, Chapter 3 details the practice-led research methodology which has been used to investigate my writing practice. I will show how this methodology was applied only after conceptualising the inherent duality of self: self as researcher, and self as artist, each with a critical eye on the other.

In Chapter 4, I discuss the circumstances of writing Albatross, the timeline, the thematic context, as well as a brief introduction to the story. In response to Chapter 3, Chapter 4 is also in part a reflexive synthesis on the writing toolset in flux. A complete copy of the play text, Albatross, is included in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5 I consider each of the tools in turn, looking at how they were applied during the writing of Albatross. I consider the text and, by examining its strengths and weaknesses, attempt to glean some insight into the success or otherwise of the various tools.

In Chapter 6 I conclude by offering my own recommendations to dramatic writers as to how to go about facing their own doubts and how
best to take advantage of the tools that already exist, in order to develop a consistent and holistic approach to their writing practice.

Please Note: the exegesis and the play text presented herein are intended to be read and assessed as two components of a single, overarching project. That said, the play text *Albatross* represents 75% of this overarching project and is duly weighted at 75% of the assessable outcome. Consequently the exegetical component is weighted at 25%.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

Considering the variety of texts on playwriting (and for that matter screenwriting) that cover the fundamentals of dramatic structure, there is striking agreement when it comes to identifying these key elements. Authors such as Downs and Wright (1998), Spencer (2002), Catron (1993), Packard (1997), Hicks (1999), Hatcher (1996), and Egri (1960), amongst others, all of whom I have relied upon while writing Albatross, each describe drama in ways that are remarkably similar, so that at times they echo each other, for example, the playwrights’ mantra, “character is action” (see Hatcher, 1996: 27; Spencer, 2002: 112; Packard, 1997: 57; Downs and Wright, 1998: 49 and Hicks, 1999: 34). This is not so surprising, though, for at its component level dramatic structure is generally well understood.

My goal in this chapter however is not to provide a detailed survey of dramatic structure, but instead to acknowledge its importance and show how it underpins my particular dramatic writing toolset. Indeed there are many other aspects of writing a good play other than dramatic structure, and many different tools may be required; however, I intend
only to consider those tools which I apply to create dramatic structure within a finished play text.

As Mamet tells us, “a play is designed, if correctly designed, as a series of incidents in which and through which the protagonist struggles toward his or her goal.” (Mamet, 1999: 12) I believe this statement neatly captures some of the key elements of dramatic structure. Firstly, that character is defined in terms of goals or dramatic actions, with appropriate stakes. Secondly, there must exist an opposition or obstacle that the characters must struggle against which creates conflict. Thirdly, there is a cause and effect so that each action is a direct consequence of those that came before and triggers those which come after. Finally, there is a climax or culminating event where the character’s fight is won or lost and, importantly, they change because of it.

Such an understanding of dramatic structure is the legacy of Aristotle who, in the Poetics, attempted to understand why the works of the great Greek playwrights who lived some one hundred years before his time were better (as he perceived them to be) than the works of his contemporaries. It was Aristotle who first identified the concept of dramatic action when he argued that “tragedy is an imitation of an action” (Aristotle, 1996: 10), and in so doing, struck the key note for most contemporary thinking on the subject.
My toolset, which has grown out of Aristotle’s theory of dramatic structure, is divided into two general sorts of tools echoed in the following:

In order to develop as writers we need to be able both to plumb our own depths for the material for our writing and to set that material free so that it can be transformed into art; in other words we need to be able to access and objectify our material.

(Hunt and Sampson, 2006: 2)

Following Maisel, I call these competing modes of access and objectivity, “creation and evaluation” (1999: 117), because it best reflects the way I think about the way I write. To clarify, this breakdown is not to suggest that I have two distinct phases of writing, but rather that I have two different ways of thinking about writing. As Maisel argues, “creation and evaluation each require a distinct awareness,” (1999: 117) and so these different awarenesses are reflected in the toolset. Below I investigate the relationship of my toolset to dramatic structure by analysing the ways in which the tools may be called upon during the creation of a new work of drama.

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2.1 Tools of Creation

I shall first consider the tools of creation. These are the tools I use mostly when engaged in a creative way of thinking – which, paradoxically, is less a way of thinking, and more a way of not thinking, for “you get your intuition back when you make space for it, when you
stop the chattering of the rational mind. Rationality squeezes out much that is rich and juicy and fascinating” (Lamott, 1994: 112). Ideally, these tools sit below our conscious awareness that we are using them.

### 2.1.1 Values and Theme

Hatcher argues that “playwrights get their ideas from their observations of the wider world, their observations of the people around them, and their observations of their own souls – their own concerns, convictions, fears and desires” (1996: 42). This has always struck a deep chord within me. Hatcher tells us that it is a playwright’s duty to observe not simply the outside world, but their deep being, their feelings and beliefs. This is echoed by Catron: “Before you begin writing, identify what is most important to you, [and] write about a fire that ignites your inner being” (1993: 4). Both Hatcher and Catron are making the simple point that to be a good playwright one needs to get to know one’s values. Knowing your values, then, is the first tool in the creation of a new work. This is not surprising and in the most general sense this is the work of all artists. For the creative writer however it has particular importance. Lamott puts it like this: “if your deepest beliefs drive your writing, they will not only keep your work from being contrived but will help you discover what drives your characters” (1996: 105).

Catron identifies three possible types of germinal idea for a play: situation, character and theme (Catron, 1993: 50). Each of these can
potentially connect into a writer’s deeply held values and be the source of a new play, and different writers must come to their own conclusions on this matter. For my own part, I find I write best when writing from theme. The *Australian Oxford Dictionary* defines theme as “the subject or topic on which a person speaks, writes or thinks” (AOD, 1999: 1389).

At the early stages of a writing project, thinking of theme in terms of subject can be quite beneficial. You may know you want to write a play about sexism for example, but you may not be sure exactly what you want to say. This is why Catron calls it writing from theme: even though it may only be a subject at first, it must be able to grow into a theme. Spencer says, “a theme needs to be a sentence, a complete sentence. It’s the subject and verb that give your theme real meaning” (Spencer, 2002: 154). Theme, then, is subject with intent. In my writing practice, it is exactly those deeply held values already mentioned that give the subjects I write about intent, that create theme.

It is quite possible that in the early stages of a new work, those deep values that drive the work, and those themes present in the work will be very similar, if not the same. This is why I think of values and theme as a single tool. By understanding those deeply held values I am also unearthing new themes for plays, and conversely, by identifying subjects I want to write about I am starting the journey of discovering exactly what my deep beliefs are. That I should write this way seems
quite natural to me; after all “the purpose of most great writing seems to be to reveal in an ethical light, who we are” (Lamott, 1994: 104).

2.1.2 Character and their Values

In my practice the natural next step to consider after theme is character. Many writing books suggest that the best way to develop character is to write character biographies, for example: “I’ll make the argument that the best, most organic and safest way to develop characters would be to create detailed biographies, backgrounds, psychology for the character before writing or outlining the play” (Hatcher, 1996: 26). Despite such ideas, I have grown to believe that there is a simpler way that does not feel so arbitrary, external or contrived.

The best screenplays are not inhabited by characters that are built. Creative screenwriters recognize that characters are alive and complete the instant you conceive them. They live within you, and your job is to find ways that will allow them to come out.

(Hicks, 1999: 30)

This way of thinking privileges the subconscious mind. It changes the onus on the writer from that of creation to one of discovery. The characters are not out there, they are inside you, they are a part of you: “they give you – in the form of cosmic refraction – unique access to your own soul and vision of life” (See, 2002:124). Identifying the characters already inside you and allowing them to speak for themselves is the tool of Character and their Values: “the writer must listen to the inner voice – not the writer’s inner voice, but the voice of the character within the
writer.” (Hicks, 1999: 30) Being inside your own head is not the same as being inside the head of your characters.

But how do you get inside the head of a character who doesn’t seem fully developed? Aristotle tells us that “the action [of a play] is performed by certain agents. These must be people of a certain kind with respect to their character and reasoning”, and just in case we missed it continues, “character is that in respect of which we say that the agent is of a certain kind.” (1996: 11) Ironically, when Aristotle is talking about character he is not referring to our Twentieth Century notions of the totality of physiological, sociological, and psychological attributes as defined by Egri (1960: 33), or even that voice inside our head. In his translation notes Heath clarifies: “When Aristotle talks about character he is not talking about the quirks and details of someone’s individuality, but about the structure of their moral dispositions” (1996: xliii). It turns out that in the tool of Character and their Values, the most direct way to hear the character inside you is to ask them of their character, that is to say, the structure of their moral dispositions, their values. Hicks defines it so: “Values are the beliefs and opinions about the forces that shape life which the character has incorporated into his image of himself” (1999: 39). These values are not necessarily the same as the author’s, but just as finding one’s own values is crucial in developing a play, so is finding a character’s values crucial in developing character.
2.1.3 Characters and Action

It is a truism that all characters need to have an action. When Ayckbourn says “never include a character with no real function” (2002: 37), he means that each character needs to have something to do and there is no easier way to do this then to give them an action. The concept of action dates back to Aristotle and in a dramatic sense it is what ties together character and plot. Action is more than just movement on stage; “a dramatic action is a want, a need, a desire, a going for something. This is the same thing as saying that it is an objective.” (Packard, 1997: 31) Similarly, “action is what a character wants” (Spencer, 2002: 38). In drama it makes no sense to talk about character without talking about action and vice versa, indeed as exemplified in the introduction to this chapter, it is often argued they are the same thing.

What kinds of action are we talking about? Spencer notes “the character must want something that we can watch him pursue” (2002: 40). What kinds of actions will be watchable? According to Packard, “the stronger the action, the stronger the character will be,” (1997: 58) and “actions should be strong and clear and right there in the text” (35). Strong actions then are what is required, for it is strong actions that force a character to do something in the here and now, that make a character look to the near future and desire to change the world to their liking, which is to say, make a story.
Yet it is not so straightforward as to give each of your characters actions and be done with it.

In order to locate a character’s major action, a playwright has to go inside himself and uncover some impulse that is probably hidden away deep in his own unconscious.

(Spencer, 2002: 58)

[Actions] have to come somehow out of the deepest core of the characters, which means they have to come most deeply out of the playwright himself.

(Packard, 1997: 35)

This is why the tool of Character and their Values is so important and, if done correctly, an action should organically begin to present itself. But is it simply the case that actions directly emerge from characters’ values? In my practice, characters won’t always necessarily act on their values, but they do act on their emotions. As Spencer says, “emotions lead to action” (2002: 175), and in my writing, there is nothing that is so sure to evoke strong emotions as our deeply held beliefs and values.

2.1.4 Character Orchestration and Obstacles

Anecdotally, half the work of a director is in casting. In my opinion, half the work of a dramatic writer is in character orchestration. It is an extremely important concept in the creation of a new work, that in my toolset is fundamentally co-joined with the concept of obstacles. Packard defines “an obstacle [as] any impediment, obstruction, hindrance, opposition, or stone wall barrier that stands in the way of someone getting what they want” (1997: 43). They can be internal or external, a
physical thing like the weather (think King Lear raging against the storm), or a psychological flaw (think Othello’s irrational jealousy). This said, in my experience, the best kind of obstacle is another person. “Typically, the character should want something of another character” (Spencer, 2002: 40), or more simply, “when one character’s ‘I Want’ comes up against another character’s ‘I Want’, you have dramatic conflict” (Hatcher, 1996: 24) Characters aren’t to be selected at random, or chosen out of instinct, nor can they be developed in isolation “Orchestration demands well-defined and uncompromising characters in opposition” (Egri, 1960: 115). One character’s action is another’s obstacle.

I would argue that the balance of actions and obstacles that constitutes orchestration is one of the most difficult aspects of playwriting. For although it is straightforward enough to invent actions in opposition to each other, actions must come from the deep beliefs of a character and can not be stuck on ad hoc. Good character orchestration is not just pitting character action against character action, but pitting the actions from a deeply held belief of one character against the actions of an equally deeply held belief of another. The “opposing forces must be equal, or else the play’s action cannot be sustained” (Catron, 1993: 23). This is true of all great drama, as the more deeply held the belief is the less likely a character will be willing to give up or change and the greater the case for conflict. Hicks puts it similarly: “the antagonist acts
from an irreconcilable moral ethos” (1999: 54). As a writer who writes from theme, such an understanding of the antagonist greatly helps in character orchestration. Once the protagonist emerges as the character that best exemplifies the theme, then the antagonist must necessarily hold different values which will direct them necessarily to opposing actions.

A final note on orchestration comes from Ayckbourn, who suggests an author “use the minimum number of characters that you need” (Ayckbourn, 2002: 13). This is a useful rule of thumb. The goal of the playwright should be to make the conflict as strong as possible. Often it is simpler to generate more conflict by simply adding new characters. Ayckbourn warns against this and I agree. Indeed in my work too many characters can dilute the action of the protagonist clouding the meaning of the play.

2.1.5 Event and Significant Change

This final tool of creation is as much a dramatic principle as a tool. “The dramatist needs not only characters who are willing to put up a fight for their convictions. He¹ needs characters who have the strength, the stamina, to carry this fight to its logical conclusion.” (Egri, 1960: 77) This logical conclusion, in Spencer’s terminology, is the event of the play, the “culmination or climax – the moment to which the action and

¹ Gender specific pronoun as used by Egri.
conflict have been leading” (2002: 85). In my writing practice knowing where I’m going is as important as knowing where I’ve come from, so having an idea of the climax of the play is crucial before writing. Spencer also describes the event in terms of action: “The event is when the character either gets what he wants or definitely does not get it, [it] is sometimes thought of as the moment of change in the play” (2002: 85). When I use event as a writing tool, I think of these two aspects acting together, so that at the climax, the character succeeds or fails and changes because of it. As Lamott puts it, “the climax is that major event, usually toward the end ... after which at least one of your people is profoundly changed” (1994: 61).

The importance of the character change cannot be over emphasized; it is the very reason for the play and reminds the audience on the nature of humanity: “We can safely say that any character ... which does not undergo a basic change is a badly drawn character” (Egri, 1960: 61). In practice this means that the event, the success or otherwise of the action, must bring the protagonist’s values into question. That is not to say the values must necessarily change; indeed it is something far more interesting. Hicks says that “the character’s self-concept makes up the who of our map,” and that “values make up the character’s self-concept” (1999: 38-39). He is introducing a new layer to character: self perception. In my writing practice, it is the characters’ perception of themselves as determined through their perception of their values which
changes as a result of the event. Their values may change or not, but importantly their self-concept changes and in effect so does their character.

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2.2 Tools of Evaluation

In my writing practice I have become aware of particular weaknesses that I tend to fall into which seem to infect early drafts of my work, so interestingly my tools of evaluation have evolved primarily as a response to these weaknesses. Being aware of common errors in the misapplication (often unconscious) of the tools of creation opens a door to accurately fix these errors in subsequent drafts, however the errors must first be identified. Interestingly the three tools of evaluation I use, and which I present here, align well with Aristotle’s initial prescription as to the exact form that the imitation of an action should take: that is, admirable (or serious), complete, and possessing a certain magnitude (1996: 10).

2.2.1 Passivity

The earliest of my drafts will often have a passive central character, one who never really takes up the battle with the antagonist or pursues their action as strongly as they should. This can be due to a combination of factors, though I tend to agree with Spencer who says “a central
character becomes passive because, ironically, you have paid so much attention to her” (2002: 189). It’s not just attention though, it is in fact love, and because you love them so, the subconscious urge is to protect them. Lamott puts it like this:

You are going to love some of your characters, because they are you or some facet of you … but no matter what, you are probably going to have to let bad things happen to some of the characters you love or you won’t have much of a story.

(1994: 45)

The solution is not to love the characters any less, but only to let them be hurt, because once they are hurt then their emotions will drive the action of the play.

