

**DRAMATISING NEW CANADIAN HISTORIES:
A CREATIVE PRACTICE DOCTORAL THESIS**

Yasmine Elissa Anne Wilt

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Abstract

This thesis is composed of two primary parts. The first part, which comprises seventy per cent of this doctoral study, is made up of two new history plays, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* and *The Interrogation*. The second part, which makes up the remaining thirty per cent, is a critical analysis that positions my creative writing within the spectrum of Canadian postcolonial drama, alongside other dramatists who employ magical realism and new historicism in their work. I analyse my creative practice and compare and contrast Marie Clements's *Burning Vision* with *We're Gonna Make You Whole*. In the final chapters I analyse my way of working, looking closely at the construction of *The Interrogation*.

The creation of the two new history plays is my primary contribution to knowledge. Published in 2011 by Oberon Books, the first of my two submission plays, *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, is a magical-real new history of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Disaster. This compact, two-act play interrupts and disrupts the mainstream mediatised history of the disaster by deploying an interwoven, alternate perspective of the catastrophe. This interruption aims to make the mainstream history seem uncanny by normalising the alternate, subversive history.

Set in the military headquarters of an unidentified military body, *The Interrogation*, my second play, interrupts the mainstream narrative of the global economic crisis by suggesting a link between the neocolonial attitudes of the UK, US and Germany and the present financial landscape. The play dramatises the brutal interrogation of two soldiers, one junior and the other senior, by a mysterious chameleon interrogator (also a soldier) who assumes the accent, affectations and status of his 'victims'.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my loving parents, Kurt and Denise. I also dedicate this work to my beloved Grandmother Louise. Thank you to Michael: your patience, kindness and fortitude are princely. I also wish to remember those who passed to the other side: I dedicate the little words between these bindings to my dear grandfathers, Rosaire and Lee. And lastly, but certainly not least, I dedicate these humble chapters to my dear Aunt Georgette, Aunt Jean and Uncle Eric.

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We're Gonna Make You Whole

By

Yasmine Van Wilt

We're Gonna Make You Whole
Yasmine Van Wilt
Oberon Books London

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This version of the script has been edited to reflect changes made for the purpose of performance. This script is not intended to be used for performance; it is a guide.

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Production History

We're Gonna Make You Whole was produced for the first time at the Acquire Arts in Battersea, London on 6th August 2011. This document has been edited from the original.

Characters

ANTOINETTE (Double cast with CHORUS 3). Mid-late twenties. Role originated by Yasmine Van Wilt.

CHORUS 1 Mixed-race/Creole. early-mid twenties. Role originated by Jordan King.

CHORUS 2 White, Mid-late twenties. Role originated by Kara Peters.

CHORUS 3 Mid-late twenties.

CURTIS Mid-late twenties/early thirties. Role originated by Lennard Sillevs.

EMCEE: (Double cast with CURTIS). Mid-late twenties/early thirties.

KELLY (Triple cast with CHORUS 2 and NANCY). Mid-late twenties.

NANCY: Mid-late twenties.

ROCHELLE (Double cast with CHORUS 1). Mixed-race/Creole. early-mid twenties.

Note:

... Should be 2/3 of a complete beat.

... Is a full beat of silence in which the beat following emphasises rather than digresses from the preceding beat. In other words, there is not a change of thought indicated by this as there is in a (Beat.)

The use of the / indicates the overlap of lines.

'To' should be used as an emphasis whereas 'ta' should be used as a kind of contraction. They are in fact different words completely.

The same is true for 'my' and 'ma'.

ACT I SCENE 1

The three CHORUS LADIES face front, eyes down. They are dressed as divas – as a divine and not all together wordly trio. They wait for their introduction from the EMCEE. A picture of the State of Louisiana behind.

EMCEE

Welcome to Louisiana's very best kept secret, the House of Funk. Hailing from the deepest darkest corners of the Bayou Teche, raised on Cajun goodness and Creole soul – they've been through heaven and hell and back to be here. Take it away Delphine, Antoinette and Betty Sue – come on people, put your hands together for – 'The ORACLES' – take it home ladies.

CHORUS 1

This your first time in Louisiana?!

CHORUS 1

Don't worry baby, we'll take real good care of you!

CHORUS 2

Down in our bayou country. You're gonna get yourself--

CHORUS 1

A nice little brain fog. You'll forget about your wife and kids.

CHORUS 2

You'll forget about your whiny husband.

CHORUS 3

You'll just get LOST!

CHORUS 2

Maybe it's cause there's something eating your brain?

CHORUS 1

Or maybe it's because we'll treat you so good... you'll never wanna leave!

CHORUS 3

Oh Susannah, don't you cry for me. Bury me beneath the old oak tree. And cross these arms that used to fight. And bury me beneath the old oak tree tonight. Bullets light the sky like shooting suns, and I stare into the night well it's not my choice to fight And I see him fall barely a man at all. And his young lead legs, collapse dead weight. He calls to a lover he leaves behind and curses, the man, that's me, who's shot him blind. Standing in the centre of the earth. A lonely god sings a silent dirge. But what of the hero slain? Oh no, just one more young life taken. Well, do I cry, do I feel remorse? No, no. They say.

This is the soldier's curse. Oh Susannah, don't you cry for me. Bury me beneath the old oak tree. And cross these arms that used to fight. And bury me beneath the old oak tree tonight.

CHORUS 1

Can we get some whisky Tommy? We've got friends in...Hello you...

CHORUS 2

It'll only be that same old cheap-ass bourbon.

CHORUS 1

But you're welcome to have some.

CHORUS 2

It makes the story go down smoother. We're glad you've come. We've been waiting for you...Since the water turned black. Guess we were hoping you'd come a little sooner. But no matter, you're here now. And we know we can trust you to take the story back...

CHORUS 1

That's why you came right. Baby, we're about to get a little postmodern on you because we gotta whole LOT of perspective.

CHORUS 2

We been here...since – before people.

CHORUS 1

So long's there's been a life force, there's been a urizen – better known as THE COMPANY.

CHORUS 2

Better known as THE COMPANY.

CHORUS 1

THEY are the force who try to keep the natural world down--

CHORUS 3

And we are the natural world –

CHORUS 1

But we will not be silenced.

CHORUS 3

What THE COMPANY have always told the people...

CHORUS 1

What they have always wanted you to believe...

CHORUS 2

Is that they know better than you. That there's nothing you can do to take them on.

CHORUS 2

THE COMPANY have always controlled the flow of information.

CHORUS 1

But they can't control us. They're shit scared. 'Cause we have the whole story. And they know, eventually, the truth's gonna get free. When we were young, we could. Throw out a line – let it zing through the air – and you'd fight out the biggest tuna, its scales shining in the sun like it was made of truth. Catfish the size of dogs used to swim through our waters tickling us with their whiskers. Dolphins. When we were children, we swam in Barrataria Bay with the pods – holding their dorsals as they sliced through the water...they were joy embodied...

CHORUS 2

There were pools – where thousands of shrimp, in their own crazy dance used to breed, on the bottom of the bayous – rising to the top as they grew. And you shoulda seen them in the noonday sun – they were silver on fire.

CHORUS 1

Mosquitoes the size of your face – we made them, to keep THE COMPANY away!
They are examining the audience, searchingly.

CHORUS 2

We were children when the people who would become the Cajuns came down the snaggle-toothed mouth of the Mississippi to hide from THE COMPANY here in this land...

CHORUS 3

It wasn't the first time people came here hiding from THE COMPANY. But back
Then...nobody from THE COMPANY would follow.

CHORUS 1

The first people...helped them survive...what was then...our wild land. Not everybody chose to come here. Some arrived in chains. And spent the centuries since they set foot on this soil fighting to be free. Over time. We saw the people get a lotta the kinks out. This place came to be, on the whole...something beautiful. Not perfect...we're not saying that. But when the people lived from the land...the land gave them life. Because they found something they wanted! And we warned the people about THE COMPANY... Baby, we shouted until our lips bled. And our lungs had no more give. But no one listened. So when...the Disaster came. And the oil flowed –

CHORUS 2

And kept on flowing. The CHORUS read the tarot cards, drink and tell the future. After the Disaster, the ones who lived on the Gulf. They knew from the start – what THE COMPANY had done. But THE COMPANY – they told the people there was nothing to worry about.

CHORUS 3

And they bought out scientists. And academics.

And Congressmen. CHORUS 1

And teachers. CHORUS 2

They told the people everything was fine. CHORUS 1

And admirals. CHORUS 2

And politicians. CHORUS 1

And they told the people everything was fine. CHORUS 2

And lawmakers. CHORUS 1

‘Come on in, the water’s fine.’ CHORUS 2

150,000 barrels of oil– CHORUS 1

Gushed out a day. Every day for eight months. CHORUS 2

But they tell the people– CHORUS 1

That everything IS fine. CHORUS 2

What you’ve got to understand– CHORUS 1

Is that THE COMPANY? They either buy you CHORUS 2

OR they kill you– CHORUS 3

CHORUS 2

For eight months, they sprayed the oil down, they sank it all under the water. Then, they sprayed the land and the people.

CHORUS 3

And now? They still spray –

CHORUS 2

After midnight, when they think –

CHORUS 1

The people won't notice?

CHORUS 2

The spray – it eats you alive. You could hear the people –

CHORUS 1

And the pelicans –

CHORUS 2

And the manatees screaming –

CHORUS 1

When they spray –

CHORUS 2

If their throats hadn't been eaten through –

CHORUS 3

THE COMPANY. They own the spray.

CHORUS 2

They tell the people...they have everything under control. And they do –

CHORUS 3

They knew exactly what they were doing.

CHORUS 2

They KNOW exactly what they ARE doing.

CHORUS 3

Infanticide.

CHORUS 2

Fratricide.

CHORUS 1

Patricide.

Genocide. CHORUS 2

The Gulf is a graveyard. CHORUS 1

‘Come on in, the water’s fine’. CHORUS 2

THE COMPANY has the people by the balls. CHORUS 1

If you get in bed with the devil, you can count on getting fucked. CHORUS 2

With their shoulders to the ground, coughing black. The people are walking petroleum, their blood is so thick with it. CHORUS 1

It’s in the water. And the crabs. CHORUS 2

And the air. CHORUS 1

It’s in the babies who cough all night from pneumonia. CHORUS 2

It’s in the mothers who miscarry. CHORUS 3

It’s in the fathers whose ears bleed. CHORUS 2

It’s in the grandmothers with vertigo. CHORUS 3

It’s in the fishermen whose skin bleeds. CHORUS 2

It’s in the B&B keeper’s bleeding bowels. CHORUS 1

The Gulf is a graveyard... CHORUS 2

But everything’s okayright? CHORUS 1

CHORUS 2

Tommy – baby, we’re gonna need another bottle!

(They drink more. TOMMY enters with more whisky).

CHORUS 2

Snappers with skin rot.

CHORUS 1

Beached whales.

CHORUS 2

Cypress shrivelled

CHORUS 1

Starved sharks.

CHORUS 2

Floating dolphins.

CHORUS 1

Sea grasses sink

CHORUS 2

Crabs choked.

CHORUS 1

The Gulf is a graveyard...

CHORUS 2

‘Come on in, the water’s fine.’

CHORUS 1

Please welcome back Delphine, Antoinette and Betty Sue –

They cross on as they begin creating the background melody with the tambourines, etc. As the song begins, CHORUS 1 and CHORUS 2 begin an ecstatic dance.

CHORUS 2

Wade in the water. Wade in the water now, children. Wade in the water. God’s gonna trouble the water. Well, who are these children all dressed in red? God’s a-gonna trouble the water Must be the children that Moses led God’s a-gonna trouble the water. Who’s that young girl dressed in white Wade in the Water Must be the Children of Israelites God’s gonna trouble the Water. Jordan’s water is chilly and cold. God’s gonna trouble the water. It chills the body, but not the soul. God’s gonna trouble the water. If you get there before I do. God’s gonna trouble the water. Tell all of my friends I’m coming too. God’s gonna trouble the water.

SCENE 2

CURTIS

I'm not sure...I understand what you want from my testimony. (Beat.) I guess...I've been involved in this problem from the start because. Well I was there for the explosion. So...yes, I mean...It's affected me. (Beat.) I've got brown spots all up and down my arms and legs. I went to New York for my cousin's funeral. She was only – half Cajun. And...for that whole week. I – I could breathe fine again...and the marks cleared.

ROCHELLE

I...I started taking samples pretty early on. It was...I just watched the water turn black. So – I asked around and I started working with some researchers at my school who were willing.