The other half of the solution is within the character all along and can be seen in Aristotle’s definition. Aristotle says the action should be admirable. Aristotle means that the audience should find the action admirable, however I think it goes deeper than that. I would also say that the character needs to find their action admirable, for only if the character can see the benefit in their action will they be willing to do it. In their words, the characters need to be willing to get hurt. Interestingly, in my writing practice, the willingness of the character to get hurt and the willingness of the writer to let them get hurt go hand in hand.
2.2.2 Stakes

Stakes are a useful test to determine whether the character’s action is strong enough. It is a gambling term that captures the risky nature of dramatic action. The stakes are literally what is being risked; “stakes is what the character has to gain or lose” (Spencer, 2002: 74). As Egri tells us, “a pivotal character must not merely desire something. He must want it so badly that he will destroy or be destroyed in the effort to attain his goal” (1960: 106). In such a situation the stakes are high because the protagonist is willing to risk their life to further their action.

For the most part, high stakes follow when the characters act from their deeply held beliefs. As Lamott puts it, “find out what each character cares about most in the world because then you will have discovered what’s at stake” (1994: 55). This said, the stakes of any one character also need to be in balance with the rest of the play. When Aristotle says the action is of a certain magnitude he is talking about stakes, not merely that they are high, but at the certain magnitude for the situation of the play. As Packard puts it, “stakes are how badly the characters in a play want what they say they want, and how appropriate and important this wanting is in view of the total circumstances of the play” (1997: 51). Such circumstances can include the setting, time, other characters’ actions, and the culminating event. Packard continues, suggesting “the best way [to check the stakes] is to look at the actions and circumstances of the play, and then exercise a continuous testing of
what would happen if the stakes of the play were raised or lowered in any way” (1997: 53). In practice this equates to the playwright asking themselves such questions as, is the protagonist risking enough, does the protagonist stand to gain enough, and, is it right that they should do so here and now?

2.2.3 Premise

The final descriptor Aristotle uses is that the action of the play is complete. Here he is talking about the wholeness of the argument made by the play; he is talking about premise. Egri explains: “Every good premise is composed of three parts, each of which is essential to a good play ... character, conflict, and conclusion” (1960: 8). Premise is a short expression that captures these three elements and neatly summarises them, and as such it is a useful tool as a test for the wholeness of a work. In many ways it captures the theme of the play, and can be mistaken for the theme, however, unlike the theme, the premise has no conception of subject. The premise is the intent of the play. Ideally, your play should have only one premise and that premise should accurately match your original theme, at which point you know you have successfully carried your argument in dramatic form.
2.3 Summary

Above I have outlined two different sets of tools that together form my primary dramatic writing toolset. The first, a toolset of creation, is primarily intended to help the playwright engage with dramatic structure so as to create plays with strong structure without having to be conscious of the fact. The second, a toolset of evaluation, can be used at any time in the writing process when the writer needs a critical eye on the development of the work. Limiting the toolset of evaluation to three specific areas incidentally stops writers from over evaluating at too early a stage in creative development. Importantly though, these tools, and toolsets, have less to do with procedures and tasks, and more to do with ways of thinking about the elements of dramatic structure. They are intended to help the writer come to grips with dramatic structure in relation to their writing practice.
Chapter Three

Methodology

This exegesis exists within the still evolving area of academic endeavour known as creative practice as research. Like all exegeses, it is a reporting tool that reflects upon and is in some way an outcome of its research methodology. The Australian government, through the Department of Employment, Education, Training, and Youth Affairs (DEETYA) commissioned the report Research in the Creative Arts to explore the climate of academic research in the context of the creative arts. This report observed that in various Australian universities where a scientific paradigm of research predominates, a methodology that proposes the creation of a work of art may struggle to be identified as research as defined both by DEETYA and the Australian Research Council (ARC). The report introduced the concept of research equivalence and recommended:

Recommendation 3
In addition to conventional definitions of research, individual universities and the major funding bodies should adopt the notion of research equivalence as an appropriate and valid concept for recognition of research-based practice and performance in the creative arts. Research equivalent activity should be recognised as being equivalent to research and scholarly activities in traditional fields.

(Strand, 1998, 53)
The recommendation opened the door for arts practitioners looking for structured research environments through which they can deeply investigate their art and create new artefacts. Indeed, in such a research methodology the emphasis changes so that it is the artefact of the arts practice which is a primary outcome of the research process (Biggs, 2000, 2).

Such research methodologies have primarily been advocated on the belief they will provide new knowledge into artistic endeavours, and their artefacts, in ways not possible with more traditional methods of academic research. To this end, creative arts practice as research has evolved with it a new contingent methodology known as practice-led research. This kind of research “can be typified as a bottom-up approach to research where the areas of interest and approach are derived from individual interest, skill and context” (Mafe and Brown, 2006; 2). In my case, it is most appropriate that such a methodology be employed when the creation of the art work was initially driven not by any specific research question, but by a thematic conceptualisation and general interest in exploring types of Australian masculinities in a dramatic context. From this starting point evolved a research question, not into such representations of masculinities, but instead into my own creative writing process and artistic practice, and how that can be captured within a dramatic writing toolset. Indeed, a practice-led methodology offers a way forward for those arts practitioners such as myself whose
research is not just about the arts, but in the practice of their art as, importantly, it allows artists to gain some qualitative account of their experience creating their art work.

The research contained within this exegesis is of exactly this kind; a practice-led methodology that raises the value of the artefact so that the practice of the art may lead the development of the research. Gray uses the following definition:

> By practice-led I mean firstly research which is initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of the practice and practitioners; and secondly that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners.

(1996: 3)

Such a definition conceives of the practitioner in the concurrent dual modes of researcher and arts practitioner: “To look at one’s own creative practice means taking on both a creative and a reflective role” (Douglas, 1994: 45). In the creative arts, a practice-led research methodology demands a certain reflective capacity on the part of the artist/researcher so that they can probe their artistic practice, processes and/or artefacts with the view toward the advancement of both their art and scholarship. This advancement interestingly is made through practice. For when “research is an activity of practitioners ... it is triggered by features of the practice situation, undertaken on the spot, and immediately liked to action.” (Schön, 1983: 308-9).
In my case the artefact is the play, Albatross, and my research aim has been to develop and test a dramatic writing toolset for the creation of this work. In practice this requires a cycle of planning, acting and reflecting, sometimes called an action-reflection spiral, or an enquiry cycle. (McTaggart, 1991: 31). First, the research into my dramatic writing toolset was, as Gray suggests, led by the problems and challenges I face in my artistic practice. Secondly and subsequently the research informs this practice, altering the practice and creating new problems. What results is a reciprocally influential relationship between artistic practice and research.

Problematically, “artistic practice is defined as an act or process of making and executing art works. As such it is a creative activity and not in and of itself a reflective concept” (Stock, 2000: 211) and so the requirements of a practice-led methodology appear to be somewhat paradoxical for those artists who, outside of a research paradigm, treat their artistic practice as an unconscious, almost habitual, behaviour. The introduction of an action-reflection spiral potentially poses some risk of shifting the practice, whereby the reflective awareness of the researcher’s mind may displace the unconscious impulse of the artist.

Current theorising on the nature of creative writing suggests that such dualism of mind, implicit in a practice-led methodology, is already a
component of creative writing practice. In the creative writing context, an action-reflection spiral is thought of as a *reflexivity* within the writer:

Reflexivity involves not *getting rid* of the self, but *doubling* the self: distancing ourselves from ourselves to a greater or lesser extent, so that we have a sense of standing outside ourselves and observing what we are doing and thinking.

(Hunt and Sampson, 2006: 4)

Such theorising of the creative writing process sits quite comfortably with my own practice (I have already discussed the division of my dramatic writing toolset based on the two kinds of awareness I have toward my work). It is not surprising that Hunt and Sampson continue to observe that reflexivity is used in social sciences as a research practice to denote the preferred stance of the researcher to their subject (4), wherein the researcher is prone to influence that which is being researched.

In my own case, the toolset already incorporates a duality of awareness – this is both a deep connection to the art work, as well as a rigorous evaluation of the work. Whether we are talking about an action-reflection spiral in a practice-led research methodology, or a reflexivity in creative writing, it seems clear that the processes of splitting the self, and one’s awareness of the self, are very similar if not the same. Interestingly what is required of me in this methodology is not simply an extension of the reflexivity already existent in the process, but a secondary splitting of self, “a second degree of reflexivity, not simply a
doubling of self but a tripling” (Hunt and Sampson, 2006: 6). Which ever language you prefer there is good reason to believe that I can extend my already split awarenesses of self, to sharpen a lens of evaluation and criticism not simply over the artefact but also over the creative process itself.

As noted in the Introduction, the play text Albatross represents 75% of this research project, and for the purposes of assessment, has been weighted at 75% of the total. Accordingly, the exegetical material is weighted at 25%, and represents 25% of the assessable outcome of this project.
Chapter Four

Artefact

4.1 Timeline

The play, Albatross, was written over a period of two and a half years, within the context of a cohort of playwrights each undertaking a Masters by Research degree. Throughout the first year this cohort met on a weekly basis discussing matters related to playwriting as well as the content of the members’ plays. The first reading of Albatross (although it had a different title) was given to this cohort, and it was largely through discussions with select members of this cohort that the first draft took shape. Toward the end of the first year, this draft was workshopped over several weeks with the aid of a director to examine the stage-worthiness of the material. Subsequent to this workshopping this draft was then presented at a moved play reading to local theatre professionals.

Partly in response to the feedback gleaned from this experience, and partly in response to feedback from the cohort supervisor, some reworking was envisioned. Typically the approach to reworking a draft is contingent upon the successes and failings of the previous version. Due to the research paradigm this was extended so that concurrent to the evaluation of the play text was also an evaluation of the toolset
employed. Such evaluations would shift the makeup of the toolset far enough so that the simple re-drafting was not applicable; importantly then, with each new re-application of the tools would come a new version of the play. Over the following eighteen months a further three (making four in total) separate versions of the play were written, where each new revision became an opportunity both to evaluate and refine the toolset used to write that draft.

4.2 Awarenesses in Practice

As noted earlier, a practice-led research methodology follows an action-reflection spiral. Indeed, in my case it was the practice of writing and the problems encountered in that practice that led the research towards new and various dramatic writing tools. Looking back on the development of the toolset and changes over the previous versions, it is probable that many of the problems with the first two versions were due to what amounts to be an over-awareness of both process and play. Previously I talked about the various kinds of awarenesses required both in the writing and in the research methodology. Hunt and Sampson call this a tripling of self: one part able to deeply access the work, one part with an evaluative eye on the state of the work, and one part a researcher’s eye on the state of the toolset (2006: 7). It is my belief that the softer awareness of access which has a deep connection to the unconscious mind, and by inference to the unconscious needs of
characters, was somewhat drowned out by the needs of the other two awarenesses.

This problem was met with successive changes in the methods of recording the use of the tools. Although it must be said that each tool required its own recording technique, for the most part I needed methods which could capture the tools in flux. Having a record of the output of the tools, would allow me to put aside the conscious evaluator and allow that awareness of deep access to come to the fore. Initially my methods of recording primarily were notes located within the play text. As scenes were developed, notes were made about characters, actions, and some expectation as to the end point of the scene. Prior to this research such methods had served me well, as these notes acted as a personal running commentary and were as much the product of the writing tools as the play text itself. Eventually the toolset evolved, and further recording techniques were enjoined. I progressively de-technologised, relinquishing my habitual use of a computer and instead employing notebooks which became part journal, part process in flux, part output from the tools, and part play text. By the third version I was sufficiently able to separate out my awarenesses of self to privilege that awareness required to deeply access my unconscious mind. The fourth version of the play, which built upon the successes of the third, is included herein.
4.3 Thematic Context

Thematically, *Albatross*, was inspired primarily by the psychologist Stephen Biddulph who argues that there is a deep flaw in the way that young boys are being raised. He puts it like this: “little boys often just grow into bigger little boys” (Biddulph, 1995: 13). In his book, *Manhood*, he makes a case for the important role of older men, especially the father, in the social development of young men, and argues that without these older men boys are unable to grow into mature men (3). Since I first read his work I have felt a strong affinity with these ideas. Like other contemporary Australian male playwrights, I have felt a desire to explore the problems of under-fathered boys in dramatic situations. Yet I wanted to take this one step further. Biddulph argues that one of the primary reasons boys are under-fathered stems from the old roles of fatherhood, such as the critical father, the passive father, and the absent father (108). As a psychologist he argues that modern males need to shed these old roles to be more engaged in the raising of their children. As a dramatist, I find these roles extraordinarily interesting and so asked myself this simple question: What happens when we put the absent father and the under-fathered boy together on stage? Answering this question has driven me throughout. It uniquely captures both the broader sociological background, as well as focusing the application of the dramatic writing toolset.
4.4 The Story in Brief

Albatross is the story of a young man, Mack, who returns to Australia for the wedding of his older brother, Anthony. Other characters in the play are Anthony’s fiancée and Mack’s ex-girlfriend, Melissa, Mack’s Japanese girlfriend, Aiko, who travels back to Australia with him, and the boy’s father, Russell. Their mother, Elizabeth, died during Mack’s birth.

This play is set at the family home in north Queensland where preparations are underway for the wedding reception to be held some two days hence. This familiar yet oddly strange environment is an unsettling influence on Mack, constantly reminding him of the life he used to live. Even though he has been running from his past these last few years, time has coloured it with roses, and he longs for the deep affection and love he once felt with Melissa. On the surface, it appears Mack has returned for the wedding, however we learn soon enough of Mack’s true feelings and motivations. For Mack, the wedding has taken him by surprise, as he was not aware that his brother was dating his ex-girlfriend. Deep down Mack sees his return as his last opportunity to find out if his feelings for Melissa are reciprocated, and to find out if he can win her back. For her part, Melissa was very much in love with Mack when they were younger, and Mack’s advances on her confuse her, upsetting her emotional balance, and her love for Anthony. Aiko’s presence adds a further complication to Mack’s ambition, but partly because of her inability to understand much English, Mack is
emboldened to risk discovery, and embarks on a campaign to win back Melissa.

Mack has been gone several years, and while away he was working as a Hollywood stuntman. This has been a bone of contention between Mack and both his father and brother for many years, and adds to an underlying tension between the three. Despite this, Russell is excited that his son has returned. He is eager both to bond with him and use this opportunity to put Mack on the straight and narrow. Being unwell, Russell wants to see Mack get married, or at least settle down. He takes Aiko’s presence as indication enough that their relationship is sufficiently developed to pressure Mack into asking for her hand in marriage. Unbeknownst to Russell, Mack has already booked his next stunt job and is due to fly back to Los Angeles right after the wedding, and as the wedding coming ever closer, Mack wants to end his relationship with Aiko. As the lies begin to unravel and the real tension builds, the deep frustrations that all the characters feel begin to emerge and the conflict must be fought to be won.

4.5 Albatross

Follows on pages 35 through to 117.
Bmcbusptt!

cz!
Hmfo!K!Qmbzfs!

Æ!3117-!Hmfo!K!Qmbzfs!
3027!Ib{fm!tusffu!
Ofx!Gbsn!
RME!!
5116
Mack, 24, a Hollywood stunt-man.
Aiko, 21, his girlfriend, Japanese.
Russell, 55, his father.
Anthony, 31, his brother.
Melissa, 28, Anthony's fiancée.

Setting
The backyard of a large property in north Queensland.
Other locations in the property.

Author's Note
For the most part, Aiko speaks Japanese. When Mack is speaking with her, he is often also speaking Japanese. This dialogue is represented by italics.
It is the intention of the author however that the actors speak in English throughout. It is imagined that the two languages can be represented through different accents, modes or fluencies of speech.
SCENE 1

The backyard and back verandah of a Queenslander house set on a large expanse of land. A back door leads into the house, and there are two windows, one on either side. There are paths leading off around each side of the house to its front. The yard is unfenced and seems to extend out in all directions. It is set up for a wedding reception, with cheap plastic chairs and tables scattered around. To one side is a specially raised area for the wedding party.

Russell sits in a deck chair on the verandah considering the view before him.

It is early afternoon.

Silence.

There is the sound of a motorbike approaching from off stage. It comes to a sudden halt out in front of the house, spraying gravel behind it.