KELLY

My husband and I, we were pulling in maybe 30 or 40 thousand pounds of red snapper a year. And about the same amount of crab and oysters. We had...you know we had to rebuild everything after Katrina...so we'd finally got it all back – in those 5 years, and then bam – you know. For a while...we kept fishing because...we didn't know what else to do. We were pulling a lotta fish up – withskin rot. And...all sorts of problems because of the oil. So finally, I went to THE COMPANY, and I told them I would not take no for an answer.

ANTOINETTE

I've got sores – all up and down my legs. And my arms and...I used to be – I was an actress...on that soap, Days of Your Life, – it wasn't ever gonna win me an Oscar or anything. But it was all I knew how to do...now, I mean. At first, they could cover up all the – it wasn't such a big deal...but then, when they started to spread. So they let me go. They fired all of the local cast. They film in California now.

SCENE 3

CHORUS 2

Do you have a history of mental illness in your family?

CURTIS

No –

CHORUS 2

You have said before that your mother was often prone to insomnia –

CURTIS

No. I said she did shift work at night. We were poor. She did. What she could. I don't think that counts as –

CHORUS

Lack of sleep can be a major trigger for all sorts of other/ psychological disturbances.

CURTIS

Disturbances?/

CHORUS 2

It can be caused by/...the abuse of legal and illegal substances. When you were on the rig, did you ever drink to fall asleep?

CURTIS

No. I mean, everybody has a beer now and again, but –

CHORUS 2

Were you intoxicated the evening of the Disaster?

CURTIS

No –

CHORUS 2

Your co-workers have described your behaviour before the incident – as erratic, confused. They suggested you might have been using cocaine.

CURTIS

No – who said that? Was it THE COMPANY guys? I always took my job seriously. I was a hard worker. I'd never slack on the job – ever. They're only saying that to –

CHORUS 2

We will need you to submit a urine sample.

CURTIS

A urine sample. NOW? Why? I already did one of them when they took me off the rig and that was clean? Why should I have to do another one now? –

CHORUS 2

You are experiencing psychological problems and we need to make sure that they are indeed resultant from what you experienced with THE COMPANY – or if you are having problems which are unrelated to your former position as fireman. Afterall, you signed a waiver saying you were –

CURTIS

You are trying to paint me as a fucking NUTJOB who...fell asleep during his shift...and through his own negligence became party to THE DISASTER – I didn't fall asleep on duty – I reported that there were... inconsistencies – and THE COMPANY. THOSE assholes who pay your wage...they know very well that at least twenty people before me – blew that little fucker of a whistle...and what did they do? umm...absolutely nothing. That's why we have this problem. SO NO – I will not take your piss test. And I will not be subjected to any more of this ridiculousness –

CHORUS 1

Is everything alright in here Dr. Melkin?

CURTIS

NO everything is not –

CHORUS 2

All moving according to plan, thank you Dr Niccols

CURTIS

According to what plan – hanh?

CHORUS 2

Here is your prescription for diazapanoline ephinephrinolcholoride. You should take it in the morning with a glass of water, but on an empty stomach. And don't eat anything before you take the pill. Best to chew with your mouth closed.

THE CHORUS CARRY/DRAH HIM
OFFSTAGE.

SCENE 4

ANTOINETTE

Is it rolling? (Beat.) I wake up sometimes and I just – want to run the hell away! But there is nowhere left on this damned planet that ain't been conquered! There isn't no patch of earth nowhere that some twat with a flag ain't put his name to. even the Tristan de Cunha islands. You know, they got more penguins than people – and it's sixty degrees year round...My Dad he had a contract on the islands when he first started out...a tanker spilled and so they sent him to investigate the accident..there were all these dead oiled penguins, lying on their sides with their eyes wide. And their babies, they were still sitting next to their mothers...just crying out for them. That's a lot like some of the stuff I've seen around here. I've been helping my cousin collect samples. And they, THE COMPANY around and they cut the heads off all the dead wildlife because they can't be held liable for anything that doesn't have a complete spinal cord. But we still test them. There was this mother and baby dolphin. They were so bloated and purple, they were oozing crude outta their skin – it had literally busted their skin because it's so heavy – and they looked like monsters, all knotted and gnarled. We took 'em back to the labs and we done the tests...anyone can do them, they're so easy. You just gotta do a tissue sample. And – the shit they had in their bodies, it coulda killed 'em ten times over. We cried for hours after that...

SCENE 5

Dulac, Louisiana. ROCHELLE coughs, deeply. She is folding clothes and tidying. She has a stack of books lined next to her. She waits for CURTIS. She is preparing to break the news that she is pregnant. She takes out her pregnancy test and then puts it back in her pocket. She coughs again. This time it is so painful she has to stop folding. She rests for a moment, and finishing her washing, reads. CURTIS – who is overwhelmed and can't process life – begins drinking as he enters.

CURTIS

I can't stand this goddamned neighbourhood anymore. You can't drive down the street without seeing fifty 'For Sale' signs. The Parkers, the Furchons, the Christies...they've all got their houses on the market. And Andy is trying to sell his Hog...and you know how he loves that damned machine. You remember what this place was like when we were in high school? It felt like...a person could could...accomplish something. Now, it doesn't feel like...anything's ever gonna be okay...

CURTIS

And I talked to Jimmy Boudreaux and he only got \$10 grand compensation from THE COMPANY – total! (Beat.) They were saying they were gonna give us a whole year's wage, well that was a lotta bullshit. 'We're Gonna Make You Whole.' Where do they even come up with this shit?

CURTIS

I'm gonna have to sell the truck.

ROCHELLE

If you've gotta sell it – then do it. We'll find a way.

CURTIS

I bet you will...just have to bat your eyes a little, hanh?

ROCHELLE

I made some dirty rice...if you're hungry.

ROCHELLE

You been home two months baby. You gotta start thinkin' like you...

CURTIS

Like I'm one of you?–

CURTIS

Well I ain't.

ROCHELLE

You ain't never gonna get –

CURTIS

I'm never gonna get what –

ROCHELLE

You've got to start thinking that life is here now... you have to look for a job at an inland department –

CURTIS

Don't tell me what to do –

ROCHELLE

Enough Curtis –

CURTIS

You can't just snap your fingers...She is upset and wants to get away from him. She is trying to get him to get up off of her books.

ROCHELLE

Will you get off of my books please?!

CURTIS

No I will not get off your books.

ROCHELLE

I got the exams tomorrow, so will you let me have my books?!!

CURTIS

Oh – you got a test tomorrow?

ROCHELLE

I've only got this one –

CURTIS

Is there something you might want to tell me, Rochelle? A man takes a dangerous job – working on the rig because he can earn twice as much. And it pains him to have to be off-shore to do two weeks on, two weeks off because he misses his wife. Well...his wife...she's living a good life. She wants to have her cake and eat it too. She says to herself she's gonna find another man, one who's maybe a little more suave. Maybe not so rough in the hands. (Beat.) Who is Jacob?

ROCHELLE

Jacob is my professor –

CURTIS

You must be getting real good grades hanh? Cause it looks he called you twice today...

ROCHELLE

He called to –

CURTIS

Now what/ sort of man –

ROCHELLE

/tell me –

CURTIS

I am willing/ to put up with a lot of things but –

ROCHELLE

Jacob called to tell me that I've been offered – depending on my results...Kettering and Kettering – want me.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 6

KELLY

I don't really know what you need for the testimony. Do you – do you plan to make the records public? Okay. Well. Ha...They say: 'We're gonna make you whole.' That is straight-up bullshit. (Beat.) What have they offered? (Beat.) Well...about thirty. (Beat.) We made a hundred grand last year. We paid off the house. (Beat.) Of course we can't crab anymore. (Beat.) NO – If I won't eat the crabs or the oysters, how am I gonna feel good about myself if I'm selling them to other people, knowing what's in 'em. The crabs we pick up, they're black on the inside. You crack the shells...and you can smell the oil. I wouldn't want my nieces and nephews eating it.(Beat.) Hard to believe people think all that oil just disappeared. (Beat.) Shrimp – they're like the cockroaches of the sea. They're delicious, but they are – bottom feeders. (Beat.) And they just sponge in all those oils, and toxins – all the crap from the dispersants (Beat.) You get the shrimp, out of the water, you can see them lined, all the insides, they look like they smoked thirty years. What people don't know is that the THE COMPANY are running a secret giant, free abortion clinic. Right now, I'd actually like to have those freaks – you know the ones that campaign at the offices – that throw paint at the doctors – I'd like to have them on my side. (Beat.) I...was three months. When I...lost the baby. I was...still...I was nervous about...being a mother. I wasn't sure I'd know what to do. I'm almost glad it's dead. Because what kind of a world is this. I've had friends... who also... And my sister. Her – she just had a little girl Shelly. And she has birth defects. They don't know if... (Beat.) She's so small, you can only touch her with one finger through the incubator...She's – I almost don't know what's worse. You get more attached when they're...they're older and they...It's not a question a mother ever wants to rationalise...I recently tried to get the attention of THE COMPANY. And...all anyone can ask me is, 'did I feel like I was supported.' 'Do I think it made a difference?' Well, what do you think? I wouldn't have had to... walk 1200 miles to get them to listen if they were open to suggestion. (Beat.) I don't think...this is one person's fault. This...is a whole system broke down. (Beat.) I get in my boat, down Barataria Bay, and I don't hear – egrets calling. I don't see the tails of fish twitching on the horizon. I don't...there isn't much of anything. except the stink of oil, and – the burn, of your eyes going dull because Corexit is eating your flesh. Most people...they don't understand...

SCENE 7

ROCHELLE lays centre stage. She coughs deeply, bringing up blood. She lies on the ground very still, and then throws up into a bucket. ANTOINETTE crosses to ROCHELLE.

ANTOINETTE

Jesus baby! (Beat.) I'm sorry I took so long – I only just got your message.

ROCHELLE coughs deeply again.

ANTOINETTE

Blows my mind why on earth you didn't tell me sooner...

ROCHELLE

I'm sorry – I –

ANTOINETTE

Did you tell your Mom? I refuse to lie to her if she calls me. (Beat.) That woman has a built-in bullshit detector. (Beat.) I don't know if you've noticed, but lately she is straight up scary...(Beat.) My mother heard the message you left...on the house phone. Who calls a house phone these days, hanh? So...anyway, you can just about guess the whole family's gonna know in a minute. Maybe – it'd be better if they hear it from you...

ROCHELLE

No –

ANTOINETTE

What do you mean no? This is the only good news they've had all year –

ROCHELLE

It's not...everything is all wrong. (Beat.) Just don't tell anybody, alright? She begins coughing deeply again.

ANTOINETTE

Come on. Come here...it's gonna be okay Chelle. It's gonna be fine. Don't worry now. I'm not going anywhere – okay. Just...breathe deep.

SCENE 8

NANCY hangs up the Cherri Foytlin and Tin Man paintings. She goes through her film footage. Her phone rings three times. She ignores it. NANCY's film footage begins silently in the background. She edits the interview.

NANCY

(The phone rings – but she answers it this time.) Hello – who is this? Who – She hangs up the phone. Why am I doing this? Why – am I doing this. Because somebody has to. Because if you stick your head in the sand, they win. They win. They say Nobodaddy...they say he's – I voted for him – I gave him my...They say he's a puppet of THE COMPANY. Maybe he is. Maybe – nothing will ever be as it seems, again. My Mother was a swan...she's – now she has the lung problem that everyone does. Her – ears, bleed when she sleeps. She can't dance because...she has constant vertigo. She was a principal in the New York City Ballet. She broke her ankle in a car accident. And she came home... back to Falls River, MA. Where she met my Father... They retired early and got a place on the Gulf – right on the water. She used to collect seashells – the smallest most perfect cochinas you could imagine...she's made me these necklaces from the shells. They can't. They put their savings, all they had into that move. And now – they... Dad's lost about twenty pounds. He had his ethol benzene levels checked. (Beat.) The THE COMPANY are refusing anyone help who lives with the Gulf. They don't want us... they don't want anyone to...I'm trying to raise the money to bring them here. I – I don't know if you have ever experienced. The people you care for most in the world – I would gladly. Give my own life for them, to make them safe. (Beat.) Nobodaddy – they...I've promised to sign their papers. I just want my parents safe –

NANCY

Some people say that only a...very talented artist can do portraiture. That only someone who has been trained... in the French style is capable of doing faces...in such detail. But...I've never ascribed to that idea. I worked with the people down here, from Grande Isle and Port Fourchon and Lafayette, and – and they made these portraits – their illustrations of what they've lost. (Beat.) I couldn't...sit back and watch. I'm not from the Gulf (She grows quiet and nervous and turns within), but I grew up on the Atlantic, so I know...If you're born on the water – she takes you over, you become her. You'll never be happy, if you're far from her. (Beat.) She whittles you down. You can't hide anything from the ocean. She'll batter you into her till she makes you her own. She'll round you out like a small stone, till you're swallowed whole...till there's just the shred of truth. (Beat.) Subjective as it is...I still think...in this case. There is one truth. And...I have watched and continue to watch them cover it up. There's nothing on the networks. They have eliminated all signs of. I got this...I got permission from THE COMPANY because they thought the paintings were going to support THE COMPANY's message: 'Come on in...' When there are no words...when nothing can be said and no one will hear – at least...there will be this. I'm bringing the paintings to THE COMPANY. I am going to show them – how not okay this is. If they – if they laugh at me. I will show them the pictures of the children. I will bring them the videos of the old women whose faces have been eaten by the spray.