Eventually there is a gentle knock at the front door.

RUSSELL

Someone get that!

MELISSA

(from inside the house)

I'm busy.

RUSSELL

(calling out)

Ant!

MELISSA

He's out.

RUSSELL

Where?

MELISSA

Gone to get tomatoes for your lunch.

There is another knock on the door.

RUSSELL

(calling out)

Round the back! Just come on round the side!
After some moments...
Mack pokes his head around the corner of the house.
He clears his throat.
Russell sees him -

RUSSELL (shocked)
What -

MACK
Hey.

RUSSELL
You're here.

MACK
Yeah.

RUSSELL
Mel, see who's here!

MELISSA
I'm busy - do you want your lunch or not.

RUSSELL
Ant's just - he's out getting tomatoes.

MACK
Where?

RUSSELL
How did you make it through? The roads have been cut off for days.

MACK
Pushed it when I had to.

RUSSELL
Huh. I was sure you weren't coming.

MACK
You didn't get my e-mail?

RUSSELL
Ant mentioned something.

MACK
We can go.

RUSSELL
You're here now.

MACK
Yeah.

RUSSELL
You want a beer or something.
I'm alright.

Cripes, how about a hug for your old man. What do you say?

(unsure)

Okay.

They cross to each other.

There is an awkward moment – then – Russell claps hold of Mack and gives him a big bear hug. Momentarily he puts him down.

There's not much of you. But I guess you can handle yourself, am I right?

Russell does some shadow boxing - and Mack fends him off easily.

It's good you're home.

It's no problem.

Where's your stuff?

You're looking at it.

That a bike you came in on?

Just bought it.

You thinking of staying?

It was easier.

Than what?

Well, I had to get out here, didn't I.

Well you did that alright. It's good you're home.

I said that already.

Mel, you'll never guess who's here!
MELISSA (from house) Probably not.

RUSSELL Do you have somewhere sorted to stay?

MACK The local, we'll just get a room.

RUSSELL You're joking, we'll make room here.

MACK Come-on.

RUSSELL Really. It's still my home, and if I say you're staying here then you're bloody staying here.

MACK I still remember a time, when you couldn't wait to kick me out.

RUSSELL Times change. It's bloody good to see you.

Russell takes him in another hug, this time it's less blokey, more gentle.

Anthony enters from around the side of the house, carrying a bag of groceries.

ANTHONY (entering) There's a very strange chick sitting on a bike out front. (beat) What's going on?

RUSSELL Mack's arrived.

ANTHONY I can see that.

RUSSELL Well aren't you going to say hello.

ANTHONY (calling out) Hey Mel, you seen who's here?

MELISSA (from inside) Nope.

ANTHONY Well -

MELISSA You get me tomatoes?
ANTHONY

Yes, they're right here.

MELISSA

Well, bring them in - don't want to be in here all day.

Anthony heads for the back door.

Stops.

ANTHONY

It's good seeing you Mack.

Anthony disappears inside.

RUSSELL

Well, that was relatively painless.

There's a clashing sound from inside, as if a large pan has been dropped on the floor.

Melissa appears at the back door.

MELISSA

(looking at Mack)

Mack.

Anthony appears behind her and puts his arm around her possessively.
Scene 2

Early morning the next day. Overnight there has been a tremendous thunderstorm. The once neatly arranged table and chairs have been scattered across the yard. They are dirty and muddy from the rain.

Mack sits alone on the back verandah. He is holding a letter in his hands which he slowly reads.

Aiko enters, she is playing with her mobile, holding it up in different locations as if trying to get reception.

Mack sees her and hides the letter.

Mack: You okay there?

Aiko: Okay.

Mack: You slept right through it last night.

Aiko: What?

Mack: Thunderstorm, a big one.

Aiko: Jetlag, feel like I'm still in LA. (beat) No reception.

Mack: (laughs) No, not out here.

Aiko: Oh. How far are we?

Mack: Too far.

She looks around the backyard.

Aiko: Is there something I can do - help clean up?

Mack: Just sit tight for now.
AIKO: Sure?

MACK: I'll let you know, okay?

AIKO: (beat) We're in trouble?

MACK: (over confident) Nah. It's all good.

AIKO: Oh. Okay.

MACK: Hey don't worry Aiko. Look around you, this is the real Australia - you won't get this in any guide book.

Aiko looks around.

AIKO: It's very - dirty.

MACK: Yeah. Don't worry though, in a while you'll be so used to it, you'll be rolling around in it like the rest of us.

She giggles at the thought.

AIKO: I don't think so.

MACK: No?

AIKO: No.

He sneaks up and gives her a tickle.

AIKO: (laughs) No.

She runs off giggling, expecting him to chase.

Melissa and Anthony enter, they are in mid-conversation.

ANTHONY: Just so long as we're okay. Right?

(beat) We are okay?

MELISSA: Yeah. We're good.
ANTHONY

Kiss?

They kiss.

Mack looks over and sees them kissing.

He catches his breath.

MACK
(to Aiko)

I just have to talk to Anthony okay. You let me know if you need anything.

AIKO

Okay. Mack?

MACK

Yeah?

AIKO

What should I do?

MACK

You brought your iPod right?

AIKO

It's inside.

MACK

Then go and get it.

Aiko enters the house and passes Russell on his way out.

Melissa looks around, taking in the messed up yard.

RUSSELL

Well, we seem to have come through it okay. We've lost the phone for now, and the power though - so don't go round opening the fridge door for no good reason. Mack you can tell Aiko?

MACK

Sure.

MELISSA

The cake?

RUSSELL

(laughs)

Not sure. I think it's fine.

ANTHONY

What about the grog?

RUSSELL

Well, there was some bubbly in the back fridge - it'll probably be okay.
What are we going to do?

About what?

We’re flooded in right?

It might be down later this arvo.

Was there any beer?

There was only a carton in the fridge - so if you want it while it’s cold, I say drink it now. Who’s going to give me a hand?

I guess that would be me.

(annoyed)

Nice, fellas. I’m supposed to be getting married tomorrow. Don’t leap up all at once to help.

I think I have to - Mack give us a hand.

Russell enter back inside, Mack follows.

What’s wrong.

My wedding is ruined.

But we’re getting married in the church.

The reception Anthony, I’m not coming back to this. To have our guests tramp through mud in their new five hundred dollar shoes.

We’ll hand out thongs.

Well that’s just perfect.

It’ll be fun.

(frustrated)

It’s not supposed to be fun!
ANTHONY: It's going to be okay.
MELISSA: It's not. Everything ruined.
ANTHONY: (beat) It's not Mel, it's just a bit muddied is all.
MELISSA: I don't want mud in my wedding.
ANTHONY: Well it's bloody pissed down for two weeks now, and my bet is it'll piss down for another couple. It's out of my hands, Mel. For all I know, it'll piss down again later this arvo and we won't even be able to get out of here tomorrow to get to the church, let alone anyone come in for the reception.
MELISSA: Why are you being so calm.
ANTHONY: Mel.
MELISSA: I think I need a walk.
ANTHONY: There's nothing to see, just water.
MELISSA: Exactly, I just want to see how high the water's got.
ANTHONY: Dad said - right up to the back paddock.
MELISSA: Yeah, well -
ANTHONY: Fine.
MELISSA: (quieter) I just need to get away.
ANTHONY: I'll come.
MELISSA: No. Please.
ANTHONY: (thinks) Okay. Just don't go for a swim.
MELISSA: What am I, three?
ANTHONY: You still love me?
MELISSA (leaving)

Don't know why.

ANTHONY And Mel?

MELISSA Yeah?

ANTHONY If you find any dry wood. We could always get the old wood-fired going.

MELISSA (beat) Dry wood?

ANTHONY Yeah.

MELISSA You're an idiot.

Melissa exits.

Russell appears as if he's been waiting for her to leave.

RUSSELL She's gone eh? May as well get ourselves properly settled in.

He passes a six pack to Anthony.

RUSSELL Back in a sec.

Russell re-enters the house.

RUSSELL (from inside) Mack, go out there and make yourself useful.

Mack enters from the house carrying an extra deck chair.

He puts it down and sits on it.

MACK What's going on.

ANTHONY It's just the wedding - (beat) About yesterday. Sorry about that, I think she'd had a bit to-

MACK (cutting in) It doesn't matter.

ANTHONY No, suppose not.
She's still a bit funny I guess.

Silence.

MACK

How about that storm.

ANTHONY

Last night?

MACK

Near blew the roof off.

ANTHONY

Near. Aiko fine?

MACK

Slept through it all.

ANTHONY

Women eh?

(beat)

You alright, saw you walking funny.

MACK

It's nothing.

ANTHONY

'Cause you should say something if - okay.

Russell re-enters, carrying a battery radio.

RUSSELL

Found it.

MACK

(cutting in)

Should we be getting this place battened down or something - a tarp maybe.

ANTHONY

(laughs)

Bit like shutting the gate after. Nah, she's held till now, she'll hold a good while longer.

MACK

How about cleaning up, you'll have guests coming soon.

ANTHONY

Hell, they can all pitch in.

MACK

And if the waters get any higher?

ANTHONY

(laughs)

We'll just have to go inside won't we.

MACK

Mate. You're an arse.
RUSSELL

Don't worry there Son, we've been through it plenty times before. Last summer we were practically living in a swimming pool, weren't we Ant?

ANTHONY

Practically. Come-on, have a beer with us.

Anthony pops the top off a beer and holds it to Mack. Mack stares at it. Anthony gives up and puts it on the ground between them.

RUSSELL

Find a channel someone, the cricket's on right?

Anthony fiddles with the radio. Russell disappears back inside.

ANTHONY

Strange you being here. You've been gone so long I'd forgotten what it was like. (beat) But you've got your exciting life to get back to I suppose.

MACK

What?

ANTHONY

We saw that one movie - where you fell out of that window. You had to parachute to the ground.

MACK

Yeah.

ANTHONY

What do they call that?

MACK

Base jumping.

ANTHONY

People die doing that, don't they?

MACK

I try not to think about it.

ANTHONY

(surprised) It doesn't bother you?

MACK

I lead a charmed life.

ANTHONY

That's what you call it.

Eventually Anthony finds a channel he's happy with.
ANTHONY: News will be on soon.

MACK: You and Mel just -

ANTHONY: Yeah.

MACK: But there was nothing going on before I left?

ANTHONY: No.

MACK: 'Cause -

ANTHONY: Look, I did want to talk to you about something.

MACK: So you just asked her on a date -


(remembering) I think there was a group thing. I tried to set her up with one of my friends -

MACK: But before you knew it - rompety pompety.

ANTHONY: Look, Mack, I'm not sure what dad's been telling you only - I wouldn't be mentioning it with our situation and all -

MACK: (thoughtful) Dad didn't have anything to do with it did he?

ANTHONY: Anthony looks around back inside the house, checking where Russell is.

ANTHONY: (quiet) He's not too well.

MACK: (surprised) What?

ANTHONY: (nervous) Goes and watches your movies. But it's the stress of it see? I tell him he'd be better off not knowing, but when else is he going to see you?

MACK: What's wrong with him?
ANTHONY: You should really hear it from him.

MACK: But I'm not.

ANTHONY: Look, letting you go gallivanting across the country side - jumping off buildings and things - even though the stress is killing him, maybe he'd do it different if he had the chance but I doubt it.

MACK: You want me to stop jumping off buildings?

ANTHONY: I want you to settle down. Aiko seems nice enough. Find a normal job and in five years time God willing we'll still have a father to talk too.

MACK: You want me to give it up?

ANTHONY: I'm asking you to think about it. I mean, you can't seriously be thinking of jumping off buildings for the rest of your life?

(beat)

I was half hoping you were back for good. Seriously. Look, I get it. You needed to see the world, spread your wings and all that. I applaud it. But you know what, even an albatross comes home to roost sometime.

(beat)

Well, what are you thinking?

MACK: How long's he been sick for?

ANTHONY: A while, but-

MACK: It's getting worse?

ANTHONY: Well -

MACK: I'm not stupid Ant.

ANTHONY: I never said-

MACK: (cutting in)

He's been sick for years hasn't he.

ANTHONY: (satisfied)

Then you know.

MACK: No, I don't know. You're the one looking after him and you won't give me a straight answer.
ANTHONY: I just thought a bit of help would be nice.

MACK: Nobody asked you to stay Ant. In fact I seem to recall certain conversations where dad was half begging you to get out more.

ANTHONY: So that's it.

MACK: I'm not immune to a hard luck story. Only you can't expect me to give up everything I've worked for, especially when I already know the other side of the story.

(beat) I'll think about it, okay?

ANTHONY: That's all I ask. Just don't think too long.

Russell re-joins them - he is carrying a towel, an empty beer bottle, and a few magazines. He puts the towel down on his chair.

RUSSELL: (off empty bottle) I thought someone here was supposed to be helping me.

ANTHONY: We're just catching up.

RUSSELL: Well - catch up faster.

MACK: I was actually just going for a-

ANTHONY: I think Mack wants to check out the property.

RUSSELL: Do you have to do it now?

ANTHONY: I think it's best.

RUSSELL: Mack?

MACK: Well - I think I need to clear my head.

RUSSELL: How much have you had?

MACK: It's just being back after all this time. I won't go too far.
Russell: Just try and keep orientated okay?
Mack: Okay.
Russell: And sing out if you get lost, alright?
Mack: Alright.
Russell: Right.
Russell opens his arms for a hug.
Mack looks at him.
Russell: Come-on, don't leave me hanging.
Mack gives him a hug.
Mack: See ya then.
Russell: See ya son.
Mack exits.
Russell: Ah, it's best to let him go, he's been through a lot.
Anthony: Yeah.
Russell grabs the still full beer Mack left behind.
He sniffs at it.
Russell: No-one's spat in this have they?
Anthony: No Dad.
Russell takes a drink.
SCENE 3

Another part of the property.

Melissa is alone.

She has some wood in her arms and is sorting through looking for more.

Mack enters.

MACK (surprised)

I found you!

MELISSA

Oh. What's wrong?

MACK

Nothing.

MELISSA

Doesn't sound like nothing.

MACK

They won't let me be, you know?

MELISSA

That I know. They're just worried about you.

MACK

I suppose.

Mack laughs to relieve the tension.

MACK

It's just so good to see you.

MELISSA

(breath)

Yeah.

MACK

Sorry about yesterday just showing up. I thought you knew.

(breath)

We can go if you want.

MELISSA

Like I could live that down.

MACK

No, I suppose not. You've barely changed. Sorry, I did promise you I wouldn't talk about it.

MELISSA

Don't then.

MACK

And the guys, they haven't changed.
What?

Ganging up on me like I'm three.

Old habits.

It's more important to them that I'm wrong than we do something about the fact we're surrounded by water.

A little island all to ourselves.

I don't want to say a bad word, and maybe I've got something to answer for, but now is hardly the time for petty — you know what I mean?

Wish you didn't come?

I've changed you know.

You're the only one.

You walking with a limp for a start. My very own Richard the third.

Right, he had a deformity or something.

I had a good tutor.

Thankyou.

So how did you do it, get hit by a car or something. Mack winces at her comment.

Really? But don't you learn how to do that?

Yeah.

Then what happened?
The driver was going too fast.

MELISSA

Isn't that the point?

MACK

Not really, it's only supposed to look dangerous, not actually be dangerous.

MELISSA

Surely getting hit by a car is always dangerous.

MACK

Not if it's done right.

MELISSA

So - ?

MACK

I was doing one of those stunt shows.

(beat)

I'm a convict, there's three of us. We're supposed to come bursting out of a bank then this cop car comes round the corner and he's supposed to hit us one after the other, you know, like dominos.

(beat)

Anyway, the kid behind the wheel, well he's got half an eye on his girlfriend in the crowd - the idiot is accelerating through the run. First guy stands his ground waiting. He leaps, rolls off the bonnet and falls to the side, he's okay. The second guy turns to run out of the way, the crowd cheers, they don't know there's something wrong, and the driver adjusts to slaw right into him. The stunt guy panics and tries to dive away, he gets hit mid dive, spun 360 degrees in mid-air and is lucky not to go under the rear tyre. I know if I turn my back on this idiot I'm done for. I line myself up with the car trying to figure out when to make my leap - leap too early and you hit the front edge of the car before being flipped up and over like a rag doll - leap too late and your legs get broken as the car collects them on the way through. The faster the car is going the smaller the window for the dive.

MELISSA

(feeling it)

You went too late?

MACK

Too early, over compensated.

Mack mimes a body being flipped up and over.

Melissa is shocked.

MACK

Of course the crowd cheered widely, they don't know I'm actually hurt and not just pretending - so the car comes round, a fake cop jumps out the back and waves my arm to the crowd before throwing me over his shoulder, carrying me to the back seat of the car, doing a burn out, and eventually shooting out a side exit. Except I was out of it by then.
MELISSA: I'm so sorry.

MACK: But that's just it. Nobody forced me to be out there. I knew the dangers, I knew I could get hurt.

(beat)

MELISSA: What I didn't know was that it would be at the hands of someone I was supposed to trust.

MACK: I'm still limping aren't I.

MELISSA: (with meaning) I'm sorry I hurt you.

MACK: You did what you thought was best. Besides, it wasn't your fault.

MELISSA: Then why do I feel like this.

MACK: Really. It wasn't your fault.

MELISSA: (holding back tears) I know -

MACK: Mel, listen.

She starts to cry.

Mack embraces her and the firewood she has been holding falls to the ground.

MELISSA: (upset) We've said all this a million times already.

MACK: No, we haven't, not once.

MELISSA: (wiping her eyes.) I feel like such an idiot, I'm supposed to be strong.

MACK: You're the strongest person I know.

MELISSA: I'm not.

MACK: You are.
He cups her face with his hands and kisses her. She is too shocked to move. Slowly she pushes him away.

**MELISSA**

You shouldn't be doing that.

He leans in to kiss her again. She kisses him back. They eventually break.

**MELISSA**

The firewood has gone everywhere. Ant'll be pissed. She bends to collect it.

Mack helps her.

**MELISSA**

You'd better go. Please.

Mack exits, looking back at Melissa as he goes.
SCENE 4

The house and backyard.

Anthony and Russell have been listening to the cricket on the radio.

ANTHONY
I suppose we ought to be doing some cleaning up. Maybe bring the tables and chairs inside for a clean.

RUSSELL
Where's Aiko?

They look around, she's not there.

ANTHONY
(realising)
Huh.

RUSSELL
Did she say she was going somewhere?

ANTHONY
Did she say anything at all?

RUSSELL
Well - no.

ANTHONY
She's probably inside.

RUSSELL
You don't think she would have wondered off.

RUSSELL
(calling out)
Aiko! Just call out if you can hear me love. Aiko!

Silence.

ANTHONY
Are you even pronouncing it right?

RUSSELL
What do you suggest I do?

ANTHONY
Wait till Mack gets back, let him go looking for her. At least he knows the language.

RUSSELL
Maybe she's just gone to the loo.

ANTHONY
Let her have her privacy then.

RUSSELL
Well, she's bound to get plenty of that out here.
If she wants it. (beat)
I mean, the whole place is just so wet, even if we got everything cleaned. At this rate, we'll be holding the reception down at the pub.

They stare at the yard.
ANTHONY
Beer?
RUSSELL
The finest word in the English language.

Anthony opens a couple of bottles, and passes one to Russell.
They drink.
ANTHONY
We're lucky really.
RUSSELL
How's that?
ANTHONY
Plenty of food, beer, listening to the old radio. It'll be just like camping when we were kids.
RUSSELL
You don't mind about tomorrow?
ANTHONY
The way I see it, we've got a bride, a groom, a wedding band, a cake. There's no reason why we couldn't just - you know, in the living room - if we wanted too.
RUSSELL
What does Mel say?
ANTHONY
Ah.
RUSSELL
You haven't mentioned it.
ANTHONY
There hasn't been a chance, not with Mack carrying on the way he was.
RUSSELL
You really ought to give the kid a fair go.
ANTHONY
Come on dad, I'm fair. He just gets these ideas into his head. You know what it's like.

(beat)
Remember when he's four, and he gets it into his head that he's going to go to school. I tried to tell him he wasn't old enough yet, but no, he followed me all the way, careful mind you so I wouldn't notice, joins grade one, and proceeds to go to school every single day for a whole week. It wasn't 'til Saturday rolled round that we found out what was going on.
The poor kid had taken himself to school, found that there was no-one else there, thinks everyone has abandoned him and comes home in tears. It was after that we sent him to live with Aunt Elle.

RUSSELL
Yeah, he sure had the knack.

ANTHONY
Still got it far as I can see, bringing her all this way, and you just know he's got no real intentions towards her.

RUSSELL
I ought to have a word with him.

ANTHONY
Don't suppose he'll listen though.

RUSSELL
Can't hurt trying.

ANTHONY
(proposing toast)
Here's to hope.

ANTHONY
May she shine a blessing on us.

They drink.

Aiko enters with her iPod.

Russell and Anthony turn to look at her.

Aiko bows quickly.

Russell and Anthony stand and bow unsteadily.

AIKO
Thank you for having me.

RUSSELL
What she say?
ANTHONY: Don’t know.
RUSSELL: English?
AIKO: Thank you.
RUSSELL: Thank you!
AIKO: (bowing) Thank you.
Russell and Anthony bow.
RUSSELL: Thank you.
ANTHONY: Well this will be quick.
AIKO: Do you all live here?
RUSSELL: Sorry Aiko we don’t understand.
ANTHONY: Didn’t Mack say we don’t understand Japanese. Course not, what am I saying.
AIKO: Live?
RUSSELL: Live!
AIKO: (gesturing around) Live?
RUSSELL: (triumphant) Yes! We’re all alive.
AIKO: No.
RUSSELL: No? I’m pretty sure we’re all alive, ha.
ANTHONY: Nice one dad.
RUSSELL: Maybe you want to go see if the phone’s working yet son.
ANTHONY: Oh no, I’m having way too much fun watching this.
RUSSELL

Go.

ANTHONY

Alright, sheesh, I'm going. Anthony enters the house.

RUSSELL

Now we're alone.

AIKO

Sorry.

RUSSELL

Don't apologise. Christ, we strand you out here in the middle of the bush, no electricity, no phone, your poor parents will be worried sick. So don't apologise. I should apologise. So, I will. Sorry.

AIKO

Sorry?

RUSSELL

Yes! Sorry.

AIKO

No.

RUSSELL

Yes.

AIKO

No sorry.

RUSSELL

(indignant)

Well I'm not taking it back.

AIKO

(beat)

Thank you, Russell.

RUSSELL

(happy)

Just call me Russ.

AIKO

Russ?

RUSSELL

Russ. Yeah.

AIKO

Thank you Russ.

RUSSELL

It's my pleasure.

ANTHONY

(from inside)
Yeah Dad. Whatever you reckon.

RUSSELL
Ah, sorry 'bout that, my boys can be a bit, well you know being with Mack and all. They say whatever comes into their heads. From their mother's side. Gets them into all sorts of trouble.

He sits her down on the ground.

RUSSELL
I'm kind of glad that we're talking. Has Mack said anything, to you, I mean, I wouldn't want you to betray a confidence only when I heard he was bringing someone with him I was half hoping that I'd see a little ring on your left hand, if you know what I'm getting at.

Aiko looks confused, she doesn't understand him.

RUSSELL
Maybe that Mack was finally thinking of settling down?

He gives her a big wink and takes a drink of his beer.

Aiko is shocked.

Russell puts his arm around her.

Aiko is frozen stiff.

RUSSELL
It's okay bucko, you don't have to say a word. I get the message loud and clear. It's supposed to be a secret! Well, your secret is safe with me. You can trust old Russell to keep his mouth shut.

(A beat)

I'm glad we had this little chat.

He puts his hand on her knee, leans in close and whispers.

RUSSELL
Just our little secret.

Aiko has completely misunderstood.

AIKO
(panicky)
Mack! I must find Mack.

RUSSELL
He'll be along in a minute, you're quite safe here with me.

Aiko stands up hurried and starts to exit into the yard.

RUSSELL
(calling out to her)
He'll be back any second now.

Aiko exits.
RUSSELL
Strange. Polite to a fault, but strange.
SCENE 5

The verandah and yard.

Anthony and Russell wait patiently for everyone to return.

They are onto another bottle of beer.

Mack enters.

RUSSELL
You're back.

MACK
Where is everyone?

RUSSELL
Well Aiko, am I saying that right? - well, she went looking for you. I think she was missing you. Though sometimes it's difficult understanding what she's saying, I think I'm beginning to get the hang of it.

MACK
You were talking to her?

RUSSELL
Well I was doing most of the talking but I think I opened a clear line of communication.

ANTHONY
Did you see Mel?

MACK
Ah - briefly.

ANTHONY
She was alright?

MACK
I think so.

ANTHONY
She's just been gone a while.

RUSSELL
Aiko seems very - polite.

MACK
She's Japanese, they're all like that.

RUSSELL
You never really said that much about her.

MACK
There's not much to tell.

RUSSELL
Alright then. How'd you meet?
MACK
I'm flying out of LAX and I see her sitting, bawling her eyes out. I go over to her to find out what's wrong, and well, one thing leads to another, six months later here we are.

RUSSELL
You just went over to her.

MACK
Everyone else was just ignoring her.

ANTHONY
So you are together now?

RUSSELL
Anthony, he's obviously got some kind of thing going on else he wouldn't have brought her down here, am I right?

MACK
(changing topic)
So what's going on with getting rescued.

ANTHONY and RUSSELL stare at each other. They laugh.

MACK
What?

RUSSELL
We're the local S.E.S.

MACK
So you two have just decided to put your feet up and drink beer until the water goes down.

RUSSELL
That about sums it up.

MACK
(annoyed)
Shouldn't you be out there helping people?

ANTHONY
For Christ's sake Mack.

RUSSELL
Anthony, mind your tongue. People will call if they need us.

MACK
The phone's down.

RUSSELL
Then they'll call when it comes back on.

MACK
(beat)
Forget it.

RUSSELL
Okay?

MACK
Actually, it's not okay.
I have a shoot starting in a week. I'm on the lunch time flight out on Monday.

RUSSELL
That's three days. You didn't say.

MACK
Well, now you know.

RUSSELL
Silence.

MACK
A movie?

RUSSELL
A commercial.

MACK
Pays well?

RUSSELL
Very.

MACK
Oh. What do you have to do?

RUSSELL
It doesn't matter.

MACK
No I suppose not.

(beat)
It's just so weird. Guess I never thought one of my sons would be a Hollywood stunt-man.

RUSSELL
It's no big deal.

MACK
Getting punched by Harrison Ford through a stained glass window is no big deal? Blokes still don't believe me until I point you out. I think my favourite was in the James Bond movie.

RUSSELL
Yeah, but you got shot by James Bond.

MACK
But that was nothing, I just got shot and died.

RUSSELL
I guess that's pretty cool.

RUSSELL
Beer?

Russell passes Mack a beer, who sips on it.

RUSSELL
Hard to get into I bet?
MACK
There’s a lot of training.

RUSSELL
I’ve got no doubt.

MACK
You’ve got to be accredited or else the studios won’t touch you.

RUSSELL
I guess it’s a pretty good while the work is coming?

MACK
I like it.

RUSSELL
So what’s this commercial?

MACK
Well, I jump off the bonnet of a car to the back of a truck.

RUSSELL
A moving truck?

MACK
Ah. Yeah.

RUSSELL
And what happens if you miss?

MACK
I won’t miss.

RUSSELL
(visualising)
The car will go right over the top of you.

MACK
I’m not going to miss.

RUSSELL
Don’t do it.

MACK
What happened to it being cool?

RUSSELL
This one sounds really dangerous.

MACK
No more dangerous then any other.

RUSSELL
What kind of life do you want? Constantly putting yourself in jeopardy. If it’s just about being cool, there’s more to life then that - There’s love, have you thought about that?

MACK
I have to Dad, I made a commitment and I have to get back to it.
Russell: And Aiko just lets you.

Mack: It's not up to her.

Russell: For Christ's sake, she told me your secret. I'd have thought you owed her at least the opportunity of putting her two cents in.

Mack: What secret?

Russell: Come on, it's obvious.

Mack: She told you about the ring?

Russell: She didn't have to tell us, I worked it out, so no don't get angry at her for spilling the beans.

Mack: But how did you?

Russell: Come on, your old man still has a trick or two up his sleeve. It's great news.

Mack: (confused) It is?

Russell: Of course it is.

Mack: I just wasn't sure what you'd say is all.

Russell: Well it's not like you need my permission, you can marry anyone you like.

Mack: Marry?

Russell: Yeah.

Mack: Who am I marrying?

Russell: (laughing) Aiko.

Mack: I'm not marrying Aiko.

Russell: You're not marrying Aiko?
MACK

No.

RUSSELL

Why the hell not?

MACK

Because, she's Aiko, you've meet her.

RUSSELL

Well, I'm shocked.

ANTHONY

(Danger)

Dad.

RUSSELL

I want to get to the bottom of this.

ANTHONY

Just drop it.

RUSSELL

Very well. Dropped. I'm very disappointed Mack, and that's all I'm going to say - And another thing, I think you need to have a long hard talk to Aiko, 'cause she has the distinct impression you're getting married.

MACK

Where is she?

ANTHONY

Went looking for you.

MACK

I'd better go after her.

Mack exits.
SCENE 6
A different part of the property.
Melissa has made a large pile of firewood and stares at it trying to think of other ways to delay going back to the house.

Aiko enters.

AIKO: Hello.
MELISSA: Oh, hello.

AIKO: I -

MACK: Are you alright?

AIKO: I'm looking for Mack. Mack?

MELISSA: He's gone back to the house.

AIKO: Gone?

MELISSA: Yeah. Only one person you can speak too and he bloody goes wandering off.

AIKO: I need to speak to him. My English no good.

MELISSA: No.

AIKO: (gestures) Do you mind if I wait here?


MELISSA: Panda Bear, oh wait, that's Chinese, sorry.

AIKO: Thank you.

Silence.
That is a very nice ring. Ring?

MELISSA
Huh? Oh, yes. I know, look at it.

Melissa holds out her hand.

Aiko looks at it closely.

AIKO
Very - very - beauty?

MELISSA
Beautiful. Thank you.

AIKO
(thinks)
Like? Anthony?

MELISSA
Oh yes! I like Anthony, I mean, I love him. Love.

AIKO
Love.

MELISSA
You love Mack?

AIKO
(thinks)
I think so.

They laugh.

MELISSA
I figured. I'm sorry, I don't mean to pry. Look at me, the lost bride of the Australian bush, wandering around out here by myself. You probably think I'm some kind of loony. Far from it I assure you. I'm almost certain I'm not a loony.

AIKO
Loony?

MELISSA
Crazy.

Aiko shakes her head, she doesn't understand.

They continue talking, more to themselves then anything.

AIKO
(thinks)
You - not like Mack? I wouldn't blame you if you didn't. He can be a hard person to get to know.

MELISSA
Mack? I - I guess, well, I am avoiding someone. That was hard to say. Maybe I've just got cold feet.
AIKO
Hard even for the people that are closest too him.

MELISSA
I love Anthony dearly. He is a wonderful man.

AIKO
You just have to trust. Trust that he loves you too.

MELISSA
I mean it's your whole future happiness right? No point being with the wrong person.

AIKO
If only there was some way to know for sure.

MELISSA
What am I thinking. One kiss and I go all mush between the ears.

AIKO
He tells me he loves me.

MELISSA
Only sometimes one kiss can tell you more than a thousand words.

AIKO
But what good are words if you can't feel it in his heart.

MELISSA
Only I think I still love him.

AIKO
I think he's stopped loving me.

Silence.

MELISSA
Come on, let's make our way back.

AIKO
I could just stay here forever, lie down and never wake up. I think I like being lost.

Melissa is starting to exit.

Aiko lays down in a dryish patch of dirt spread-eagled and looks up at the sky.