They spray at night...when they are sleeping. They are hoping they will die in their sleep. The phone rings again. NANCY ignores it. I make documentaries...because I – we have to find a way...To make the world understand. Surely, somebody cares – if people knew, they would care, right? They would do something?

NANCY goes over her video footage. We hear only the sound from the interviews. The lights go low and then...and then the sound of heavy footsteps coming up the stairs.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 9

ANTOINETTE

Yeah, they've threatened to burn my house down – to do...all sorts of things. Last week, one guy came up to me in WalMart in the hosiery section with a stocking on his head (while I was buying pantyhose – you gotta appreciate the continuity, right?! So he says to me that if 'I valued my life, I'd better shut up'. And then he just disappeared down the \$0.99 cent aisle. Ha...I've heard all sorts of crazy crap...I used to be real afraid. But not anymore. I used to stay up all night in my living room holding my baseball bat – preparing for whoever might come in my door...I'd have this nightmare that – some big thug dressed in black would get outta one of them Company cars you see everywhere these days...and that he would come through my front door and shoot me in the head. I didn't sleep for weeks...but now, I'm not scared – of anything anymore. I feel like – there's nothing they can do to stop this movement. Maybe – they can shut one or two of us up...but they can't – they can't silence the TRuTH – (Beat.) There's a comfort in that. How close do you want to see the sores. (Beat.) I guess you could say I've got a long-standing vendetta against THE COMPANY. I mean, they've pretty much ruined my life. (Beat.) The day the plant blew up...I was on my way to Texas City for easter to see my parents. They were contractors. So they were there – on loan to... THE COMPANY. I...Got in my car. Took the 45. Smelt the salt, the air getting thick and hot. 'One More Time' playing on the radio – Daddy loved Lynard Skynard. (Beat.) Got my aunt in the car with me singin' along. Asphalt looked like it was melting, heat coming off the highway. Like a mirage. (Beat.) Swear I saw him there for a minute then – rising off the ground, his skin – the same colour as the clay either side...When I heard Daddy was dead. I knew that was him saying goodbye. There wasn't nothing left of Daddy. Momma was a wreck, so I had to...go and identify him and all they had was a couple of teeth – that's how they knew it was him, from his DNA. They erased every trace of my Daddy's life, except for what still lives in the people who loved him. (Beat.) We had a wake, and the room was so full, there were people just standing outside. (Beat.) But all I could think, when I was saying his eulogy– was that – the explosion that killed him at the plant – it was 5,000 degrees. It melted him. There were more than 800 safety violations at the plant – that contributed to its explosion. (Beat.) I got a real good lawyer, in Texas City, Brandon Connors, and he helped me fight THE COMPANY – I stood in front of the leaders of THE COMPANY in a public hearing – and the result, was that THE COMPANY was forced, legally, to increase their health and safety standards. So now, I can see – that even after losing Daddy. After all we did...nothing has changed. And this time, so many more lives will be lost.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 10

ROCHELLE has come home after a long day taking samples. She should be dressed in camouflage. She calls ANTOINETTE. She calls several times.

ROCHELLE

Antoinette – hello. If you're there. You really need to pick up baby.

CURTIS

My wife, the duck hunter! What'd you catch?

ROCHELLE

Did you hear that Darlene down at the bank, her sister died of septicaemia?

CURTIS

Jesus – are you serious?

ROCHELLE

Yeah, she and the baby...they found the levels of toxins in her were – she had like 5% petroleum in her blood. (Beat.) This makes 32 women I've counted so far... in Lafayette who have died because of it –

CURTIS

I'm sorry cher. (Beat.) Look – try not to take this the wrong way, but I...I'm wondering if it's doing you any good working on this –

ROCHELLE

It's what Kettering has hired me to – and apart from that, I straight-up refuse to just sit back –

CURTIS

You cannot keep running on empty Chelle...Got that letter we've been waiting for. (Beat.) When they lift the moratorium...I'm gonna have to go back. But I'll...they think they have an inland job for me...I'd be...well, it would be probably in Lafayette. Did you hear me...baby? (Beat.) This is good news, right? I...thought you'd be pleased.

ROCHELLE

I am...I'm happy for you Curtis.

CURTIS

Is that it?...You're...what is going on? (Beat.) I thought we were maybe...you know –

ROCHELLE

I'm not...made of bricks you know. You can't just...treat me...like I'm –

CURTIS

You're...scared of me –?

ROCHELLE

You ain't seen yourself when you come home all coked-up, out your head, saying – doing...

CURTIS

Jesus...I don't know how much more I can say than...I –

CURTIS

I'm doing my best Rochelle. Please tell me that counts...for something –

ROCHELLE

Curtis, this isn't about –

CURTIS

Please. Come on baby. You just gotta – come here. See. This is me. This is the man who loves you – who...I do anything – to keep you happy and safe. We're gonna...I ain't nowhere's near perfect. Lord knows my faults got faults...but you gotta believe we're gonna get through this together – (Beat.) What's wrong. What's going on with you? Come on, it's me. Tell me...

ROCHELLE

I...can't get through to Antoinette.

CURTIS

Yeah...and...

ROCHELLE

She's not answering her phone...I went by her place and the doors were all...unlocked. And, earlier I saw those – you know the cars she said she thought was – -well, I saw a couple of 'em driving down LaFontaine and I...

CURTIS

You cain't let your imagination run wild on you Rochelle.

ROCHELLE

It's just weird her not –

CURTIS

She probably just decided to evacuate outta the floodpath.

ROCHELLE

You're talking about the woman who waited out Katrina on her roof – ?

CURTIS

The most simple answer's usually the right one.

ROCHELLE

Momma hasn't heard from her and neither has Aunt Claire –

CURTIS

Give her a few days. You know she don't...she got her own way of getting on with things.

ROCHELLE

Yeah, you're...you're probably right. (Beat.) I just have such a...I got this sorta sick feeling in my...

CURTIS

So your parents evacuating?

ROCHELLE

Yeah. Daddy's got the whole car...ready to go.

CURTIS

Probably a good idea.

ROCHELLE

Do you think we should?

CURTIS

Well, if we're definitely gonna get some flooding here. Then, course, but, if they just saying that we maybe get some run-off, then...well, I dunno that if it's worth going anywhere. We're pretty high up –

ROCHELLE

Yeah, but we don't wanna be trapped in here... without a way down. I mean, what if... Well, you know...with the electricity and all...

CURTIS

It's perfectly safe Chelle...

ROCHELLE

I don't know...when the water comes up – it's gonna raise all the spray up. I don't wanna be around if that's coming here –

CURTIS

It's not gonna come here –

ROCHELLE

And how do you know?

CURTIS

And where do you wanna go?

ROCHELLE

I dunno – Momma and Daddy are going to Texas.

CURTIS

Well...we ain't got the money.

ROCHELLE

We should go with my parents –

CURTIS

I refuse – I don't want to have to –

ROCHELLE

You refuse? Get off your freaking high horse Curtis –

CURTIS

I refuse to be indebted to your parents AGAIN –

ROCHELLE

Well, you couldn't ask your parents could you? –

CURTIS

You can't just run to them everytime we have a problem.

ROCHELLE

They're my parents, they WANT to help –

CURTIS

I'M YOUR HUSBAND –

ROCHELLE

This is bigger than–

CURTIS

Can you once, in our damned marriage discuss things with me – SOLVE problems with me, instead of being a little spoiled–

ROCHELLE

Fuck you!

SCENE 11

On his porch alone, CURTIS plays. He chews tobacco, sunflower seeds and drinks whisky, does lines of coke and plays and cries...in no particular order. He plays guitar and becomes increasingly wasted. He weeps. He passes out.

SCENE 12

CURTIS

You're back.

CURTIS

I'm sorry.

CURTIS

Am I getting the silent treatment now—

CURTIS

I gotta go soon—

CURTIS

I'm sorry baby. You're...right. We'll do whatever you think is right, okay?

CURTIS

Alright?

ROCHELLE

Yeah...yeah.

CURTIS

I can't find all the documents. You file out that paperwork? (A pause). She is annoyed to have to jump into this conversation.

ROCHELLE

No, you're gonna have to look at it 'cause— they need like five years worth of documentation. I don't think we got it baby—

CURTIS

Well, that's great.

ROCHELLE

They're asking something about money we could have potentially earned— and we have to take that out of our claim?

CURTIS

What? Baby, can't you just figure it out? I got a whole pile of/

ROCHELLE

Well, I can't you only gave me about half of what I need to—

CURTIS

Well, I gave you all I got...

ROCHELLE

If you could just go through–

CURTIS

I gave you / what I got–

ROCHELLE

/ Tax returns...your severance package. How much you pay out for your dependents. And then, you have to factor in the sale of the motorcycle, how much you're losing on the other property with it not being let. It's like 100 pages –

CURTIS

Jesus –

ROCHELLE

You also...you gotta subtract what you got paid to do the clean-up.

CURTIS

I have to subtract what I got paid to clean-up THEIR mess from my compensation claim?

ROCHELLE

I called the help–

CURTIS

Are you telling me – that they are gonna take out the money they owe me because I worked to clean-up THEIR disaster? (A beat).

CURTIS

You have gotta be f– this is a fucking joke. (Beat.) SO I am literally – in the real use of the word – working off my own compensation money...and doing their dirty work at the same time? (A beat).

CURTIS

Well look at me. (A beat).

CURTIS

Your husband is the biggest mug that anybody ever saw. Not bad enough they try to goddamned blow me up? Not good enough is it...unbelievable.

ROCHELLE

Well, can you please call them up and say that – can you tell them...because I can't..

CURTIS

I don't have time / To call them? Because I have to go back out on that damned boat again. (His nose starts bleeding. He blots it.) And clean-up their toxic shit. SO can you...can you please – take a little f...reaking responsibility, please Chelle? And just do this for us?

ROCHELLE

This is not my fault –

CURTIS

Well what am I supposed to do?

ROCHELLE

Stop cleaning up...for God's sake. / We don't need the money so badly that you should –

CURTIS

Yes, we do baby – we Need the money that bad. We need it really effing bad baby. (Beat.)

ROCHELLE

Is anything worth putting yourself in such a –

CURTIS

They are gonna find a way to take whatever / they can from me anyway –

ROCHELLE

Please – just stay / five minutes so we can –

CURTIS

I got...50 bags of oiled boom...which I can tell you is actually made from 1000 pairs of old tube socks in my truck – waiting to get taken down to the landfill. / So unless you want to let that melt into our driveway –

ROCHELLE

Curtis –

She drops to her knees. A pool of blood begins gathering beneath her...

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 13

CHORUS 2

Didn't think we'd forgotten about you, did ya – ?

CHORUS 2

We are – delighted to come back on and do another song for ya'll...

CHORUS 1

You know my sister Betty Sue –

CHORUS 2

You know my sister Delphine –

CHORUS 1

Well, they got something real special prepared for you tonight. Trained in the bayou school – in the primordial style...

CHORUS 3

(Sung). There's no riches, and there's no glory. No happy ending to my story. A tale of sadness and a tale of woe. I lost my true love in the Gulf of Mexico.///
I'm a small town girl. From Isle Jean Charles. Married my sweetheart Pierre. Jus' pre de Bayou Teche./// They called at midnight. To tell me that/ my one true love is never coming back./// There's no riches, and there's no glory. No happy ending to my story. A tale of sadness and a tale of woe. I lost my true love to the Gulf of Mexico. At night I dream he calls my name. A burning pyre, engulfed in flames. There's no riches, and there's no glory. No happy ending to my story. A tale of sadness and a tale of woe. I lost my true love to the Gulf of Mexico.