MELISSA
Don't want to come eh? Don't blame you.

Melissa picks up the firewood and exits.
SCENE 7

The verandah and yard.

Anthony and Russell, patiently waiting.

Melissa enters dragging half a tree branch behind her, and carrying some other wood.

MELISSA
Hello?

ANTHONY
Honey is that you?

MELISSA
Yep. I've brought firewood.

Anthony goes to help her.

ANTHONY
Cripes, you've got a tree there love. I was almost ready to send out a search party. Look at all that wood.

MELISSA
I thought we might like to start a bonfire, toast some marshmallows.

ANTHONY
Yeah, only we're out of matches.

MELISSA
I'm sure I bought some last week.

ANTHONY
Well they're not there.

MELISSA
Did you look in with the cutlery.

ANTHONY
Yes.

RUSSELL
Can't find them anywhere.

MELISSA
Well that's great.

(off empty beer bottle)

ANTHONY
They're twist tops.

We just need some other way of lighting it. Magnifying glass, or—
MELISSA: A cigarette lighter. I've been wasting my time for the last hour.

ANTHONY: Come on, it's funny.

MELISSA: So not funny.

ANTHONY: (beat) You run into Mack?

MELISSA: (lying) No.

ANTHONY: You sure?

MELISSA: Yes I'm sure. Look there's something I need to talk to you about.

ANTHONY: 'Cause Mack said-

MELISSA: He's been back?

ANTHONY: Briefly.

RUSSELL: He's gone looking for Aiko, sort out this wedding.

MELISSA: What?

RUSSELL: Ah. It was supposed to be a secret. Just can't seem to keep my mouth shut.

MELISSA: They're getting married?

RUSSELL: (hushed) I think he was worried 'cause she's Japanese and what with the war and all.

MELISSA: The war?

ANTHONY: Dad, it didn't have anything to do with the war.

RUSSELL: What then?
ANTHONY: He wasn't going to invite us. It's the only thing that makes sense.

MELISSA: What's going on?

ANTHONY: Dad found out from Aiko and then Mack denied it.

MELISSA: That they're getting married.

RUSSELL: Mack even asked about a ring.

MELISSA: (annoyed) That doesn't make any sense.

ANTHONY: All this talk got me thinking anyway, and well I mentioned it to Dad and he didn't have any objection if you didn't. I say we should go through with it. You've got your dress and no I didn't peek, and I've got the wedding band, Aiko can be a bridesmaid, we've even got cake. It shouldn't be that difficult really.

MELISSA: Married?

ANTHONY: Yeah.

MELISSA: Are you completely mental?

ANTHONY: (hurt) No.

MELISSA: That has got to be the worst idea I've ever heard. What about my family? What about all the other people coming in from across the country? What about God! Do you think He'd be happy us just doing a quickie out in the middle of the bush.

ANTHONY: It's just an idea.

MELISSA: I don't think you put much thought into it.

ANTHONY: I just want to be married to you and -

MELISSA: And?

ANTHONY: And I just didn't want anything coming between you and your special day.
MELISSA: Well, it’s a bit too late for that.

ANTHONY: Are you alright?

MELISSA: Yes. No. I don’t know.

ANTHONY: You’re exhausted. He goes to hug her. She shrugs him off.

ANTHONY: Did I do something?

MELISSA: No.

ANTHONY: I’m sorry, forget I even said anything.

MELISSA: (calmer) I’ll think about it.

ANTHONY: Thanks. He hugs her.
Another part of the property. Aiko is still lying on the ground in the dirt looking up at the sky. She looks like she may be sleeping. Mack enters and sees Aiko lying there.

Mack

I've got a bone to pick with you.

(beat) Aiko? What are you doing laying in the dirt? I think I was joking when I said that you'd be rolling around in it in no time. What's with you - I thought you'd be having a great time, making friends - You said before we came that you would be able to look after yourself.

(beat) You're not talking to me. Well, great. In fact I shouldn't even be talking to you. Why did you tell them about the ring? I didn't even think you knew.

(beat) Are you asleep? Don't just lie there.

(beat) Fine. Except I know something you don't know. I know how to wake up sleeping girls. First you need to sneak up on them.

He sneaks up on her.

Mack

Then you got to bend down and get real close.

He bends down and gets close.

Mack

Then -

Mack tickles the bottoms of her feet.

She squeals.

Mack

Oh so you're not asleep.

Aiko

No, I'm fast asleep - dreaming of a better day.

Mack

Yeah, it's been a bit of a shitter.

She laughs.

Aiko

It's okay, today is the last day.

Mack

Huh?
Aiko (quoting) 

"Tomorrow is another day."

Mack

"Ah, yeah. Did you get a knock on the head?"

Aiko

"I think so."

Mack

"Shit. Give us a look."

Aiko

"No. On the inside."

Mack

"You got a headache? Headache?"

Aiko

"Silly Mack."

Mack (beat)

"Aiko, why did you say we were getting married?"

Aiko

"Why did you not say we are getting married."

Mack

"Did I miss something? Aiko, you know where I stand."

Aiko

"There's another girl."

Mack

"What?"

Aiko

"I have been lying here thinking it through."

Mack

"Aiko. Really."

Aiko

"I'm not going to let you just walk away. I'm not going to give you up without a fight."

Mack

"There's no other girl."

Aiko

"You see, out here we're all by ourselves. Out here, I've got you to myself."

Mack

"But honey-"

Aiko

"We can live out here."

Mack

"That's crazy."
What's so crazy? That I love you? That I want to keep you from running off to another woman? Why is that so crazy? You can love me, you'll see, you can love me just as much as her.

Is that why you said we were getting married?

You think that is crazy too?

No, it's just not true though, is it?

I never said.

Huh?

It must have been someone else.

You sure?

Yes. You would think I could remember something like that. Besides, I can't even understand them.

Your English is getting better all the time.

Too Australian, sometimes I wonder if they even speak English.

Dad just seemed very sure is all, and he knew about the ring.

What ring?

You don't know?

No.

Oh.

You're not angry with me?

Well. No. I don't know.

Please don't be angry with me. I try to be good.
I know you do.

Am I too good?

Maybe that's it.

Maybe?

Yes.

You wish I was not so good?

You want independent woman.

Aiko, I don't know.

You want polite little Aiko in public, but tiger in the bedroom?

It doesn't bother me.

She approaches him seductively.

Maybe I should do a little dance for you.

You don't have to dance for me.

She starts a little seductive dance.

Mack, really.

Maybe I want to dance for you.

She approaches him and gently pushes him to the ground.

She continues a very sexy well choreographed dance as she speaks.

Back before you found me in America I had a job working in a special kind of bar in Tokyo. A special kind of bar where all the young pretty girls would do a special kind of dance for all the white business men who would come to Japan.
that special bar with the special girls was one particular special girl that would dance and tease these men that they would fly in from all around the world just to see her dance. She would dance the most seductive dance waggling her little tail as she moved around the dance floor. And the men would give her money and she would weave her spell entrancing them with the movement of her body.

Mack is drawn to the dance and the movement of her body.

Then one day, a very rich American man, a Texan with a big cowboy hat, he came into the special bar because he had heard about the special girl with the special dance and he wanted to see the beauty for himself. And when he did the girl and the dance was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen and when she had finished he made an offer that was just too hard to refuse. And so she went with him to America. And there she did her dance for the rich American man with the big hat and for a time life was more wonderful than she could imagine.

As the tempo of the dance increases so does the tempo of Aiko's speech.

However the rich American began to boast about his special prize and the special dance and soon began to invite all his friends around to watch the beautiful girl do her special dance. And they all said it was the most beautiful thing they had ever seen and each wanted the beautiful girl for his own. All the men began to squabble over the beautiful girl each one vying for her attentions. But the rich American man grew jealous.

Stop!

Don't you want to know how it ends?

I think I already do.

The dance silly. Don't you want to know how the dance ends? She reaches down and gently cups his crotch.

No. I think I -

You're mouth says no but your Captain I think has overruled that command.
She gently begins to rub his crotch.

AIKO Saluting the flag I think.

MACK Please no.

Aiko release him.

MACK Sometimes I don't even think I know you.

AIKO Then I think you must get to know me.

She straddles him pushing him too his back.

AIKO If you are to love me, it's only fair.

MACK I don't know if we should. I mean, we're out in the open here.

AIKO Didn't stop you last week.

MACK That was different.

AIKO You were on top, yes?

MACK Well, yes.

AIKO You want to be on top now?

MACK No, I mean-

AIKO Maybe you want to see how the special dance ends?

MACK Aiko, I'm not that kind of guy.

AIKO Why do you think I love you silly?

MACK But I'm unstable. I get bashed up for a living, you don't know what it's like, not really.

AIKO But I'm willing to find out.
MACK
(realising)

Yes you are.

AIKO
I told you.

They kiss.

AIKO
Promise me.

MACK
What?

AIKO
Stay out here. She can't come between us, not out here.

She unbuttons his shirt, then slowly kisses her way down his body.

She unbuckles his belt and unzips his pants.
SCENE 9

The back verandah and yard, later in the day.

Russell, Anthony and Melissa are resting.

Russell and Anthony are drinking another beer.

Enter Mack and Aiko.

RUSSELL

You're back then.

MACK

Yeah.

RUSSELL

We were worried 'cause it's getting late.

MACK

We're fine.

RUSSELL

I understand if you need to be alone, it's just that I don't want you wandering too far from home, especially with the sun going down.

Mack checks his watch.

MACK

It's two in the afternoon.

RUSSELL

Well?

MACK

It won't go down for hours yet.

MELISSA

He's right.

ANTHONY

Mel, you're not helping.

MELISSA

I'm just saying.

RUSSELL

And I'm just saying we don't want you wandering off now it's getting dark soon.

MACK

Okay.

RUSSELL

Mack, seriously.
ANTHONY: You may be some tough guy on the movie set, but out here you're the same as everyone else.

MACK: (annoyed) I get it.

RUSSELL: You promise you won't go wandering off?

MACK: Well.

RUSSELL: You're not going to promise.

MACK: There's a lot of things to consider.

RUSSELL: Like?

MACK: We're stuck out here two days from now and-

ANTHONY: (cutting in) And you've just got time to make your shoot.

MELISSA: What shoot?

ANTHONY: He has to leap off the bonnet of a car onto the back of a truck.

MELISSA: That doesn't seem so-

ANTHONY: While they are driving.

MELISSA: Oh.

MACK: (frustrated) It's no big deal.

MELISSA: But you could get run over right?

MACK: You can get run over crossing the street. It's a moot point anyway - I mean, we're stuck out here.

ANTHONY: (beat) It seems you've made your decision then.

MACK: Look, I never really had a choice. I've made a commitment to...
people I respect and that's important to me.

ANTHONY: That's disappointing.

MACK: What would you have me do?

ANTHONY: Put family first.

MACK: I'm trying to.

ANTHONY: (angry) Try harder.

MACK: (loud) I'm here aren't I!

ANTHONY: Are you? You know I can't really tell.

MACK: You knocked her up, didn't you. That's the only reason she agreed to marry you.

Angrily Anthony grabs Mack by the shirt. Towering over him.

Russell leaps up and separates the two of them.

RUSSELL: You two just stop it. If you don't start behaving yourself I'll take my belt off and give you both a thrashing, and don't think I won't. Behaving like a couple of girls. Pull your heads in.

MELISSA: We have barely eaten all day - we're all just hungry.

ANTHONY: (to Mel) Maybe we can sort something out.

Anthony and Melissa go to enter the house, they pause at the door.

MELISSA: I've got chicken, it'll spoil if we don't eat it. And that would be such a shame.

ANTHONY: You want some Dad?

RUSSELL: Okay Ant. Just whatever.

ANTHONY: Sure.
Sorry.

They share a moment.

RUSSELL

It's okay.

Silence.

Anthony and Melissa exit into the house.

RUSSELL

(to Mack)

You know I wouldn't really beat you. Sometimes I forget you're your own man.

MACK

Tell that to Anthony.

RUSSELL

Yeah he can be a bit of a terrier when he wants. I'll have a word with him later.

MACK

Thanks.

RUSSELL

(beat)

Did I ever tell you about the day I met your mother? Aiko you might be interested in this too. Even now you look so much like her. Same hair, same face, same free spirit. Sometimes I wonder if you got any of me at all.

MACK

Dad.

RUSSELL

Well, it's true.

MACK

Just tell the story.

RUSSELL

Okay. So she was the only daughter of some neighbours of ours, very good friends of my mother and father. She was this gangly girl growing up and to be honest I had no interest in her at all. I can't even say we were friends. She was not popular at school, I think being an only child made it hard for her. Eventually they moved away and I forgot all about her. The next time I see her and it's a week before I'm getting married, this was years later right? Right. My parents had invited her parents and there she was sitting across the table from me, my fiancée beside me and at first I didn't even recognise her. My parents had never really approved of my fiancée, well of me getting married I guess, I was only twenty-three I think and I hadn't really travelled or anything, not like you. So here's my theory. It was a setup. Can you believe that? Of course my parents deny it, always have, but there's not doubt. I think both sets of parents had gotten together earlier and decided to set me up with your mother a blooming week before I'm due to marry another woman. The nerve right? Well, I know what you're
probably thinking. Love at first sight and all that, but that's not quite - hmm, the day before I was supposed to be getting hitched my best man comes to me, we had been buddies in college. He says he's got something to tell me. He says, 'Russell', no, he never called me Russell not even then. He says. 'Russ, don't get married.' And I think he's joking. 'I love her mate.' He says. 'I love her mate' - How about that eh? Turns out that they had been seeing each other for years, since way before she even hooked up with me. That she only agreed to marry me to get him to commit.

MACK
What are you trying to say?

RUSSELL
Well, it's the best thing that ever happened to me. See, if I wasn't getting married then your mother wouldn't have come back into town and you my laddie wouldn't exist. I guess all I'm saying is that sometimes the girl for you is there right underneath your nose the whole time.

I was hoping you might butt in here, tell me a little something about you and a certain ring - (gesturing Aiko)

MACK
I think you've got the wrong idea about me and Aiko.

RUSSELL
Well then tell me what's going on. You were the one who was talking about a ring.

MACK
Yeah but I only want it just in case - and because mum said.

RUSSELL
My mum?

MACK
No.

RUSSELL
Aunt Elle?

MACK
No. Mum. You don't know?

RUSSELL
Know what?

MACK
Elle sent me this letter, it's from Mum - I assumed you knew.

RUSSELL
What letter?

Mack takes a letter out of his pocket and hands it to Russell. It looks quite old.

Russell unfolds it and starts to read. By the time he's finished there's a tear in his eye.
RUSSELL (shock) I never knew.

Mack takes the letter back and looks over it.

RUSSELL She never told me.

Mack Aunt Elle sent a note with it, apologising for not giving it to me sooner saying that she had misplaced it and only recently found it. She didn't want to tell me about it until she knew she had it.

RUSSELL Oh. Has she read it?

Mack I don't think so. It was still sealed.

RUSSELL Well, I can't help you. I'm sorry.

Mack It's lost?

RUSSELL No.

Mack You sold it?

RUSSELL No. Normally I'd be happy to give it too you, like if you were going to be married or something. It's just Anthony beat you to it. Mel is wearing it right now. He gave it to her when they got engaged. I mean, you keep on saying that you're not even getting married and Anthony and Mel are getting hitched tomorrow with any luck and it's a bit unfair to her to ask her to give it up. It's just bad timing more then anything.

Mack (unbelieving) I just never really had anything of hers and suddenly I get this letter and it's like she was there in the room with me. Do you know what I mean. I just thought that somehow she was trying to send me a message.

RUSSELL I don't know son.

Mack I guess I was wrong.

RUSSELL (beat) I just want you to be happy Mack. That's what I'm saying I guess. Sure I could have married that other woman and we would probably still have been married today, but son, I found more happiness with those few brief years with your mother then -
You know it doesn't all happen at once, if you were to take that leap of faith then I could have a word with Ant and Mel, show them the letter, and who knows -

Mack

Leap of faith you say.