CHORUS 2

Ya'll be sure to stay for the shrimp broil after. CHORUS 1 Be a dinner to remember – They all find this hysterical. They begin to cross off. CHORUS 1 and CHORUS 2 dance and warm-up, getting ready to go on. They pass their bottle of bourbon between them and take a great long swig.

CHORUS 1

Ya'll don't go nowhere. We're just gonna freshen up...

BLACKOUT.

ACT II SCENE 1

Standing ahead of the audience is NANCY. She edits footage showing areas of the Gulf of Mexico destroyed by the oil and Corexit. The footage is visible to the audience.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2

CHORUS 2 and CHORUS 3 sit next to two telephones. They make the sounds of the phone ringing and then answer – -Their voices answering the phones should create a kind of CHORUS. They should speak over each other constantly. CURTIS and ROCHELLE enter but are ignored.

CHORUS 2

Office of THE COMPANY. This is Candy. / How may I direct your call?

CHORUS 3

Good afternoon, Nobodaddy's office. This is Wilma. How may I assist you?

CHORUS 2

Yes, / hold please.

CHORUS 3

Hold please.

CHORUS 3

I'm afraid/

CHORUS 2

Nobodaddy is out –

CHORUS 3

You can leave a message if you'd like.

CHORUS 2

Hold please.

CHORUS 3

Nobodaddy is out.

CURTIS

(Crossing Forward.) Now look here –

CHORUS 2

(Speaking into the phone and to CURTIS at the same time.) Nobodaddy is out to lunch.

CHORUS 2

If you would like to leave a message I'll be sure –

CHORUS 3

He's a very busy –

ROCHELLE

I want to speak to your manager NOW –

CHORUS 2

For what –

CHORUS 3

Is it a situation of dire consequence –

CHORUS 2

A situation of urgent concern –

CHORUS 3

An inconsequential application –

CHORUS 2

Or a minor and insignificant application –

ROCHELLE

Well, let me tell you for what. My husband worked your Vessel of Opportunity programme and –

CHORUS 2

I think you'll find that everything is on the website –

CURTIS

If our questions had been –

CHORUS 2

Y'all have taken the liberty –

CHORUS 3

Well, then you'll need packets A-F.

ROCHELLE

Of making sure to bend us over –

CHORUS 2

Did you fail the first round of –

ROCHELLE

Now, I have been to this office five times. And I have made more than 50 phone calls...and I have had absolutely no joy. ALRIGHT? My time – is worthwhile. I have other things to do...like put my freaking life together. Alright. So I WILL see Nobodaddy or whatever the hell his name is today – ALRIGHT?

CHORUS 3

I would suggest taking the appendix as well in that case. HERE--

CHORUS 3

If you can't find the solutions in this book –

CHORUS 2

(They are chuckling over this now.) Then they don't exist.

ROCHELLE

And I for one would like an answer NOW – you'd better get Ken Feinberg out here or I am gonna go straight-up ape shit –

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 3

KELLY

Feinberg – shit – I – can you delete me saying that? (Beat.) THE COMPANY is making us look like we're putting out an open hand, waiting for it to fill up like a lucky slot machine. (Beat.) Well, that's not the story at'tall. (Beat.) We were feeding the world – (Beat.) It's not like we're saying to ourselves – 'Hot damn. We don't have to work for three years. We can live off THE COMPANY (yeah right.) – and get a fat compensation pay-off. 'Well, THE COMPANY and – Nobodaddy – they ain't done a thing! They're just sitting around, letting us die at high noon. I would rather work any day, I'd rather work. I'd be fucking delighted if the Gulf was clean, and I could go back down to ocean front – watch the sunrise on a Saturday like I used to. But I doubt I'll ever be able to...(Beat.) How do I know the oil's still there? It's right where it was before. I go out into the Mississippi and, come home? The propeller's covered in it. Smell's overwhelming – makes your eyes and throat burn. Notice all along here. This time 'a year, we usually get kids coming down for spring break.(Beat.) used to do it myself, before me and my husband moved back. And, between us – we stare at each other at night wonderin' how we're ever gonna be the same. My niece Tamara – she's four this year. My brother lets her play out on the water – running out by the shoreline. You can see the tar balls washing up – laying there in the sand. Somma them as big as my fists – and he just leaves her out there, filling those stupid plastic sandcastle buckets. She's got a cough. Keep taking her to the hospital. And doctors just send her home. She doesn't have a fever. So apart from cough medicine – there's nothing much they say to do. (Beat.) I see 'em spraying –Starts a low rumble, like a big cat growling at you, from far – and starts zippin' in. Movin' in on ya. (Beat.) Then, you can hear the motor overhead, cuttin' into the beach – then the sound water hittin' the roof – the colour – like a low orange haze. Like we're in Vietnam. And we can see all that drizzle falling. Hard not to feel they're out to get you, like they're tryin' to get rid of – When they're spraying so close to home. They don't want the oil on shore. Cause people won't come to the beaches – if they'reblack.

SCENE 4

In CURTIS and ROCHELLE's apartment. CURTIS sleeps.

VO CHORUS 1

You lost 11/shipmates.

VO CURTIS

I hear the engines revving, / the lights are...are glowing. I'm hearing the alarms at a constant rate.

VO CHORUS 2

You are not a witness and have no first-hand knowledge / of the DISASTER –

VO CHORUS 3

It blinded 'n wrapped round ma face. I's thrown head-down knocked me dead-unconscious. Moment before I blacked / ...All'a could think on was –

VO CHORUS 1

You're smashed, a chicken under a grinder. Charlie, he'd run from the comms room, / barely got out. His head's bleedin' like you'd think he didn't have any brain left, and he looks at me and jumps – I seen him break as he landed, like he was made of cardboard – Sounds of chaos, of a fiery inferno. The consuming oil, rising in his dreams.

VO ROCHELLE

Let me see – my husband. No I will not goddamned hold on! You got my husband locked in there twenty hours and you ain't gonna let me in to hold him. You gotta be freakin' – I mean, you gotta be kidding me –

CURTIS

Chelle! Chelle!

CURTIS

Ain't going back in...ain't gonna do it. Not now – not –

VO CHORUS 1

You can't leave me –

VO CHORUS 1

You was always gonna walk away.

VO CHORUS 2

Only the weakest kind of man that sees a shipmate fall and keeps running for his own life.

VO CHORUS 2

Is your life worth so much? Are you so much better than me?

VO CHORUS 3

Is living all that great Curtis?

CHORUS 2

I didn't have anybody. Maybe it's better I was the one – -to go...maybe it's better you left me behind... cause there's something about a full body burn tends to make people nervous.

CHORUS 2

I used to brush my baby Annabelle's hair one hundred times every night before she went to bed. With a brush my Momma gave me – that was her Momma's before. Annabelle died in her sleep, did you hear? – My baby's hair strangled clean round her neck – cause I wasn't there to take out the knots...

CURTIS

I didn't see you – I didn't see you –

CHORUS 2

Liar. I seen the rounds of your iris when the flames went up –

CURTIS

What was I supposed to do? Nothin' I coulda done.

CHORUS 3

In the end, all that talk of loyalty...no one person for themself – -it was all a lot of bullshit...

CURTIS

I'm sorry...I'm – I'm sorry –

CHORUS 3

When a man's got his mouth round the barrel –

CURTIS

If I'd have turned back...we both would have...

CHORUS 2

Took me fire hours...to die.

CURTIS

You were too far away – -all them...cans, lying round the deck. They was like...bombs, exploding. I didn't – it was like fucking Baghdad. You knew there wasn't no chance in hell I was gonna make it through. You knew I never would – that's why you didn't scream –

CHORUS 3

I couldn't. Skin on my lips / melted clear –

CURTIS

No – no, you knew. / You knew I'd never get through – you saw that beam coming from the derrick above, you knew plain's day that beam was gonna crack – -there wasn't no way I was gonna. If I didn't have–

CHORUS 2

The lies a man will whisper to himself to ease a guilty conscience –

CHORUS 3

Well, it don't matter you didn't come last time... you come get me now cher, come on back.

CURTIS

I'm not going back – I'm not going back!

CHORUS 2

Oh baby – -but you is! You goin' back rightnow!

CURTIS

You get the hell away from me – -you leave me the fuck alone –

CHORUS 2

Second you start proclaiming something's never gonna get you, it starts making Christmas with your neck.

CHORUS 3

You coming with me baby...on one hell a fiery fucking broncho ride. Ask me nicely, I let you be on top.

CURTIS

Rochelle!!!

ROCHELLE

What's the matter baby? –She kisses him and holds him as he sits, shell-shocked...Hallucinating between this world and the second – mythic dream world which plagues him.

ROCHELLE

Now listen up spirits – You think I don't know you're here...well, I do. I got you all over my palms...and I know what you is...I got you in my pockets. I got you under my feet. You ain't gonna get in here no more, you ain't gonna come in...messin' with me, cursing my love. ...Ain't no raggedy old bones set through me now – -ain't no meat-flapping jaws gonna eat their way inside...(Beat.) I didn't think so – -you looking to get somebody. Well, you picked the wrong woman to fuck with!

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 5

NANCY addresses her audience – a group of scientists, doctors, etc.

NANCY

Thank you for coming. I know that some of you have journeyed here...with possible great risk to yourselves. And – I want you to know that I appreciate your efforts. There are times when I believe we all feel we are screaming inside a vacuum. That our lungs could not be any more full with the bellows for this fight. But – I urge you, I – implore you to keep your spirits high. To continue to work...with me and with each other. I...offered my research to the THE COMPANY as many of you know. I have now had my response. It is as we thought. They are refusing to examine external water and sample tests. (Beat.) Some of you may have read my findings, but for those of you who I am only reaching now...Our clean-up workers. They've all come down with one sort of nasty cancer or another. I have collected the testimonies, the information. I have made the archives for the Disaster...I have seen whales, dolphins, people...They always look half-eaten, like acid has corroded. This stuff. It attacks your fatty membranes. That's what most people don't realise. So many people – are experiencing serious psychological and neuromotor problems. The dispersant, it gets in around your cells, and it eats them whole. And the brain – well, that's the fattiest organ in your body. So, I've...seen and am seeing people coming down with dementia-like, Alzheimer-like symptoms, MS symptoms. People ask me – if this is really happening, why are people not protesting the THE COMPANY together? ultimately. There is no united front. (Beat.) We don't all feel the same way about fossil fuels. We don't all care equally about the environment. It's not...clear cut. All we know is that everyone is suffering. And...all we want. I don't want to take anyone down...I just want someone to set up a health clinic. To give people basic compensation for – income they've lost because they can't fish...or run their B&B...or maintain a restaurant...or be an oil worker. All people want is what is fair. No one's asking for a hand-out. That's not what this is about. It's not a major political statement, it's just...a desire to get by...We have two wonderful physicians, Dr. Matt Rubineaux and Dr Wanda Sanders who have bravely offered to be here...to test all of us. If you would be willing – what they can gather from this will be invaluable for our research...and for the fight...

A QUICK CHANGE TO THE NEXT SCENE.

SCENE 6

The INTERVIEWER should be brusque and unfeeling, utterly unsympathetic. She should be interviewing CURTIS as if she were addressing financial regulation, not a traumatic event from his received memory. The scene should be hyper-real, the lights should occasionally flicker. CURTIS should seem ultra-uncomfortable.

CHORUS 1

Tonight, we are here on Faux News, live with Curtis LaFontaine, survivor of THE DISASTER. I want to talk to you today about what happened to you. You were on the firefighting team – correct?

CURTIS

Yes...yes, that is correct.

CHORUS 1

So what happened, what were the events of the... night?

CURTIS

Well...I woke up to an explosion. I turned and I sat at the edge of ma bed. I'm...And the force – clear threw me across my room – into the fire-rated doors. These are three-inch thick, steel-doors...and it clear knocked me out. When I came to, smoke was already eating into the room and...I was bleeding from...what I know now was my head. And it was...thick, like pudding – just coming down into my eyes. I finally managed to get out onto the deck of the rig. Where I got slammed again by flying debris – clear knocked me to the floor below. And at this point, there are petroluem cans, and greasers, and all sorts of things which we use...everyday to keep our systems ticking. And they were all exploding, like the most intense fire-crackers you could imagine. It was like...it was like...Baghdad on the deck... When I finally managed to make my way down to the derrick – to the fire station – it was consumed by fire, it was like... I knew there was no way we were gonna put that out. I knew we should abandon the rig...

CHORUS 1

How did you feel – when you saw the derrick on fire? Did you think you...might not survive?

CURTIS

Absolutely. I was still kinda in shock. The main thing going through my head was – we're all dead. There's no way we're gettin' off here. As we were getting our gear on...we saw the crane operator get knocked forty, fifty feet from the derrick, clean to the bottom deck. (Beat.) We dressed out as fast as – We started trying to make our way over to get him...and flames surrounded us in every direction...and there was no way we could get him. (A pause.) We...I...had to leave him.

CHORUS 1

As a trained emergency professional, someone who is trained to save people, how did you feel watching that man perish?

CURTIS

(He gulps. He clears his throat. He is nearly sweating he is so distressed by the question.) It was...the worst...thing I've ever had to do. It haunts me today...I can't stop asking myself...is there any other way I coulda gotten over there? (A pause).

CHORUS 1

You lost colleagues as well...in the fire?

CURTIS

Yeah...yeah. I mean...you know, it burns a hole inside you, losing one of your own...But, we know it's... part of what we're trained to expect...part of – what we know could happen. Losing someone we're meant to protect. Somehow it's worse. And it ain't like – they was just members of the public. Losing someone is never easy...it always feels like you've failed – But on a rig – you're a family. eighteen hours a day, every day...you ain't got your wife and kids around, you got – your...(He falters, for lack of a better word.)...people become–

CHORUS 1

How did people manage to evacuate?

CURTIS

Well...when it came down to the day. The actual fire. Nothing went like it was supposed to. There were... problems in the engine room. The blowout preventer... That's supposed to – well stop a blowout – and to isolate the rig – and that didn't work, obviously. And then, also, none of the fire-safety mechanisms worked either. So, basically, all the things which were meant to keep us safe, turned on us...It was just us men – fighting that fire, with... basic equipment.

CHORUS 1

Was there panic, in terms of getting on the lifeboats?

CURTIS

There was...in terms of...some people were – losing it. (Beat.) The first two lifeboats, they left before...a number of people could get on. So some people were jumpin' off the rig, into the water, which was also covered in oil, and on fire... And you got people, just scrambling to get on. everyone is just thinking the same thing – I got people at home...I got people that need me...Some of the ones left behind managed to get one of the life rafts inflated...and it...got stuck, at a forty-five degree angle to the side of the rig. And it was just...it was dangling, with people falling out. And others were jumping... Thank God they managed to get that down in the end, 'cause it looked – it looked like they wasn't gonna make it.

CHORUS 1

At any point, did you consider jumping?

CURTIS

We stayed behind...after we could get most of the men onto the other two usable life rafts. The rafts, they're on the deck. And we had to inflate them – and get in them, and then...get ourselves down the water. (Beat.) And then, we couldn't...get the motor that inflates it...and also propels it to start-up. So, yeah...yeah. I thought...about it. I was fixing to –

CHORUS 1

(Unfeelingly, with absolutely no emotion or compassion. This should be comically cold.) So you eventually made it to a supply ship and back to shore, where you were asked to sign this waiver saying you had no first hand knowledge of how the accident occurred and that you were not injured in the disaster. Why do you feel they asked you to sign this?

CURTIS

Me and my wife, we were gonna leave the hotel where they put us. And...They told me it was just a statement saying I was off-tower that I wasn't working... and me and my wife, we just wanted to get out...ta go be with ma family. And...they said...it was just...to say I didn't see it all before the fire. And they just said, sign here, initial here.

CHORUS 1

What are you contending in your law suit regarding this waiver?

CURTIS

I understand they have a right to look into my claim because I signed and all, but the fact that they kept me and the other crew members off shore for 20 hours. It was...it was...you give your life to this job. People I knew and...cared about died in this incident. My lawyer, he's a maritime specialist – and people get injured all the time – and they helicopter them in! We –

CHORUS 1

(Interrupting. Arrogant. Sarcastic even.) So are you saying...that it was premature for anyone to sign a waiver claiming non-injury, because, as you say, in your lawsuit that you suffer from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder?

CURTIS

I was up for 60 hours, and they are trying to use this waiver against my defence.

CHORUS 1

THE COMPANY say, that they were surprised to receive your claim, given that you signed the waiver.

CURTIS

It just shows you that they were irresponsible and that they wanted to keep us off-shore. They could have easily brought us--

CHORUS 1

(Interrupting.) What health problems do you claim you have suffered?

CURTIS

(Having difficulty expressing his stress.) I –

CHORUS 1

Okay, well Curtis. Thank you – now back to you in the studio.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 7

CURTIS on his porch, as before. This time. He is lighter – he has entered a different kind of psychic state. He is clearer. CURTIS plays a second song. ROCHELLE enters at the end of the scene, slowly. CURTIS does not hear her. As he finishes playing, she comes to him from behind and kisses him. She kneels next to him and they hold each other tightly. The sound of a ticking geiger counter.

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 8

NANCY is outside collecting samples of the oiled sand and water. ROCHELLE, hearing her, exits outside to see what she is doing. CURTIS speaks to her from inside.

ROCHELLE

What are you doing?

CURTIS

Dinner's ready baby – Jesus Christ! Do you know what time it is – Are you trying to – I'm going inside and I swear to God you'd both better not be far behind me.

ROCHELLE

Do you know how much –

NANCY

Shhh! Come, / help me.

ROCHELLE

I could hear you all the way / to the house!

NANCY

You could not. You were watching. The light was on.

ROCHELLE

They're going to find you.

NANCY

I don't care – if they find me or not.

ROCHELLE

You should care. You're gonna get yourself –

NANCY

Way I see it, I'm already in a fucklot of trouble, and I haven't done anything wrong. So I may as well earn it.

ROCHELLE

This is insane!

NANCY

You should just go – I'll tell them you didn't know a thing.

ROCHELLE

I know you've been out here digging and taking samples for hours.

NANCY

Wrong – I'm making sandcastles. They're better by night. (Pause.) You should go. You should stay away in fact. (A beat).

NANCY

They'll be coming soon. (A beat).

NANCY

I won't name you, don't worry –

ROCHELLE

They'll take you. NANCY: Of course they will.

ROCHELLE

You aren't afraid?

NANCY

Aren't we all afraid now.

ROCHELLE

Aren't we all afraid now.

NANCY

You should give me the research so they don't –

NANCY

They'll be here any moment. You need to leave.

A GUNSHOT. BLACKOUT.

SCENE 9

EMCEE

Please welcome back – The Oracles for their last song of the night –

CHORUS 3

Summertime And the living is easy. Fish are jumping And the cotton is high. Well, your Daddy's rich. And your Momma's good looking. So hush little baby. Don't you cry. One of these mornings You're gonna rise up singing. One of these mornings You're gonna spread your wings. And you're gonna fly. until that morning When Jesus comes rising. Just hush little baby. Don't you cry.

CHORUS 1

Never said it was a happy story...

CHORUS 2

Never even promised you'd like it...

CHORUS 3

But it's in your blood--

CHORUS 3

You're a story-teller now.

CHORUS 2

(Singing.) This little light of mine –

CHORUS 1

I'm gonna let it shine. eMCee: This little light of mine –

CHORUS 3

I'm gonna let it shine.

ALL

Let it shine – let it shine – let it shine. CHORUS 1 I'm gonna –

CHORUS 2

Let it –

EMCEE

Shine – shine – shine –

CHORUS 3

(Overlapping with CHORUS all.) This little light of mine! I'm gonna let it shine. Ohh, I'm gonna let it shine. Ohh, I'm gonna let it shine. Oohh, I'm gonna let it shine.

CURTAIN.

THE INTERROGATION

By

Yasmine Van Wilt

Production History

The Interrogation was produced in July 2013 as a staged reading in Sifnos, Greece with assistance from the European Union.

Characters

TERRY: A middle-aged American man of average height; he has a sturdy build but is neither overweight nor muscular. He has a kindly face; he is nicely but not flashily dressed.

JORDAN: A handsome young man in his mid-twenties. He is of average height; he is muscular. He has visible tattoos; he is in uniform. He is clearly, through his accent and comportment, the least powerful of the three men. Despite his physique, he does not give the impression of an imposing presence. A citizen of an unspecified formerly British colony, his accent and syntax is more British than not.

MURRAY: A handsome man in his early forties who is immaculately groomed. He is taller than average;

Notes

The use of the / indicates the overlap of lines.

The use of **bold** text suggests louder speech.

The use of *italic* text suggests the importance of the word itself as a cue.

SCENE 1. The INTERROGATION ROOM

The off-stage sound of water gushing. The lights rise. The set should give the audience no clues about the time or place. The room is hyper-sterile. It is a simple white box. The floor, ceilings and walls appear to have no seams, breaks, or fissures. A very mild white noise begins humming as the lights rise from half to full brightness. The sound of gushing water stops suddenly, as if a tap has been turned off. Then, there is a blackout. The lights rise. TERRY stands centre stage. His appearance, seemingly from nowhere, should surprise.

He's a middle-aged man with a kindly face. TERRY is more familiar than unfamiliar, uncanny. He is nicely but not flashily dressed. He pulls a checklist from his breast pocket. He checks items off of his list.

TERRY reviews his checklist again and then paces uncomfortably. He looks at his watch. He crosses to the stage right wall and presses with moderate force. An invisible cupboard pops open. He pulls two chairs and a table from this cupboard. He arranges them. He then disappears inside the cupboard, and after a bit of rooting around emerges with a single glass of water. The effect should be comical. TERRY drinks the glass of water, quickly. He looks at his watch. He sets the timer on it. He takes a long, deep breath.

The distant sound of bars clicking snaps TERRY to attention. The sound of a heavy door closing behind echoes loudly. TERRY hears it as if it is within his ears. The aggressiveness of this sound -- real or perceived (through TERRY's action) -- should surprise us.

A spotlight shines centre stage. TERRY steps forward into the light and speaks directly to the audience. The sound of footsteps. Of someone sitting.

Note:

Despite his benign familiarity, an air of the uncanny should pervade this space; we should feel as though we recognise the location, and yet it should also seem utterly alien.

TERRY

19:40. (Insert the time of the last audience member's entrance.) You're late. Make it the last time. And take off your rank stripes you keeno. At fucking ease. Sit for fuckksake. Thank you. Now. Have you done company induction? (He is supremely annoyed.) Of course you fucking haven't. You'll have to deal with that tomorrow morning because I don't have the fucking time. LOOK AWAKE, FOR FUCKSSAKE. NOW, WHY ARE YOU HERE?

(In monotone. At a pace.)

'On the basis of your performance in your initiation training and second phase training, your superiors have awarded you Special Commendation.'

(He picks a point just above the audience and stares directly at this point).

And that's why you're here. That's the only reason you're here. I sure as fuck didn't pick you. You weren't even in my top 20,000. It just so happens that the officers I picked hit a fucking suicide road bomber in transit. All of them were their best national candidates. 5 languages each. Top training... I'm not gonna tell you to feel lucky. This is the hardest...and worst job in this entire organisation.

(He steps forward. He waits to see if this has 'sunk in'.)

I don't have time for consequences so you are gonna have to do your best to get this the first time, or I will have to deal with you accordingly. Capiche?

(He paces.)

You should start taking notes now because I never say anything twice:

What we do? We hope no one else, in their life ever has to do. But we do it because we must. Because we are chosen, and it is our responsibility. And after we do our jobs, we pay. And I can tell you that the price, for us, is higher than it is for any of these cunts.

(A beat. He paces.)

Lesson one: Make your body a perfectly-tuned instrument. The trick? To get your body right, you gotta get your fucking brain sorted:

The human brain is a suitcase. It's got compartments.

Each and every single one of them stores shit. In order to be any use to me and this unit, you need to get inside those compartments and off-load the old. Cause after today, you're gonna need space for all the new shit. Whatever happens outside of these walls stays outside these walls. You are sure as fuck not coming in here complaining that your baby's got the runs or mumps. That you've got high cholesterol. Your mother is dying. And. Don't even think about dragging your ass in here hungover, snotty or coughing. You get it? There is no off duty. There is no down time. Day in. Day out. Yeah?

You're looking at me right now like you think you're some kinda hardass. But I can tell you, that at the end of your first, you're gonna be crying like a fucking baby. And then you'll have to pull yourself together and do it all fucking over again. And then you have to go home. And what do you think happens when you go home? When your kid is crying so loud in the middle of the night that it wakes you up? Do you think you're gonna be your same old self? I don't want any reports back that your daughter's got a black eye. That your wife had a 'fall'. What you do is no one's problem but yours. SO: you deal with it. At the end of the day? You smoke a pack. You go to the shooting range. You go for a run. You play music. You find a god and you pray to it. Whatever. But you don't go home with your shit from here. Because if I get a call from the brig, I will come after you wherever you are. And I will make you sorry.