Russell

Maybe I should give the two of you some alone time. There is some laughter coming from the house.

They turn to look but see nothing.

Russell

I'll go talk to them.

Mack takes Aiko by the hand and they exit into the yard.
SCENE 10

A different part of the backyard.
Mack and Aiko have walked quietly for some time.

AIKO
(breaking the silence)
What's going on? Why have you been so quiet?

MACK
You didn't really get any of that back there did you?

AIKO
About the letter, about the other girl.

MACK
No Aiko. The letter is from my mother.

AIKO
I don't believe you. That is not possible.

MACK
It was written before she died. Before I was even born.
Mack takes out the letter.

MACK
I didn't even know it existed until I got it. I guess that's why I've been acting so strange.

AIKO
Oh. But you're alright now?

MACK
I think so. Do you believe in faith?

AIKO
I don't understand.

MACK
Faith, believing.

AIKO
Do I believe in believing? Like fate?

MACK
Kind of. In the letter my mother tells me she loves me and that she doesn't regret a thing.

AIKO
She is lucky your mother.

MACK
No she wasn't. After she had Anthony she had complications, she was warned not to have any other children.

AIKO
(not understanding)
But she had you.
Not really. She died giving birth to me.

So you ran away to America.

There's no easy way to say this. For some reason Dad thinks there's something serious between us, and that if we were engaged then, well, he would talk to Anthony about getting mum's ring back.

You want to marry me?

In her letter, Mum promised me her engagement ring.

But Anthony has it?

He gave it to Mel when they got engaged.

This is a strange way to propose.

That's it really, I'm not. It would be pretend. I know, it's a lot to ask, and I wouldn't if there wasn't any other way.

You don't want to marry me?

We've only known each other a short while and I'm learning new things about you every day and well - it takes time to make these decisions.

Surely you just know.

You can't really say you want to marry me can you? I mean in many ways you don't even know me.

I know you're a decent man who cares about the people around him. I know that you love me, even if you don't want to admit it to yourself, and I know that of all the thousands of people who could have stopped to help me that day I couldn't have chosen anyone better than you.
MACK

Don't make it anymore difficult than it already is. It's not like I'm breaking it off or anything - I'm just saying, let's play this little charade, I get my mum's ring, just like she wanted me too, then maybe sometime down the-

AIKO
(firm)

No.

MACK

Is it so much to ask?

AIKO

How do I know you won't go off and give the ring to this other girl? Tell me that. How do I know you won't play a charade on me too.

MACK

I thought we settled this, I didn't get a letter from another girl.

AIKO

But that doesn't mean there isn't one.

MACK

Be reasonable.

AIKO

You first!

Awkward silence.

MACK

You're right, I'm sorry.

(beat)

All these years she has just been a big mystery. Dad never talked about her, well not to me, and I would ask my Aunt Elle what she was like but it never felt real somehow, like it was second hand. But this letter, she wrote it, she sat down and for those few minutes she was thinking about me, and of all the things she could have said, of all the things she could have left me, she wanted me to have her ring. But it's not just a ring you know, because that little golden band, and that little diamond, it tells me something. It tells me that you can't erase your past, that there will always be a little part of it reaching out to you to help you find your way in the present. Somehow I fear that without it I'll be left wandering the planet forever.

(beat)

I know you're mad at me. I'm sorry. It was a pretty shitty thing to ask. I was just hoping you might take pity on me, like I once took pity on you. I was hoping you'd help me find my future. What do you say?

AIKO
(quiet)

Okay.

MACK

Yes?

BJLP!

Zftp@!
AIKO (sad)

I will help you.

MACK

Thank you very much.

He kisses her awkwardly.

MACK

Let's go tell them the good news.

He takes her by the hand.

They exit toward the house.
SCENE 11

The verandah and yard.

Anthony and Melissa rejoin Russell, they are carrying some sandwiches on a plate.

ANTHONY
We made enough for everyone.

RUSSELL
He's just gone to talk to Aiko, guess they wanted some privacy.

ANTHONY
Oh.

MELISSA
You know I've been having second thoughts.

ANTHONY
You have?

MELISSA
Maybe it's not such a bad idea getting Mack to go for help.

ANTHONY
I thought we'd agreed.

MELISSA
It just doesn't seem such a big risk is all - it's like Mack said, who knows what's going to happen two days from now.

ANTHONY
Two days from now we'll be married, kicking up our feet on our honeymoon.

MELISSA
Knowing Mack, he doesn't give up on these ideas easily is all.

RUSSELL
It wasn't easy.

MELISSA
What happened?

RUSSELL
Well, I wasn't going to say anything but he's making it official now.

MELISSA
What?

RUSSELL
This wedding.

ANTHONY
I knew it. Now he's been found out, we're invited after all are we.
RUSSELL
I don't think it's quite like that.

ANTHONY
You put the hard word on him did you?

RUSSELL
A little.

ANTHONY
So when is it?

RUSSELL
I don't know, he hasn't asked her yet.

MELISSA
What?

RUSSELL
He's doing it now.

MELISSA
You sure?

RUSSELL
Something's come up, forced his hand.

ANTHONY
What?

RUSSELL
Well, it kind of involves the two of you, all of us really - He got a letter from his mother -

MELISSA
Elle?

RUSSELL
No, his mother. Written before she -

ANTHONY
I don't remember any letter.

RUSSELL
I read it, it's her alright.

ANTHONY
I never got a letter.

RUSSELL
Well, it seems she wrote it some months before -

ANTHONY
He's been holding onto it all this time?

RUSSELL
Anthony just listen. In it she says she wants Mack to have her ring.

ANTHONY
Hang on. Her engagement ring? He wants Mel's engagement ring?
I said I'd have a word with you.

(Anthony)

No. No. Fucking no way. I asked for that fair and square, and you said, you said you'd be honoured Dad! You can't be seriously expecting me to give it back. It's on her fucking finger.

Melissa

Anthony.

Anthony

No.

Melissa

It was Elizabeth's and she did want him to have -

Anthony

(Cutting in)

No way. There's got to be a statute of limitations or something.

Russell

Be serious.

Anthony

I am. Or where would this ever end. I wouldn't be surprised if he's written the damn thing himself just to ruin my life.

Russell

I don't think that's likely.

Anthony

How do you know?

Russell

It was quite old.

Anthony

So he wrote it ages ago, just proves how cunning he is.

Russell

Anthony it's genuine.

Anthony

You want me to do this, don't you?

Russell

I said I'd have a word with you and he did seem more eager to propose.

Anthony

You've bargained away Mel's ring to get him to propose?

Russell

It's not like that.

Anthony

Then what is it like.
I'm trying to think what's best for everyone. We can get you another ring.

I don't want another ring!

It's not so bad. It was your mother's so maybe -

You too eh? Well fuck, I guess the engagement is off then.
Grabbing Mel's hand -

What are you doing?

Ant is tugging on the ring.

Don't!

Come-on you little fucker.

Melissa yanks her hand away - The ring comes off!

Got it!

Anthony, you give it here.

So you want it back now.

Anthony taunts her with it.

Mack and Aiko enter.

So here he is, decided to show his face.

You want this?

Fetch!

Anthony throws the ring.

The ring sails through the air off stage.

What the hell have you done that for!
ANTHONY: You want it, go get it.

MACK: I don't need this.

Melissa glares at Anthony.

ANTHONY: So I'm the bad guy!

MELISSA: Yes Anthony, this time you are.

MACK: Not everything I do is about you.

ANTHONY: That's it exactly, nothing you do is about this family.

MELISSA: Guys, please.

ANTHONY: I suppose you're taking his side.

MELISSA: I'm on my side.

RUSSELL: Look we'll find the ring, you can give it to Aiko, it will all be fine.

AIKO: No.

MACK: (warning) Aiko.

AIKO: No.

ANTHONY: What's this?

MACK: (to Aiko) What are you doing?

AIKO: (upset) Why won't you marry me?

MACK: I thought we agreed.

RUSSELL: Mack, what's going on.

MACK: She's just saying - how are we going to get married without a ring?
AIKO: No marry.

MACK: See.

ANTHONY: I don't think so.

MACK: (sarcastic) And you speak Japanese.

ANTHONY: No, but I can tell when a person is happy and when they are not.

AIKO: You do not love me, not even a little bit?

MACK: (annoyed) He's thrown the ring away so -

AIKO: Well, I don't marry you even if you want me!

RUSSELL: Will someone please tell me what is going on?

AIKO: (desperate) I marry Russell. He likes me. She takes Russell by the arm.

MACK: You're joking.

AIKO: No. He is the man for me. Ask him.

MACK: (to Russell) What's going on with you and Aiko?

RUSSELL: At least she tells me what is going on.

MACK: Have you been putting the moves on her?

RUSSELL: No.

MACK: Is this why you've been pushing me to marry her?

RUSSELL: No. I just want you to be happy.
Am I really going to marry her? I don't even know her.

Mack no marry me, I marry Russell.

Mack: There. It sounds pretty bloody obvious to me.

Anthony: Hang on, she said you aren't going to marry her.

Mack: She doesn't have good English. Christ!

Anthony: You probably didn't ask her to marry you at all, you probably didn't even tell her. This is all part of your scam isn't it.

Mack: (angry) There is no scam.

Anthony: The moment you got here you've worked to fuck up my life - the letter - pretending to get married - it's all a big scam. I can't believe I fell for it. And now the ring is gone.

Mack: This is bullshit. I've got a dad who hits on my girlfriend, a brother who is so suspicious of everything I do he would throw his fiancée's wedding ring away so I don't get it. I don't need any of this, fuck I don't even need the ring because it'll remind me of this fucked up family.

Russell: Come-on buddy. Let's just talk about it.

Mack: No. This is all fucked, I'm outta here. And I'm not your buddy.

Melissa: Wait Mack. Please.

Mack shakes his head and exits around the front.

Melissa: (to Ant) I blame you.

Anthony: Me? He's just left without even telling his supposed girlfriend here where he's going and you think this marriage of his was for real?

Melissa: You know Anthony sometimes I wonder what the hell I'm doing with you.

Anthony: What?
We hear the motorbike start up and then rev loudly, before taking off down the road.

MELISSA
He's your brother you dick. No I'm not saying another word.

ANTHONY
Shit. You love me right?

(beat)
Okay, you're still moody.

MELISSA
Fuck you.

ANTHONY
I'm sorry I threw the ring away but there's a chance we'll find it. We've got time.

MELISSA
It's not really about the ring though is it.

RUSSELL
(upset)
Will you two just sort it out. I'm going to look for the ring before it gets dark and by the time I get back - well you know.

ANTHONY
(bitter)
You still trying to set Mack up.

RUSSELL
Son, it was my wife's ring. It was my wife's fucking ring. You should know better.

Russell exits looking for the ring.

ANTHONY
(beat)
I'll go after him.

MELISSA
Your dad will be fine.

ANTHONY
I meant Mack, the road will be closed - he's probably going to attempt a crossing - in that piece of crap he's riding he'll probably be swept away, and I'd rather not have that on my conscience thank you very much.

MELISSA
He made it in didn't he.

ANTHONY
(beat)
I got to stop him from going overseas. Look, I didn't really want to tell you like this.
ANTHONY

Dad is not very well. I tried to tell Mack but he just wouldn't listen.

MELISSA

I don't understand.

ANTHONY

(choked)

We're losing him.

MELISSA

What?

ANTHONY

A few months.

MELISSA

But -

ANTHONY

It's in his heart.

MELISSA

But he never said -

ANTHONY

Didn't want to spoil the wedding.

Silence.

ANTHONY

That's why I've got to go after Mack. I've really fucked things up.

MELISSA

Anthony, I'll go.

ANTHONY

You sure?

MELISSA

He'll listen to me.

ANTHONY

I see. Mel?

MELISSA

Yeah?

He takes her hand and holds it against his heart.

ANTHONY

Don't get lost.

MELISSA

What do you mean?
ANTHONY
It doesn't matter what you two had before. Just tell me my fiancée will come back to me.

MELISSA
(realising)
I've got to go, I'm sorry.
Mel exits around the front after Mack.
SCENE 12

The verandah and yard, a short time later. Russell re-enters from the yard, and goes straight into the house.

ANTHONY
Dad?

RUSSELL
(from inside)
Getting some water—time we sobered up.

Aiko and Anthony sit with their own thoughts.

AIKO
I guess next time you’ll try listening to your mother. Next time? Crazy.

ANTHONY
Oh. Are you okay?

AIKO
(happy face)
Okay.

ANTHONY
Look I’m not really sure what you’re saying. Do you understand?

She stares at him blankly.

AIKO
Okay.

ANTHONY
I just wanted to say—look I’ve really stuffed this up for you.

(Aiko starts crying)

ANTHONY
I know you’re upset, you’ve got every right to be. Mack running off like that, being stuck out here. I’d be upset too. I am for that matter. Anyway, I just wanted to say that I’m sorry. So sorry.

AIKO
Sorry?

ANTHONY
Yes, sorry.

AIKO
(beat)
Thank you.

ANTHONY
No prob.
AIKO (to self) Thank you, that's all you can say, pathetic. Nod your pretty little head, smile your pretty smile, do your pretty dance.

ANTHONY We're not stuck here or anything, if that's what you're thinking. It might not seem like it now but - you just got to have faith. You sure you're okay?

AIKO Yes okay. Koala bear.

ANTHONY Ha. Yes. I doubt there'll be any out here though. Too wet. But don't worry we've got plenty of fresh water - from the rainwater tanks. You want some?

AIKO No understand. Slower.

ANTHONY (slowly) Water? Not understanding, Aiko shakes her head.

ANTHONY No? Fair enough. Silence.

ANTHONY All we can do is wait. Silence.

Russell enters from the house carrying a bottle of water and some glasses.

RUSSELL (to Aiko) It's only water. Don't have any sake. Sorry.

AIKO Sake?

RUSSELL Don't have any.

AIKO Okay.

She takes a drink.

AIKO This is not sake. Water?

RUSSELL That's it.
Any luck with the ring?

Nah. Maybe you want to try, I'll wait here.

Yeah, sure.

(Day)

Dad?

Yeah?

I'm so sorry.

Just go find it.

Anthony exits looking for the ring.

Russell looks at Aiko.

Now we're alone.

He puts his hand around her.

Aiko is shocked.

Well I was hoping I would get you to myself. And don't worry about that silly marriage thing - I'm old enough to be your father, ha.

He gives her a squeeze.

No. No.

Yes I am, really. It's kind of you to say that but - well, look I wanted to give you something, private like.

Russell takes the ring out of his pocket.

It seems I found the ring after all. It can be our little secret.

No, no. I can't marry you. That was pretend. I was making Mack jealous.

I want you to have it, I mean, from Mack. If you go hunt him down, show him this then who knows maybe the wedding will be back on.
Russell offers the ring to Aiko.

AIKO (panicky)

No, no, marry!

RUSSELL

Yeah, I know he said some bad things. But he was just angry at Anthony. If you can find it in your heart to forgive him?

Russell bends down before her.

RUSSELL

Please?

He offers her the ring.

Aiko is very confused.

RUSSELL

Here, take the ring and just think about it.

Aiko takes the ring thinking he has proposed.

AIKO

I should talk to Mack, okay?

RUSSELL

Okay?

AIKO

Okay.

RUSSELL

Great.

He gives her a hug, and a kiss on the cheek, Aiko is uncomfortable.

RUSSELL

Go on, go tell Mack. You can probably catch up with him - he'll be stopped just down the front of the property - the front road.

He gestures in the direction Mack went.

RUSSELL

Go on.

AIKO

Go?

RUSSELL

Yeah, he wouldn't have gone far. That way.

AIKO

Mack?

RUSSELL

(grins happily)

Yeah, you crazy kids.
Aiko leaves after Mack.
Russell sits down and opens a beer.
RUSSELL
Well, old mate, looks like you've accomplished the impossible.
SCENE 13
On the road out, at the water crossing. Mack has pulled up and stopped the motorbike to one side. He has rolled up shorts and waded into the water, which is flowing all around him. It is up to his knees.

Melissa comes running in after him, she stops at the edge.