Now. If we're clear, how about we get down to the dirty? What I do. What you will learn to do follows scientific method. OKAY? Every step has a procedure. And every procedure has a protocol. You start with the environment before it is occupied... What time is it? Don't tell me. Write it down, Jesus. And take down the air quality. You do it like this.

(He licks the air.)

Dry to arid. Take down the temperature. The obvious: our two this evening? They'll come in sweating. You'll have to take that into account. They'll need water. A dehydrated brain is no good. You get a single glass. And you place it here. Like this. Then you prep the space so it's completely unremarkable, with no distractions. You stand here, and you wait. This is your power position. You wait for their knock. When it comes; you DO NOT fucking answer. You make them walk in to you, and then you pat the chair like this, as if you're inviting them to sit. Then, you give them space. Ten metres. Flash a smile. Not a toothy one. Just enough to relax them. They'll look away, embarrassed. You keep staring at them. You keep the heat on them. And then you continue to turn up that heat. Literally and metaphorically. If they're lying, in the end, they'll canary their way to the fucking block. AND you remember this: No matter who they are. No matter what they did. They need YOU. SO YOU fucking own them. And there won't be one of them who doesn't know it. You get this in your skull: if they need you...then you make them do the work. Now, this is the most important thing I have to tell you. Come a little closer for fuckssake. I don't want to shout! Okay, okay. Not that close. What, are you trying to fuck me? Back off you filthy fucking faggots. Stay there.

(He paces. He cracks open a soft drink. He makes himself more comfortable.)

Humans are naturally good liars: And how do I know? Because I'm a world fucking expert on lying. I have a Ph fucking D in white, black and every other shade there is.

(TERRY arranges the space. He checks the positioning of the tables and chairs. He stands for a moment and surveys the space.)

Our first guy is gonna come in here like a mangy city rat. And he's gonna pace around the room, stalking the chair down like its a piece of street-trash dinner. Because he hasn't slept in a fucking month. 'Cause he told a lie. 'Cause he fucked his way into the unit. 'Cause he's got a big dirty secret to hide. Every motherfucking cuntsucker who comes in here has given it as good as he's got it. Our guy has had a shitty fucking time, but you know what: there is no fucking doubt he's given it as good as he's gotten it and worse. Now you get it.

(He paces. He is collecting his thoughts. He is getting ready to sermonise.)

We only listen to the real things. Sweat, piss, shit, panic, fear. That is their body telling us it isn't lying. That's where we make the music baby. That's us making the fucking symphony.

Now we turn up the heat on the chair.

(TERRY crosses to the chair to test the temperature.)

Literally. Use the machine! Now, in 15 minutes, this one'll literally be sweating his balls off. Don't look so fucking righteous. What d'you think? People just come in here and tell us their secrets? Did you even read my memorandum of events for today? 'Cause I don't have time to explain every little thing we're doing!

(TERRY steps towards the audience.)

I've set up everything else. You just need to keep your eyes open for my cues. First, you get them to admit one small thing. Then, when they've admitted that, which will takesome effort, they admit something bigger. Finally they spit their teeth out.

(TERRY laughs uncontrollably. He takes a flask from his jacket. He crosses to the audience. He mimes handing the flask to a member.)

Look at you. Try not to piss yourself. Here, drink this. Cheers, to your last fucking moment of peace.

(TERRY steps back. He flicks his sleeves down. He checks his shoes one last time. There is a knock.)

Get your noses ready. I'll take your analysis at the end. Make this count greenbacks. And do not make a fucking sound. You're lucky I let you in here at all. Come in.

JORDAN
Is this--?

TERRY
Yes... Come in please.

(Beat. JORDAN paces uncomfortably.)

TERRY
Are you able to sit?

(JORDAN sits, finally.)

TERRY
I can get you another chair. Or maybe a cushion?

(JORDAN ignores TERRY's offering.)

TERRY
Or maybe you'd like a glass of water?

JORDAN
I'm alright.

TERRY
Good. Good. And how are you doing?

(JORDAN examines the room. He is visibly impatient.)

TERRY
I imagine you're scared. And humiliated--

JORDAN
Can we cut the bullshit?

TERRY
You don't feel me asking you how you are is...relevant?

JORDAN
Can we just get on with it?

(A long, awkward beat.)

TERRY

That's your file there on a table. You'll need to initial the bottom of pages 4-10.

(JORDAN signs.)

Driver's license number--

(JORDAN writes this in. He stands.)

TERRY

I'm sure you're aware....that everything you say will be noted by the--

JORDAN

Yeah. Yeah. I know. I know what's going to happen. The guy before you told me. So you can save your whole story about...how much better I'm gonna feel.

TERRY

You won't feel better.

JORDAN

Honesty. That's a new one.

(A beat. JORDAN paces.)

TERRY

Why don't you sit?

(JORDAN reluctantly sits.)

TERRY

How many years did you serve under the accused?

JORDAN

3.

TERRY

Did you know him prior to serving in his unit?

JORDAN

Are you serious? His kind wouldn't be caught dead around...my lot.

TERRY

So you are saying you didn't know the Colonel before serving under...him?

JORDAN

I knew of him, but I didn't know him.

TERRY

You knew of him?

JORDAN

He was the commanding officer of the enrollment team.

TERRY

Our files also suggest he was your acclimatization officer.

JORDAN

Well. Yeah. But there were like a hundred of us or something ... He ...he didn't actually do anything. It was the guy under him. Zimmerman.

TERRY

And?

JORDAN

What do you mean, and?

TERRY

What happened? What was your interaction like?

JORDAN

Interaction? I don't remember any during induction.

TERRY

You don't remember the first months you spent serving under a man who would become so important in your life? I don't think I'd forget.

(TERRY looks at JORDAN incredulously. He examines him. He takes a pad out of his breast pocket and makes a note.)

TERRY

And you didn't meet him before that?

JORDAN

NO.

TERRY

Private Carver...I have overwhelming evidence to suggest that you did, in fact, know the Colonel before you enrolled. You will answer the next question truthfully AND respectfully. Or you will bear the consequences.

(Beat. TERRY paces. He stares at JORDAN.)

TERRY

How often did you see the Colonel after you began serving under him?

JORDAN

I saw him once or twice a month for training. That's it. And I was never alone with him.

TERRY

Okay, so you're saying once or twice a month for three years. So you're suggesting that you saw the Colonel a maximum of 72 times whilst you served under him?

(A beat. TERRY examines JORDAN incredulously. After a moment, he crosses to the stage left wall.)

TERRY

Excuse me! Hello?

(He knocks on the wall.)

We have a problem. Can you make yourself ready?

(JORDAN looks around nervously, trying to determine who TERRY might be addressing.)

(A beat. TERRY backs away from the wall. He paces.)

TERRY

How about some Red Battalion stats: The average soldier sees a commanding officer 198 times a year; of these times, 150 are spent in close proximity. Of these 150 close proximity encounters, 45 involve shared combat for at least fifteen hours.

(TERRY crosses to and then shouts in JORDAN's face.)

TERRY

So let's try again. How often did you REALLY SEE the motherfucker?

JORDAN

Most days.

TERRY

Right. That's what I thought. Because your unit is not very big, and the Colonel is hard to miss. Especially with his habits. He is...as you are...a smoker. Right?

JORDAN

He smokes cigars.

TERRY

Allow me to summarize our conversation thusfar. You did know the Colonel personally before you enrolled. And after you enrolled, you saw the Colonel frequently. You seem to be sweating. Do you need water?

(TERRY gets very close to JORDAN. He makes JORDAN uncomfortable. He gets out a cigarette and smokes it. He blows the smoke in JORDAN's face.)

TERRY

Do you have any idea how many ways I can ruin you?
Answer me NOW!

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

YES. What?

JORDAN

We were...mates.

TERRY

You were mates? A Private, and a Colonel?

JORDAN

Yeah, but only because he wanted to be.

(A beat. JORDAN chooses his words carefully. He is beginning to get fearful.)

JORDAN

Once he showed up at my quarters with a Happy Meal alright? And...everyone was riding me for weeks after that. I couldn't barely -- you know, get on with work. But we weren't friends. I mean...he's. Him. So for Chrissake. What would I be doing with him?

TERRY

So you're saying you didn't want him to do that?

JORDAN

No. I didn't.

TERRY

You were 'mates', but you didn't want him to do you any favours? Of any kinds. Because you just wanted to be a regular guy under his command.

(TERRY lights up another cigarette.)

Would you like one?

TERRY

Are you asking?

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

Yes?

JORDAN

Yes? You'd like one?

TERRY

I knew you wouldn't give me one...

JORDAN

(TERRY contemplates this.)

I'm just wondering...where you got your own cigarettes? And if they might not have come from the same man who bought you...the odd...Happy Meal?

TERRY

No!

JORDAN

(TERRY paces. He is frustrated.)

If you continue to lie to my face like I'm some kind of brain-dead fuck, then I am going to have to be more direct in my questioning.

TERRY

(TERRY stares at JORDAN, urging a response.
JORDAN fidgets and looks away. He shifts in his chair.)

Let me make this incredibly clear: You are not going to like the consequences for lying.

TERRY

(A beat.)

I'll say it really slow so that even a retard like you can understand. Did you or did you not accept any special favours from your 'mate', the Colonel?

TERRY

(JORDAN is over-hot. He wipes his brow. He struggles.)

JORDAN

Are you saying I did something to make him think? --- Is that what you're saying? 'I was asking for it.' I never thought I'd hear that. I never thought I would be sitting here...having to defend myself. You're strong. You're trained. You're capable. You go out there and you deal, everyday, with people shooting in your face, your life is--

TERRY

Sort your head the fuck out. YOU ARE LYING, AND YOU ARE DOING IT BADLY.

(TERRY stands over JORDAN's chair, threateningly.)

JORDAN

What the fuck?!

TERRY

I'm your superior officer. And I'm trying to do you the favour of helping you. But in order to help you, I need to determine what sort of interactions you had with the accused prior to your attack.

JORDAN

Just what I already said.

(JORDAN is beginning to shift, uncomfortably, in his seat. The heat is clearly rising.)

TERRY

So you accepted. The Happy Meal./ And cigarettes--

JORDAN

No.

TERRY

You were promoted last year?

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

And wasn't the accused on the team of nominating officers?

JORDAN

He's the fucking head of the team.

TERRY

And did you spend much time together during this promotion period?

JORDAN

A few hours...in the days right before.

TERRY

And what was your interaction like during this period?

JORDAN

I wasn't with him by myself, obviously. I did what he said to. I got the promotion. End of.

(A beat. TERRY paces.)

TERRY

A number of witnesses suggest that your interaction prior to the attack was...let me get this right:

(He takes his pad from inside his jacket; he examines his notes.)

TERRY

'Tense.' 'Heated.' 'Unprofessional.'

(Beat.)

TERRY

You have nothing to say to this? No new information that might help your case?/ Nothing that might prove to me that you really were only platonically involved?

JORDAN

I haven't done anything!/ What more do you need than that? I got...I am the victim here--

TERRY

So you and the Colonel were not 'intimate?'

JORDAN

NO!

(TERRY takes a photo from inside his jacket.)

TERRY

This is/ Exhibit F. Your official unit photograph. Correct?

(JORDAN is becoming increasingly agitated.)

TERRY

This photo was taken just a few hours before you left post for discharge. I need you to detail everything that happened between the time this photo was taken and the time of your alleged attack.

(JORDAN turns away from TERRY, defiantly.)

TERRY

It seems we've reached an impasse. If you are unwilling or unable to work with me, then I have no problem saying, at this point, that you are a liar and should therefore be ruled as such. As you may or may not be aware, the penalty for lying is twenty years.

JORDAN

What the fuck??! WHAT THE FUCK? ARE YOU SERIOUS? How can you possibly be serious? I haven't done a fucking thing wrong. I come in to...report...what happened to me because....it was fucking criminal. It was...the worst...and so many people told me I had to. They told me this was the thing to do. I shouldn't just...and then you fucking...you tell me I COULD GET...TWENTY YEARS?!

TERRY

I deal only with truth./

JORDAN

What the fuck does that mean?/ Seriously, what does that mean?

TERRY

It means.../ if you don't start telling the truth, I'm gonna kick your battered asshole all the way to the brig.