MELISSA
We gotta stop meeting like this.

MACK
Yeah, people will start talking.

MELISSA
Those two always running off into the middle of nowhere.

MACK
Up to no good.

MELISSA
(beat)
About before, it was just the stress of - seeing you again after all this time. I'm sorry I guess is what I'm saying. I hope you're not leaving because of me.

MACK
No, I wouldn't leave because of you.

MELISSA
That's good.

MACK
You want me to come back?

MELISSA
Well, I really just wanted to make sure you were alright.

MACK
I've been through worse.

MELISSA
You didn't even tell Aiko where you were going.

MACK
She'll be alright. She's got a habit of landing on her feet.

He takes the bike keys out of his pocket and throws them to Melissa.

MACK
Give her these, at least she'll be able to ride out of here when the water drops.
MELISSA
She loves you.

MACK
We can't always get what we want.

MELISSA
(beat)
So this ring thing, it was like Anthony said, just an attempt to ruin my wedding? Cause I can't believe you would do that deliberately.

MACK
Well - believe it.

MELISSA
(shocked)
You came here to ruin my wedding? - And the letter, the ring, the kiss, everything was intended to do just that.

MACK
Yep.

MELISSA
(shocked)
I - I - You made me think you still had feelings for me just to get at your brother.

MACK
That and I like kissing you.

MELISSA
I can't believe I was going to ask you to come back - What am I doing out here, I am getting married tomorrow.

MACK
(snaps)
Yes. To my brother! Dad snaps his fingers and the two of you can't wait to jump into bed with each other.

MELISSA
And where the hell have you been, huh? I waited for you. You arrogant prick, standing there judging me. Well take a look in the mirror.

MACK
There's a fucking billion guys out there, did what we have mean nothing?

MELISSA
No.

MACK
Funny way of showing it. Do you even love him? I mean, he just ripped your engagement ring off your finger and threw it away to stop me from having it.

MELISSA
Don't change the subject.

MACK
Alright. When I asked you to marry me huh, I wasn't good enough eh? But big brother Anthony is, is that it? Poor little Mack the runt of the litter, you needed to up-size,
MELISSA: I think I loved you too much.

MACK: Well that's great.

MELISSA: It was unhealthy for you. You were so young. I had to stop it somewhere.

MACK: You just keep telling yourself that. I mean, you didn't say no when we went out on a date, not when I put my hand on your knee, stuck my tongue down your throat, my dick in your -

MELISSA: (cutting in) Stop it.

MACK: Well it seems you're an expert in saying no now.

MELISSA: I'm sorry.

Silence.

MACK: I never stopped loving you.

He approaches her.

MACK: I never stopped.

He takes her hand.

MACK: When I touch another girl - I imagine it is your hand, your arm, your cheek, your breast. And you waited for me, just shows doesn't it, shows that you've been thinking about me too. My hand, my arm around you, my heart against yours - And you still love me, I can see it in your eyes. I know it. I feel it too.

They face each other, close.

He puts his fingers on her lips to stop her from speaking.

MACK: (passionate) Come away with me. The world is a big place, we'll find somewhere where we can be together, it's not so strange to think. I love you, and if you even think that you could love me a little, then you owe it to yourself, you owe it to yourself to remember what it was like to be truly happy. But - and this is the only but - you have to decide now. Choose me and live the life you've always wanted, walk out of here with me, and be free.
MELISSA (overwhelmed)
You haven't even kissed me.

They kiss.

MELISSA (catches her breath)
Nice speech by the way.

MACK
I've had some years to think it over.

MELISSA
And you've changed, I feel like I don't even know you.

MACK
Then get to know me. A man once told me, sometimes Mel you've just got to take a leap of faith. You got to trust your feelings. You love me and want to come with me, or you don't. It's that simple.

MELISSA
No, it's not. I love you and want to come with you, and I love Anthony and want to stay, and your dad -

Aiko enters holding the ring, they see her, but not the ring she is carrying.

MACK
And my dad what?

MELISSA
Well -

MACK
He won't understand.

MELISSA
You should come back, do the right thing.

(deciding)
I have to go, I'm getting married tomorrow.

She turns to go back to the house.

MACK
Mel wait.

MELISSA
Talk to your girlfriend. Then tell me you love me.

Melissa exits.

AIKO (shocked)
It's her isn't it.

MACK
What?

AIKO
The other girl. I feel so stupid.
Don't be like that.

Did you ever love me?

Yeah.

But?

Not enough I guess.

And you couldn't tell me this?

I don't think I knew.

But you knew about her?

Do we have to go through this?

Yes.

Yes. I knew about her.

Stay here 'til the waters go down. There's plenty of water, food. You've got everything you need.

Not everything.

I should be going.

She grabs onto him.

Mack?

Yeah?

You don't want to see how the dance ends?

Honestly?

Yes.

I already know. You did it for me once the year I was in Tokyo, not that you would remember, so when I saw you in LAX - anyway that's the real reason I went over to you. Helped
you. I'm sorry.

Aiko feels sick and sinks to the ground the wind knocked out of her.

MACK
It's hard to get the image of all those men out of my head, you know?

AIKO
I think I'll just lay here.
She lies down.

MACK
You should go back. I left the keys with Mel.

AIKO
No, I'll just lay here and look up at the stars. Maybe you'll come flying back for me.

MACK
I'll see you Aiko.

Mack begins to wade deep into the water. Soon he is gone.

Silence.

Anthony enters, Aiko hears him before she sees him.

AIKO
(excited)
Mack! You came back!

She sees Anthony, she is defeated, falling back to the ground.

Anthony crosses to her.

ANTHONY
What are you doing out here eh? Come on, I'll help you back.
He takes her by the hand.

She doesn't move.

In her hand, he feels the ring.

ANTHONY
What you got there?

He opens her hand and finds the ring.

ANTHONY
The ring, you found it! That's good luck that is. Just what I was looking for. Maybe our luck is turning. Maybe the worst is over. Come-on, not moving huh? Okay, have it your way.

In one swift movement he picks her up, she puts her arms around his
neck and he carries her off toward the house.

THE END.
Chapter Five

Discussion

The aim of this chapter is determine the success or otherwise of the dramatic writing toolset in the creation of the play, *Albatross*. To do this I will consider the application of the various elements in the toolset and attempt to make some determination as to whether each tool accomplished what was intended. I will do this through reference to notes gleaned during the application of the tools, and by examining strengths and weaknesses in appropriate sections of the play text.

I will examine the tools in the order presented in the Literature Review for, this is one way they may be employed in the creation of new works of drama. By examining the tools in this order I provide both an examination of the success of the tool, and a mini-narrative of my writing practice.

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5.1 Tools of Creation

5.1.1 Values and Theme

The tool of Values and Theme is used to manage the process of unearthing those values which best illuminate the subject on which you
wish to write, and begin to express these values in terms of a theme. When first writing *Albatross*, I identified strongly with the work of noted Australian psychologist Stephen Biddulph, and desired to express his theories in a dramatic light, particularly those in relation to under-fathered boys and absent fathers. This was the initial inspiration and remains the subject of the play. To convert this subject into theme I needed intent. What exactly did I want to say about under-fathered boys and absent fathers? Catron tells us that “a play that boils up from your inner self will be stronger because it expresses ideas important to you” (1993: 3). The tool of Values and Themes is used expressly for just such a purpose, to unearth those deeply held values and then connect them with the subject on which you want to write: “The theme ... is not a casual something of mere interest or importance, but a matter central to [the writer’s] existence and purpose on earth” (Maisel, 1999; 36).

To unearth my values I used what might best be described as a focused self-reflective writing exercise, or perhaps more simply, “a getting to know oneself” task. I started, pencil in hand, writing feelings and thoughts that came into my awareness that already pre-existed any notion of the play, and then once they were written, I began re-writing them in different ways to make subtle differences in meaning; in short:

Fatherlessness; breakdown between father and son; how does it start; crime; properly fathered boys; mother’s overcompensation; does the father need to be physically absent; Affect on the son; And finally, do under-fathered
boys fail to become men? Yes. (Player, 2006a: 1)

Through this exercise, I had found not just a subject, but a statement on a subject – I had found my intent: to explore the condition of failure. I wasn’t just writing on under-fathered boys or absent fathers, nor was I writing on how they have failed, or their failures, but how they fail, which is to say – what is it about these characters that stops them from achieving in life, in the present?

Thinking now about Albatross, this theme remained present through to the fourth version. Indeed, it is the case that the under-fathered boy of the play, Mack, and the absent father, Russell, do fail to resolve their differences. What I find most remarkable is the integrity of the theme across time. It seems to me that for all else that came and went through development, this fundamental combination of subject and intent remained consistent. To me this implies, primarily, that I was able to use the tool appropriately. Further though, the implication is that the use of the tool encourages the writer to capture early on in the creative process a defining phrase that explicitly states, not just what the play is, but what the play isn’t. In my writing practice such a phrase invigorates the writing, reducing distractions and maintaining the focus of the story.

5.1.2 Character and their Values

I already discussed in the Literature Review how the tool of Character and their Values can be a short-hand way of trying to identify a
character’s psychological landscape without the effort of writing a full psychological, physiological, and sociological background. Primarily though, this tool is about connecting into the unconscious mind, identifying the character inside you and allowing them to speak for themselves. This tool instructs the playwright to question their characters on their values and beliefs, and use any answers to tap directly into the kinds of persons they are and what they might do in the story. In practice this is not so easy, for as Lamott puts it: “You have to get things quiet in your head so you can hear your characters and let them guide your story” (1994: 117).

Continuing the mini-narrative from the first tool of Values and Theme, the story concept currently involves at least two characters, an absent father figure and an under-fathered son. My inspiration was to place these characters on stage together after a long time apart. Through the use of the Character and their Values tool, before I really knew anything about them, I could begin to determine what kinds of people they would be, and importantly at this early stage, I could determine whether I would want a person like that in my story. There is no easy approach to the use of this tool. Each time you have conceived a character and questioned them, if you don’t like the answers they have for you, then you must let them go. Importantly, my job as playwright is not to arbitrarily force a character to believe something they don’t, quite the contrary: we must find the right character for the play. Many times I
would conjure a father figure character and I would ask him what was important to him, I would ask him what he would feel about his son upon his return. All kinds of responses came back, in brief:

   I’ll kill the bugger; Don’t know if I even want him; Why don’t I get a say in the matter; I didn’t even know I had a son; Why doesn’t he go to his mother; And finally, the one that stuck, I think I would be happy to see him.

   (Player, 2006a: 5-6, 21, 30)

You can imagine how different the story would have been had I chosen one of the other voices. However it was the final voice that caught my attention, and was the basis for the further development of the character. Whatever else was to come, I knew he would be happy to see his son, that is to say he valued family life. When considering the character of Russell in the finished play, this deep-seated value comes through in many of his actions. He is constantly attempting to get more details on Mack and Aiko’s relationship, even cornering Aiko in Scene 4:

   Has Mack said anything, to you, I mean, I wouldn’t want you to betray a confidence only when I heard he was bringing someone with him I was half hoping that I’d see a little ring on your left hand, if you know what I’m getting at.

   (64)

Later in Scene 9 he is trying to convince Mack to ask her to marry him:

“I guess all I’m saying is that sometimes the girl for you is there right underneath your nose the whole time” (90); and “I just want you to be happy Mack” (91). Importantly, Russell can only see one way for Mack to be happy and that is getting married and having a full family life.
The tool of Character and their Values has been applied well for the character of Russell, and also Mack, whose own application of the tool proffered the value, love. Like Russell we can observe this value of Mack’s in the finished text. One of the reasons he chases the ring is because it is a symbol of his mother’s love: “I just never really had anything of hers and suddenly I get this letter and it’s like she was there in the room with me.” (91)

In contrast, the character Melissa does not seem quite as grounded. The reader gets this feeling primarily because, although they are willing to accept what she does, they are never entirely sure why she does it. The deeper values that drive her actions are not as clear as with some of the other characters. This is problematic for the tool, however my instinct is that this problem stems from the misapplication of the tool of Character and their Values as opposed to any problem with the tool. When reflecting on my notes made during the development of the character Melissa, I could find no direct value statement of the kind expressed by Russell and Mack. It seems that in my haste to explore issues of masculinity I have unfairly overlooked the deeper feelings of Melissa. This would be promptly addressed in a future draft.

5.1.3 Characters and Action

The tool of Characters and Action is about making sure your characters want something and are attempting to get just that thing at every point
in the story. It describes what particular kinds of actions are watchable (namely strong ones that the character is going to pursue despite the obstacles); and that each of these actions need to be motivated by some deeply held belief of the character. I use the tool of Characters and Action in two different ways. First, as a character development exercise to begin understanding the sorts of actions the character will take over the play as a whole; and second, when working on individual scenes, to help discover what the character is most likely to want at that given moment.

Continuing the description of the story development, the tool of Values and Theme identified intent, exploring failure, and the tool of Character and their Values gleaned core values for each of the two emerging characters, the father who valued family, and the son who valued love. These few ideas limited the types of actions the characters would be willing to do, as it is these values which are the primary motivators for an action. In simple terms, the use of this tool is fundamentally contingent upon the use of the previous two, for the previous tools identify the jumping off points for action. In this way the tool identified actions for each of the two characters so far:

The son (Mack): being to win the love of a girl who is impossibly out of reach, and
The father (Russell): being to reunite his family, and to help them attain the kinds of happiness he wishes for them.

(Player, 2006a: 20-25)
These are not full actions though, for they are missing the context of the complete story. Instead, these are what might best be called proto-actions, for although they exist fully within the mind of the character in development, they best describe the potential of action, as opposed to actual explicit actions the character will take.

With regard to Albatross, there is considerable consistency between these early stages of character development and the finished text. Mack’s primary action is to win back Melissa, particularly evident in Scene 3 where he kisses her for the first time; and in Scene 13, where he makes the impassioned plea:

Come away with me. The world is a big place, we’ll find somewhere where we can be together ... I love you, and if you even think that you could love me a little, then you owe it to yourself .. to be truly happy.

(113)

His secondary action is to gain a hold of his mother’s engagement ring. Consider Scene 10 where he convinces Aiko to help him fool his father and brother: “and of all the things she could have said, of all the things she could have left me, she wanted me to have her ring” (95). Each of these behaviours is a different reflection of his single greater action, that being an attempt to find love.

Importantly, this action is great, understandable, realistic, potentially achievable, and has serious consequences for Mack. This is exactly the kind of action argued for by Packard in the Literature Review (1997:
In my view, correct application of the tools of Character and their Values, and Characters and Action necessarily creates the strong actions needed to sustain solid drama. This belief seems to be borne out by the similarities between the nascent son character during character development and the actual character of Mack in the finished play.

The second use of the tool Characters and Action is in determining exactly what a character would be doing in any given scene. Typically, by knowing which characters will be in each scene and knowing what their greater goal is, the writing of each scene becomes an attempt by each character to get what they want dependent upon what has happened so far. For example, the notes I made for scene 9:

Mack now wants the ring, Mack and Aiko rejoin the group, Mack is annoyed to see Melissa with Anthony. Russell wants to know what’s going on, wants Mack to marry Aiko, wants to know why they’re not invited. Aiko doesn’t want to go near Russell. Anthony wants things to be right between him and Melissa. Melissa just wants some peace.

(Player, 2006b: 19)

In these notes it is important to see that each character has an action, not in the big picture, but right there in the present. This is one of the key components of the correct application of Characters and Action. It can be seen, then, that in my writing practice there is a constant translation, converting broader character values into general wants when beginning the development of a character, and then later into
specific actions for each scene. This translation is captured in the tool of Characters and Action.

5.1.4 Character Orchestration and Obstacles

Character Orchestration relates to the setting of one character’s action up against a second character’s opposing action. In this way each character becomes an obstacle for the other and conflict results. Importantly, this tool is dependent upon the tools that come before, as it demonstrates that the opposing actions must be sourced from deeply held beliefs.