JORDAN

I want to speak to... I want someone else./

TERRY

You had someone else sunshine. You had five junior officers. /And you didn't want them either, so now you get me. In case you didn't know? I'm the end of the line.

(JORDAN starts crying.)

JORDAN

I fucking hate this unit. I fucking hate -- you...and --

(JORDAN stands and is pacing and blubbering.
This is visibly irritating to TERRY.)

TERRY

Pull yourself together. What are you? A soldier or a little fucking girl?

(JORDAN drinks a glass of water. He comes back to his chair. He contemplates sitting but decides to stand.)

JORDAN

Do you know this chair is hot?

TERRY

I'm afraid it's not.

JORDAN

Fuck you; it is!

(TERRY crosses to and then touches the chair.)

TERRY

Doesn't feel hot to me.

(JORDAN crosses to and then tests the heat of the chair. It burns his hand. He recoils.)

TERRY

The mind is a powerful instrument. You know, your brain can make you think...a chair is hot when it's not. It can make you feel like something happened...even when it didn't.

JORDAN

I'm not imagining this chair, and I'm not imagining the...for fuckssake, don't play the crazy card. I'm not crazy.

TERRY

I'm not saying you're crazy. Who said anything about crazy? I just think. You should know that none of this behaviour will do you any good. None of this attention-seeking, question-evading, tantrum-throwing pussy shit. As far as I'm concerned, you've made this entire thing up because you fancy the fuck outta/ the Colonel and he doesn't like--

JORDAN

What the fuck/ is going on here? You saw. You've had more... access to images and...documents and... You know what happened to ME. How can I be getting this...when he's the one who...? I just--this makes absolutely no fucking --

TERRY

Are you prepared to tell the truth?

JORDAN

I didn't do the bad thing!

TERRY

Then why are you lying?

(Beat. TERRY looks out at the audience.)

If he doesn't confess that he and the Colonel were more than 'mates', then we'll move on to tactic 2 to speed this the fuck up. Okay. Eyes peeled cuntbreaths.

(TERRY steps back towards JORDAN. JORDAN unfreezes.)

TERRY

Would you like to see the unit photo again? To jog your memory--

JORDAN

No...I don't need to see that fucking photo again. Jesus. It's my fucking photo isn't it???
After...that...we all left. I went back to the barracks to pack. I didn't go alone. Look at my file! Please...you....you...look for yourself, you have my witness list.

TERRY

At what time did you leave the barracks?

JORDAN

I don't know...maybe 07 hundred hours?

TERRY

I have evidence that you and the accused were together at 08 hundred hours.

JORDAN

I get how you work now. You throw whatever little piece of information you've got out there, and...you make it sound dodgy. Of course we were fucking together at 08 hundred hours. Us and thirty other blokes. We had inspections.

TERRY

What would you say if I told you that my evidence suggests that you encountered each other in...a much more...personal manner?

JORDAN

'I would say' that is total bullshit. I would also say. If you want to suggest something, I suggest you should come the fuck out with it.

TERRY

I think you may be somewhat mistaken about who makes suggestions. You don't suggest what I do. Okay? I have nothing to lose. I don't care what happens to you.

They can cane and hang you as far as I'm concered. I'd buy popcorn for that. I honestly couldn't be bothered to do anything for you right now because you're a liar. I don't help liars. If you did...have something useful to tell me that might make me think you were worth saving, I might feel different. Maybe... you have evidence or knowledge you could share with me that might explain this compromising personal evidence I have...against you?

JORDAN

You have information against me? You have compromising information about me? How is that even possible? I...don't believe you.

(A beat. He rises and paces.)

JORDAN

I need to piss.

TERRY

I'm afraid you can't leave this room.

JORDAN

Fuck off. You've got to be kidding me.

(TERRY crosses to the upstage left wall. He knocks on the wall. A urinal comes out.)

TERRY

Knock yourself out sweetcheeks.

JORDAN

I'd like...to be alone.

TERRY

You're never alone here.

(TERRY crosses to the door and exits. JORDAN looks around. He searches in his pockets for a bottle of medicine. He takes off his jacket and throws it around, scrounging for his pills. He takes off his shirt and searches in his shirt pockets. Then, he looks in his trouser pockets, socks and shoes. He takes his shoes off. The sound of an intercom switches on.)

TERRY V.o.

You have two minutes.

(JORDAN frantically puts his clothing back on. He continues searching as he dresses.)

TERRY V.O.

You have oneminute.

(JORDAN walks towards the urinal. He looks for a flush. A pull chord falls from the ceiling. He flushes.)

TERRY V.O.

I'm coming in now.

(TERRY opens the door. JORDAN walks at apace back to the interrogation area.)

TERRY

Are you alright Private Carver?

JORDAN

I dunno what you're talking about. I just needed to piss. I imagine that even you need to piss from time to time, Sir.

TERRY

You'll be careful not to use that tone with me you little cunt.

JORDAN

You've got my fucking testimony, you've got my fucking evidence, you've seen all the damned photos, you got what I gave you...so what the fuck do you need from me? Hanh? What could you possibly not have?

TERRY

I will not say this again because this is boring me to fucking murder! You know as well as I do that you've avoided clarifying...NOT ONLY what your true relationship with the Colonel was prior to this alleged attack...but also what you were REALLY doing in the 28 hours before you reported the attack--

JORDAN

Fine. Fine....fine. I agree...whatever.

TERRY

You agree?

JORDAN

Yeah...

(TERRY takes out a bag containing medicines.)

TERRY

I believe you misplaced these.

JORDAN

Like fuck I did.

(TERRY crosses to the down left wall and shouts the following:)

TERRY

Can you note that the accused has called me a 'cunt' and now also a 'fuck'?

JORDAN

Who are you talking to?

TERRY

Like I said, you're never alone here. Can I just confirm that this is your medicine?

JORDAN

You know it fucking is.

(Beat.)

JORDAN

Can I fucking have them now?

TERRY

NO.

JORDAN

Please.

TERRY

If you can't help me, then you are welcome to go out that door there. The gentleman on the other side can lead you to solitary. Don't worry, your...gluten allergy won't be a problem in there. They don't offer food to solitaries. Also, on another positive note, you won't need your anti-psychotics. After all, no one who is alone can really be mad. There's no one to validate their madness.

JORDAN

Alright. I get your fucking point. What do I have to do?

TERRY

Have you got anything useful to tell me about what you were doing at 08 hundred hours with the Colonel?

JORDAN

I was eating.

And...
TERRY

We ate...together.
JORDAN

And were you alone?
TERRY

No...no, we weren't. Not for...only for...moments. There were...everyone ate at the mess.
JORDAN

And you didn't leave the mess...at any point?
TERRY

We all ate. I went outside and smoked. I came inside for a coffee. And--
JORDAN

And did you smoke with the Colonel?
TERRY

Yeah, but again. I wasn't alone with him.
JORDAN

Witnesses heard you argue with the Colonel?
TERRY

No. No. He...wished me well for...civvy life...
JORDAN

What do you need 'well wishes' for? Every soldier loves being home...unless something's got him tied here?
TERRY

Oh fuck off. After three years serving the fuck, why wouldn't we have...fucking chatted about home? All anyone talks about for days before...all anybody ever talks about is going home.
JORDAN

I'm obliged to point out you have clearly violated Codes 23, 89 and 4356789325.
TERRY

What? What code is that? What are you marking down? Stop. I have a right to know what you're marking!
JORDAN

Yes. Of course. How rude of me. Code 23, Infraction A: 'Solicitation of A Superior Officer'--
TERRY

JORDAN

No way! I didn't do that. No--

TERRY

Code 89, Infraction B: 'Lewd Behaviour With A Superior Officer.'

JORDAN

I never did anything of the--

TERRY

And Code 4356789325 Infraction Z: 'Unlawful Use of Unit Property for the Solicitation of Sex or Lewd Acts with A Superior Officer.'

JORDAN

Unit property?/ What property?--

TERRY

I'm afraid violation of these codes carries severe penalties, including some...hefty fines./I hope you have a debt management plan...for your family.

JORDAN

WHAT? I DIDN'T DO ANYTHING. I am fucking innocent. I didn't do those things. I didn't...I want to go.

TERRY

You can go. Go ahead. Ohhhhhhhh... Actually. I've just thought of another violation. Code 2. 'Deliberate Deceitfulness Towards A Superior Officer.'/ That's me...I'm the superior officer--

JORDAN

I haven't done that!/ I HAVEN'T DECEIVED YOU!

TERRY

Twelve counts at least. It's actually eighteen, but you repeated the same lie several times, so...I'll say...fifteen counts. I'm feeling generous. There you go! Deal: fifteen counts. So on top of your twenty years. You will owe your colours 9% of all your savings plus a one-time payment of thirty million--

JORDAN

No!!! You are a fucking joke--

TERRY

I promise you the penalties are as severe as I have suggested.

JORDAN

For fuckssake, I don't have any fucking money. So you can't take anything away from me. I'll fight this--

TERRY

So you are saying you did not have a special relationship with the Colonel?

JORDAN

We didn't have any kind of fucking 'special relationship.'

TERRY

Evidence from both your and the Colonel's phones proves that you did not meet outside the mess, but that, in fact, you met several hundred feet away...in a dis-used warehouse.

JORDAN

What the fuck difference does it make?/ What's a couple hundred feet, hanh?

TERRY

If you didn't have a special relationship, why did you need to meet?/... In such an unprofessional location?

JORDAN

He was/ giving me advice.

TERRY

That's bullshit. You're bullshitting me. I fucking hate bullshitters.

(TERRY paces menacingly.)

TERRY

You and the Colonel snuck away to talk about breaking up.

JORDAN

Absolutely fucking not. How could we break up when we weren't together. YOU cunt!

TERRY

You'll be aware that everything that's said in this room is--

JORDAN

Under fucking surveillance. I get it you fucking monkey! I talked to him for like ten minutes. About shit. We smoked. Then, I did the weapons inspection at 10 hundred hours. He was there. He led it. Obviously. And then we got on the fucking plane, all of us, as a fucking unit, even the fucking fallen, all of us.

(A loud, electric, wiry sound rises, temporarily. The lights go out. TERRY disappears. The sound of a heavy door shutting behind. JORDAN paces.)

He becomes increasingly nervous. He stands on his chair. He shouts. He bangs on walls.)

JORDAN

Where the fuck did you go? Come back? Come back! Please. I want to get the fuck outta here. I didn't do anything WRONG. YOU CAN'T DO THIS TO ME.

(The lights begin to come on.)

TERRY

Get the fuck up you fucking pansy. I didn't go anywhere.

(The lights flash on brighter than before. There is now a spotlight directly on JORDAN. Hesquints and cowers under the lights as they reach full-brightness. JORDAN falls to his knees, weeping, thrashing.)

JORDAN

Fine! I'll tell you. I was on the plane with him. We....we got off the plane together. I went into debrief. Like everyone. I debriefed like every single person does from the unit. He will have done the same. And then the lot of us. We all went for drinks. That was how it started. We....went drinking. I didn't want anything. I had a diet cola. Honestly, that's it????!!!! I had a diet cola, and I woke up...

TERRY

So you debriefed. You went to the Crown and Scepter where you were seen talking to the Colonel, in a corner, alone.

JORDAN

I don't know what people are saying...but there was no...there wasn't anything with us.

TERRY

There 'wasn't anything.'

JORDAN

I've been under his fucking...command...through fire and whatnot and on the fucking front line...I've served under him... That's as much as we've... So yeah, you can call that something. What can't you understand about this? What can I do to get the fuck out of here?

TERRY

Well, you could confess---

JORDAN

Confess to what? I've done nothing wrong!

TERRY

Then, you won't mind a polygraph.

JORDAN

What? Yes, I would mind! VICTIM means nothing to you?

TERRY

There are three relevant time periods in this case. The time of your tour. The incident itself, and the thirty hours after the incident. You have failed in your questioning regarding time period 1. We'll now move on to period two.

JORDAN

You people are incredible. I told you that I didn't know him before. I told you I spent some time with him on tour, kinda in a friendly way, sorta. But not much, and then I told you he fucking....did THIS.

(TERRY whistles loudly. A hatch in the ceiling draws down. A large, monstrous contraption lowers from the hatch. TERRY pulls it to the ground.)

JORDAN

Oh my fucking...what is that?

TERRY

Just put your arm out, I'll need to attach this part to you...

JORDAN

Is that...the polygraph?

TERRY

Yes.

JORDAN

Why's it got spikes and--

(TERRY straps a terrifying metal vice grip with spikes onto JORDAN's arm. He calibrates the system and checks it once to see if it works.)