Continuing the story development mini-narrative, I decided that the protagonist would be the son and that his action would be to win the love of a girl. She became my third character. According to the Character Orchestration and Obstacles, this girl’s action should come into opposition with Mack’s, but I was not wholly convinced that this was the best approach. I wanted her to be torn between her love for him and the love she felt for someone else, perhaps a new love. This new love would be a fourth character, and if his action were simply to love and behold his girlfriend, then this alone creates a strong obstacle for the protagonist, Mack. For the action to maintain itself there need to be as many obstacles as possible without overwhelming the protagonist. To this end I gave Mack a girlfriend whom he didn’t want, and made his rival for the affections of the other female character his brother. From
this complex matching of opposing actions came three new characters, and the five characters of the play were set, in brief:

- Mack: protagonist, absent son.
- Russell: his father, absent father.
- Melissa: Mack’s goal, first love and ex-girlfriend.
- Anthony: Mack’s rival, also brother.
- Aiko: Mack’s current girlfriend, obstacle to finding true love.

These new characters created considerable challenges for the toolset. The goal is to construct characters capable of speaking for themselves, and yet quite clearly, the tool of Character Orchestration demands the creation of new characters with specific actions almost arbitrarily added on. The answer to this dilemma is found in the application of the tool of Character and their Values. Previously, as each character was conceived, they were questioned on their values and I made a judgment as to whether they would remain in the story. Although the tool of Character Orchestration has suggested new characters, these characters are not technically conceived and matched into the play until they are fed through the tool of Characters and their Values, and subsequently Characters and Action. Anthony evolved the same value as his father, Russell, that being family life. Aiko valued protection, and much of what she does is motivated by her need for this, and as already discussed, Melissa’s values remain obscured.

In *Albatross* we can observe Anthony’s determination and strength of purpose firstly to convince Mack into giving up being a stuntman, Scene 2: “I mean you can’t seriously be thinking of jumping off buildings for
the rest of your life?” (51); And secondly keep the girl he loves, Scene 11: “It doesn’t matter what you two had before, just tell me my fiancée will come back to me” (105). Each of these actions stems from his greater action and values. Like his father he wants his family to be reunited, and ironically, is willing to risk just that in order to achieve it.

Also apparent is Aiko’s love for Mack and willingness to fight for Mack’s reciprocation of this love, Scene 8: “I’m not going to let you just walk away. I’m not going to give you up without a fight.” (80) is at once a representation of her greater action which is to be protected. She is caught in this relationship with Mack, and thrown into a world she doesn’t understand. As the play goes on she clings more and more to Mack, which conversely only serves to have him push her further away. Finally, Russell’s single-mindedness to see Mack married is a constant force pushing him back into the arms of Aiko, and further away from his goal. Each of these three characters, Anthony, Aiko and Russell, as portrayed in the final text, effectively complements their conceptual selves.

5.1.5 Event and Significant Change

The final tool of creation is Event and Significant Change. Catron tells us that the protagonist shows the meaning of the play (1992: 78). They do this through their struggles, their successes and failures, but most importantly they do this through how they change. It was further noted
that this change is in the character’s perception of themselves, brought about because their values have been called into question. When approaching the final scenes I already knew that Mack was going to fail to get what he wanted, he was going to fail to win back Melissa, he was going to fail to get the ring, in essence, he was going to fail in fulfilling his need for love.

Using the tool of Event and Significant Change, I needed to ask myself, what did this mean for Mack’s opinion of himself, and further, what values were going to be brought into question? At the start of the play, Mack tries to do the right thing, and if questioned would probably argue that he is a nice guy who helps other people. In Scene 2, Mack confronts both Anthony and Russell for not being more sensitive towards Melissa and the impact of the storm on her forthcoming wedding. He has helped Aiko out of a difficult situation at LAX previous to the play starting and is still protecting her when the story begins: “I’m flying out of LAX and I see her sitting, bawling her eyes out. I go over to her to find out what’s wrong, and well, one thing leads to another, six months later here we are.” (67) This is how he sees himself and his values reflect it. He is someone with a healthy respect for human life and liberty, and believes that he is owed real love in this life. At the start of the play he is already trying to find it.
It is these values which are called into question when he tries to win over Melissa. Eventually he starts acting against character; his lies become ever greater and more hurtful, particularly towards Aiko. When he finally loses Melissa he changes; no longer is he able to see himself in a positive light as someone who can make a real love connection. Instead he hurts Aiko, something he could never have done at the beginning of the play, and walks away from his entire family leaving them isolated on the property. When he walks, this value has deeply shifted within, and we know, because of that, he is never coming back.

This potential for change is a key component of his character. Mack is flawed, for the most part unwilling or unable to tell Melissa what is truly in his heart. He leaves himself closed off to prevent himself from getting hurt and to prevent himself from hurting others. He is torn between his moral code and his passions and is unable to reconcile these forces until the very end. This interior struggle fights over Mack’s behaviour. It is by understanding how Mack’s actions can be in opposition to his values that we observe the building of the interior conflict, the potential for character change, and the ultimate event of the play.

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5. 2 Tools of Evaluation

5.2.1 Passivity

In my toolset the first tool of evaluation is Passivity. This may in fact be unique to my writing practice, and is in part a response to my experience that in earlier drafts of my work my protagonist can tend to be passive. As pointed out in the Literature Review, this stems from an unwillingness on my part to let the characters get hurt: by protecting the characters I unconsciously impede them. It is strange to think that some writers would want to protect their characters, however I find that because I link my own values so closely with the protagonist and their values, when I do protect them, perhaps it is out of an instinct to protect myself.

I have already mentioned that one of the primary reasons I needed to write four versions of the play was because the softer awareness of access was being drowned out by the weight of the conscious critic inherent in the methodology. Originally the play had been set in the Australian outback after a plane crash landing. In the second version, the protagonist, Mack, had been injured in the plane crash by being hit on the head, and would lose consciousness. My intention had been to create space for Mack to delve into a unconscious/unreal world where the dreams he has while unconscious begin to take over his waking self. Unfortunately, as could be seen in the completed second version, this
left Mack somewhat passive, and at the whim of an authorial intention as opposed to his own wants and desires.

It was through the use of the tool of Passivity that I was able to see a way past this problem. The tool of Passivity speaks of a hidden psychological wall built around the protagonist and author protecting them both from the world of the play. Paradoxically, I was protecting Mack by making him physically hurt from the plane crash. In doing so I was not letting him chase real actions that could leave him emotionally hurt in the world of the play. To prevent passive characters this tool demands that writers demolish these psychological walls and any subsequent author imposed constructs in the play so as to have a richer experience in the world of the play. This helps the writer by increasing the strength of emotional connection they feel with all the other characters, and allowing the best application of the tools of creation.

5.2.2 Stakes

The second tool of evaluation is Stakes. In my practice Stakes is a tool of evaluation because it is a way of assessing the characters’ actions within the broader context of what else is happening in the play. Stakes is a way of testing the appropriateness of what the characters are doing by framing their actions in terms of what they are going to risk and what they can potentially gain. Where the tool of Characters and Action is about asking what the character will do, Stakes is about asking, will they
really do that now? If the answer is no, then the stakes are wrong. The tool of Stakes should be used throughout the creative process in combination with the tool of Character and Action. As mentioned above the tool of Character and Action can be used to identify what exactly each character wants from each scene. Even at this early stage the tool of Stakes can be used. If the test fails and you still really want your character to do what was identified in the tool of Character and Action, then you know it needs to be more strongly motivated, which in turn can mean a reconsideration of their values and how this ties into their action.

The best example of the use of this tool is captured in the following anecdote. As already mentioned the play had originally been set in the Australian outback after a plane crash landing. In the third version of the play all the actions of the characters were fundamentally the same as the version presented in this exegesis, for example, Mack still wanted Melissa and the ring and Russell was trying to convince Mack to marry Aiko. Interestingly, with the setting of the play being after a crash landing, doubt was cast over the believability of the characters’ actions, not because they didn’t want to do them, but importantly because they failed the question – would they do that now? In my case the answer was not to change what they were doing, but to change the now, by moving the setting to a family home, indeed its backyard. This was quite a considerable shift, however by using the backyard of an isolated
property in North Queensland caught in a flood, I was able to capture the key element of isolation from the previous setting. Once the new setting was in place the actions became more realistic, and no longer failed the test of Stakes.

5.2.3 Premise

The final and simplest tool is Premise. Premise requires the writer to think of the message of the play in terms of the play's completeness, and as such can really only be used with a draft play text. Through thinking about this tool the playwright should be able to glean some insight as to what, if anything, is missing from the play. Following Egri’s format for the premise, “character, conflict, and conclusion” (1960: 8), the premise for Albatross is as follows:

Selfishness fails to win love.

The similarity between the premise and the theme is striking, and they are closely related, indeed it could correctly be argued that the premise is simply a specific way of wording the theme that separates out the subject and only leaves the argument or the message of the play. In contrast the theme could be expressed more fully:

When forced back together, family members fail to mend their relationships and make that deep connection of love that they all need.

Whether this is true or not in the wider world is debatable, but it is certainly true in my play. Premise is a useful way to bring the writer full
circle, to re-examine the theme from which they started without the weight of the subject matter, so as to test whether the message is clear.

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5.3 Reflecting on the Practice

I have until now briefly discussed two of the significant changes between versions of Albatross and how these changes were motivated in turn through the tools of Passivity and Stakes. In Section 4.2 I discussed the changing nature of both the toolset in response to earlier versions of the play text and the evolution of the techniques used to record the tools and how this countered what I felt was a drowning out of the unconscious awareness of access to my creative self. This adds an interesting layer of complexity across any comparative discussion of the four versions. Ideally my methods for recording these tools would have remained stable, likewise the tools themselves, however I can say that my Tools of Evaluation remained comparatively stable across the four versions of the play. Below I will discuss the primary changes between the four versions of the play, how these were motivated by the Tools of Evaluation, and in turn some concerns I have about the completeness of the toolset.

The differences between the four versions can best be demonstrated by examining Mack’s primary action and the setting of the play. In version one, the play was set at a plane crash site and Mack’s action was to get
his injured girlfriend to safety in defiance of his father. Although this action worked reasonably well, I never felt comfortable that the stakes were raised high enough for Mack to kill himself (after his girlfriend dies) as he does at the end of version one, nor did I feel that he pursued his action to protect this girlfriend strongly enough. Indeed this is partially due to the nature of the action itself, a protection action is never going to play as strongly as an investigative action for example.

In version two, also set at the crash site, I gave Mack the head injury where previously it had been his girlfriend. As discussed under Passivity this was intended to raise the stakes and increase the conflict with his father, by having his unreal dream state take over his waking self. Ironically, and what became clear in the finished version was that, Mack became passive and at the whim of a mental illness. By version three the Tools of Creation had solidified and I had a better understanding of Character Orchestration and Obstacles. This version then was also set at the crash site. Now Mack’s girlfriend was no longer his primary concern. Indeed his action was to ditch his girlfriend and win over his brother’s fiancée, a new character. The fourth version in response to the tool of Stakes, as discussed above, changed the location to a family home in North Queensland, and kept Mack’s action the same.

What surprises me most after reflection on these four versions is how well the early output of scenes correlated with what is found in each of
the completed versions. For each of the Tools of Creation, there is evidence to suggest that the application of these tools had a long term impact on the development of the play. This is particularly notable in early versions of the scenes for version three after both the toolset and my methods of recording the toolset had each coalesced, for these early versions of scenes at times matched significantly with what is found in the version included here. Indeed I would argue that the entire dramatic structure of Albatross is indebted to the application of these tools, for the only significant change moving into version four was the setting, something which is interestingly beyond the scope of tools of creation as I have identified them. This is my first concern with the toolset.

My second concern seems to be that, ironically, this toolset creates conflict between characters too well. This is particularly noted in earlier attempts at version three, for here the conflict had a tendency to jerk upwards more rapidly than it should have. My reasoning for this is that in response to the previous version where I had a problem with passivity, the tools of creation that evolved put a very strong emphasis on what a character is going for in the present. This allows little room for self-reflection or self-recognition on the part of the character about what they are doing and why. Like many things Shakespeare did this best. Through using soliloquies he was able to connect the audience on a deep level to what the character thought about themselves.
Interestingly even after a major revision there were not as many soliloquies or monologues in the play text as I expected.

In response to these two concerns I expect my toolset to continue to evolve so that the Tools of Creation will expand to incorporate both the initial development of the setting as well as character self-recognition. Interestingly, my settings often act as a character having an action in the broad sense; for example, in *Albatross*, the action of the setting is to keep all the characters together. I expect then that the tool of Character Orchestration and Obstacles may well become Character Orchestration, Obstacles and Setting. As to understanding how self-recognition fits into the broader scope of the Tools of Creation, I am as yet unsure. However what I am sure is that with my current methodologies and recording habits my toolset will continue to evolve and answers will be found to these questions.

Indeed my goal has only ever been to find a primary toolset for creating dramatic structure, to which I imagined further tools could be enjoined. Further it seems I have been so successful in this goal that there is a bias in the tools towards moments of conflict between two characters of which other writers should be aware. While this is crucial for solid dramatic structure, it is not necessarily the only thing that makes an engaging play.
Chapter Six

Conclusion

In this exegesis I have proposed a primary toolset for dramatic writing. To do this I have examined the tools of many authors including Spencer (2002), Egri (1960), Packard (1996), Hicks (1999), and Lamott (1994) and observed how each is, in their own way, fundamentally contingent upon Aristotle’s basic tenet that “tragedy is the imitation of an action” (2006: 10).

The eight tools which constitute my toolset have been divided into two subsets based on the ways I think about my writing. The first subset comprises the tools of creation. They are Values and Theme; Character and their Values; Characters and Action; Character Orchestration and Obstacles; and Event and Significant Change, and reflect a creative way of thinking in my writing practice. The second subset comprises tools of evaluation. These tools are Passivity, Stakes, and Premise, and these best reflect my own evaluative way of thinking. It is difficult to discern whether I am right or not in my belief about these two sets, and other writers might find this division of tools unhelpful or even hindering. In response it might be best to remember Spencer who argues: “the object is not to be right. There is no right. The object is to understand one’s
“own opinions” (2002: 211) and in this sense, the development and naming of the tools within my toolset has been very important for understanding my own writing practice.

Indeed, I believe I have, as much as possible, proven the aim of this exegesis to be true, that the tools outlined above do indeed constitute a primary dramatic writing toolset for my own writing practice. I have shown that these tools are indeed capable of creating solid dramatic structure and that this structure is evident in my play Albatross.

I would hope that other writers, through considering my insights, may gain a greater awareness into their own approach to creating dramatic structure and perhaps their own formulation of a dramatic writing toolset. In response to Spencer’s original proposition that “you only learn to write the play you’re writing at the moment,” (2002: 173). I would add an important precursor, that being (and to paraphrase), you only feel like you learn to write the play you’re writing at the moment, for in reality you will be well prepared.

In conclusion, much of dramatic structure reminds me of the writing process itself. For example Egri, in writing about character, could just as easily have meant this to refer to the writer – “but forces within and without the man exert greater and greater pressure, until this seed of conflict is strong enough to burst through his stubborn head. He has
made a decision, and now he will act upon it” (1960, 65). So much of what I do as a writer can be summarised by this statement. I write plays for a reason, a seed of conflict inside my own mind. When finally I have something to say, it bursts through and I must act upon it. The writing of a play is my own action, and like the protagonist of a story it is guided by my values and principles, which are in turn challenged by the obstacles we all face as writers. So much of my understanding of both my practice and toolset is wrapped up in how I’ve had to overcome these obstacles. The splitting of awarenesses into unconscious artist, self-critic, and researcher has been both a blessing and a curse, for:

There is a creative tension in the writing process, between action and reflection; between processes we understand and those of which we are less conscious. [What] we’ve learned should become part of the unconscious ‘toolkit’ in the background of our writing process.

(Hunt and Sampson, 2006: 7)

My goal then is to practice the toolset with the view to integrating the knowledge of it into my intuitive unconscious self, or more simply, forgetting what I have learnt. Such an act then would be the final event for myself as protagonist in my dramatic journey.
Bibliography