JORDAN

Fuck...I...I just need a minute.

TERRY

You need a minute to...confess?

JORDAN

NO! How can I fucking confess?

(TERRY begins checking the pressure of the spikes.)

JORDAN

I fail to see...even if I did...spend some time with him...how/ it would make what happened my fault??!!!!

TERRY

Let us begin.

TERRY

Were you sexually attracted to the Colonel?

JORDAN

No.

(A buzz goes off.)

JORDAN

OWwwwwwww.

TERRY

Well, that appears to be a lie.

JORDAN

No. Oooowwwwwwww. Uggghhh.

TERRY

Did you ever fantasise SEXUALLY about the Colonel?

JORDAN

No.

(The buzz goes off. JORDAN suppresses his desire to react to the pain.)

TERRY

No?

JORDAN

No.

(The buzzer goes off again.)

TERRY

I can do this all day. We both know the answer.

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

Did you ever masturbate thinking about the Colonel?

(A beat.)

TERRY

Answer.

(A beat.)

TERRY

If you don't--

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

Did you ever masturbate the Colonel.

JORDAN

NO.

(There is a delay. TERRY pokes the machine. And then. The buzzer goes off. JORDAN screams.)

TERRY

You do understand you can't lie to me. Even the intention to lie...to mislead...is detectable.

JORDAN

Fuck off.

(The buzzer goes off. JORDAN attempts not to respond to the pain.)

TERRY

Did you bugger the Colonel?

JORDAN

No.

(The buzzer goes off. JORDAN appears to be in incredible pain but says nothing.)

TERRY

Did you let the Colonel bugger you?

JORDAN

No.

(The buzzer goes off.)

TERRY

You're lying.

(A beat.)

JORDAN

Alright...we had...we fucked a couple times, but that's it.

TERRY

You've done very well.

(TERRY crosses to JORDAN; he removes the polygraph. He cleans JORDAN's wounds.)

TERRY

I'm proud of you. What happened before didn't need to happen. If you can tell me the truth, I won't need to punish you. I don't want...to punish you.

(TERRY dresses JORDAN's wounds. There is an overtone of sexuality.)

TERRY

Do you think you're done lying now?

(JORDAN doesn't move or respond. He's grateful to have his wounds cleaned.)

TERRY

Are you ready to explain the details of the attack?

(JORDAN looks around, nervously. He starts shaking. TERRY gets him a blanket from the right side cupboard; he simply walks towards it and pushes, and magically, it opens.)

TERRY

Had you been drinking...after debriefing...at that pub, the Crown and Sceptre?

JORDAN

No...

TERRY

No?

JORDAN

I don't remember drinking anything. Or...I don't remember willingly drinking anything. He...offered me a drink. Just a coke. That's...it. I only had...a sip. Next thing, I'm in the back...alley. And my jeans...ripped...Belt buckle round...my rib cage. I...he's getting it in my...

TERRY

Did you see his face?

JORDAN

Nobody knows where I am. No one knows I'm even back.

TERRY

Sorry. I'll repeat: Did you see his face?

JORDAN

I was... I was facing down...

TERRY

How can you be sure it was him, if you were facing down?

JORDAN

He'd got me on...my...stomach. My face is on the pavement. That's how I got this mark here, see? It's...he's hurting me...inside. I'm trying to...relax....cause they say. If you. Struggle. Like a dog, breathy, on my. Neck, sweaty. Booze stinks. A bottle smashing. Lights flashing. My head hits the ground...and...that's it.

TERRY

You don't remember after that?

JORDAN

No.

TERRY

So you can't be sure if the man who attacked you...was the Colonel.

JORDAN

What? Of course I'm sure...I could...smell him.

TERRY

You could 'smell him.' Does it not seem strange...that you should recognise him by/...smell?

JORDAN

You know we...fucked.../

TERRY

You didn't just 'fuck', once or twice...did you?

JORDAN

NOoooooooooooo.

TERRY

So all that happened between you was that you fucked once or twice? And then, he gets you a coke at the bar, and then, ultimately, you allege that he attacked you?

JORDAN

Yes...

TERRY

So, if you didn't know him very well. It would be hard to be sure that this man...was definitely the one who attacked you?

JORDAN

No. No! I know it was him.

(TERRY crosses to the audience. He addresses them.)

TERRY

Let's do a short summary? The accuser has admitted that he and the accused have 'fucked.' And now, we are trying to ascertain why the accuser has framed the accused for the attack when he has little or no evidence to support his case.

JORDAN

But that's not what this is about, surely--

TERRY

The situation is this Private Carver, if you cannot be sure without a shadow of a doubt that it was the accused who attacked you, then you should not be accusing him. His sentence will be much heftier than your thirty-five years for insubordination.

JORDAN

WHAT? Thirty-five years???---

TERRY

Of course, if you cooperated. And told me the whole story. Then, maybe I could get you a better deal. Maybe I could find you a way out.

JORDAN

Thirty-five years for what?? I...I risked...my life for this unit. And he...is a fucking animal. I got all those...bloody awards and medals. Look at my files! And...after doing so many....after putting my...this happened. THIS HAPPENED. DON'T YOU GET IT! I can't even...go to the bathroom...without having a handful of...painkillers. Sam has to...help me...take a fucking...shit. Do you have any idea how...humiliating that is? And then all I get from you is. A stack of fucking paperwork an...interrogation and -- now, you tell me you can find a way out for me--

TERRY

You tell the truth, and you'll be fine. Now, why didn't you report the attack in the first/ twenty-four hours?

JORDAN

I couldn't./ I WAS OUT COLD!

TERRY

You realise you are in all this trouble because you didn't follow protocol?

JORDAN

So you all fucking tell me. Maybe you'd like to explain how it's my fault that I couldn't report it -- how would that even fucking work? You check your watch after you get your arse ripped out and you say, 'Ummm, excuse me Mr Attacker, I need to be getting a move on if I want to report this'? I don't know how long I was...in that fucking alley. I don't know how many hours it took me to get home. I don't know why no one stopped me to ask if I was okay? I don't know why I didn't go straight to the hospital. I don't know how Sam was able to have....the...forethought to take pictures. I have no...answers. You have my coat. You have my clothes. And shoes... There has got to be evidence of him on...there...

TERRY

Let's look at the logistics. Do you know when you got home?

JORDAN

I already said! Sam thinks around 18:00./

TERRY

You said The Colonel gave ‘You a drink...and then the next thing you know--’

JORDAN

I was being attacked. Then I passed out. Then I was waking up... Then I was home. I don’t remember anything else. Just being cold.

TERRY

We have a phone log for you.

JORDAN

What?

TERRY

You appear to have called the Colonel a number of times before and after you allege the attack occurred.

JORDAN

No. NO! You can see the date and time of when I got home on the photos.

TERRY

Excuse me, Private Carver. Can you clarify to which photos you’re referring?

JORDAN

The...the ones from when I got home. From what happened to me.

TERRY

You are deliberately trying to steer away from my questions. I don’t take kindly to your--

JORDAN

I didn’t call.

TERRY

You’ve already said that you have no memory of the events from after the attack to when Sam took the photos. So either you have no memory. Or...you remember and you maintain that you did not take the calls. It cannot be both Private Carver--

JORDAN

I won bravery awards./... I’ve won medals...I’m not...the bad guy here...fuck!!!!

TERRY

Sit./ Pacing like that will only make you more aggravated.

JORDAN

I can't sit!/ It fucking hurts.

(TERRY gets out a pill from his jacket pocket.)

TERRY

Anti-anxiety. Drowsiness. And another for anti-psychotics. And lastly, one little one for pain. I can't imagine what the fuck you feel like when you're on all this lot. Do you feel anything?

(TERRY throws the pill on the ground. JORDAN scrambles to find it.)

Do you know what you're doing? Are you aware? Of what happens? I don't think you have a fucking clue. I think you're off your fucking face. This is your medical record. The first twenty or so pages detail your psychological problems. 'Confusion'. And a 'history of depression'. You've been on various medicines for years, haven't you? Then, towards the middle...something interesting appears. You are seen by the medic for lesions on your anus. For bruising, abrasions, bleeding. Injuries recorded by the medic as resulting from a 'personal incident', not a 'combat-related incident.'

JORDAN

So fucking what?

TERRY

You can leaf through the rest of this document, but I'm sure you'll agree that there's substantial evidence to suggest that you like...rough sex. The first photo in this index was taken during a medical visit you made at the beginning of your first tour three years ago.

JORDAN

Congratulations. You have evidence that I've been fucked up the arse.

TERRY

And was that sex consensual?

JORDAN

What difference does that make?

TERRY

As it happens, rather a lot./ I can put the lie detector back on if you need help remembering. I know it can be hard to recall.

JORDAN

Ha. Right.

(JORDAN is becoming agitated. He can barely stand being in his skin.)

JORDAN

So what does consensual mean to you?

TERRY

Did you say 'no'?

JORDAN

You people are incredible. Honestly. You have your safe jobs and you just stay here totally out of danger and you just judge the rest of us who have to fucking work for it out there. I'm not pushing some fucking stack of papers. I'm hoping to fuck I'm not gonna get my arse blown up out there. And then, I come back and...I have to deal with so much shit. So much shit because of who I am. You don't know what it's like to be me in a place where anyone who's even a little different gets treated like a fucking leper. And worse than that, someone who needs to be made an example of. Or community property because every fucking asshole in this fucking unit who's ever had a fucking secret hard on for another bloke...saw me as fair game. Okay. OKAY? Because somebody saw me kissing Sam at the airport last time we came back...and that was the beginning of all this. That made me fair game. DO YOU GET IT?

(TERRY's watch beeps.)

TERRY

I am running out of time. We have 5 minutes. Here is what you're going to do: You confess that you and the Colonel were friendlier than you initially suggested. That this is why you're so convinced/ he was the person who attacked you...because you knew him very well.

JORDAN

Fine. Yes./ I knew him. I fucking knew him plenty. Okay. So. Yes, it wasn't hard. I knew it was him. He's stronger than he looks and he's....you know his training. And...that drink. I was... I know it was him.

TERRY

Okay. So you were having an affair?

JORDAN

Yes.

TERRY

Is it possible... that you asked the Colonel to leave his wife, and he turned you down?

JORDAN

No.

(A beat. JORDAN moves around nervously.)

TERRY

Are you sure?

(JORDAN turns away from TERRY, ignoring him.)

TERRY

You claim that the Colonel left a telltale mark on you.

(Delivered as if ipso facto.)

I will need you to remove your uniform.

JORDAN

WHAT?/

TERRY

You have lied about/ your relationship to the Colonel. As you know, this offense carries a severe penalty. Furthermore, lying about something so important makes your accusation seem similarly false.

JORDAN

I want...outside council.

TERRY

I'm afraid you don't get any. I'm it. Just me.

JORDAN

I am not taking off my--

TERRY

Okay. Then, just a moment. I'll need to calculate. Insubordination. False accusation. Perjury. Probably at best you'll get injection. And at worse, decapitation. Injection isn't public, which of course makes it more desirable. And decapitation is often not successful on the first attempt, so that's also not ideal.

JORDAN

What is this, a fucking joke? WHAT ARE YOU, A FAGGOT--

(JORDAN takes off his uniform's shirt.)

JORDAN

There. That's it. He burned me with a fucking cigar. There -- look -- on my back!

TERRY

I'll need you to remove your uniform entirely so I can do more thorough inspection.

JORDAN

Of course you fucking do...

(JORDAN removes all his clothes except his underwear.)

TERRY

All of it.

(JORDAN removes his underwear.)

JORDAN

You're sick.

TERRY

Hmmm.

(TERRY gets very close to JORDAN.)

JORDAN

Don't touch me!

(TERRY moves JORDAN in front of him so that JORDAN is facing the audience.)

TERRY

Can you bend over? BEND OVER! I WANT TO SEE THE EVIDENCE OF THIS FUCKING ALLEGED ATTACK.

(TERRY bends JORDAN forward.)

TERRY

I can't see anything, which leads me to believe you're lying. Unless you can prove that you-

-

JORDAN

Please stop. I...please. Please. Stop.

(TERRY rises quickly and crosses upstage right. He pushes against a white wall which we realise is a hidden cupboard. He disappears behind the open door. He first removes one water-filled bucket. And then another one. He then removes a long board. He gathers the items and crosses downstage to JORDAN.

TERRY stamps on the floor and a platform raises from below. He lays the board on the platform and stares at JORDAN. JORDAN is backing away, nervously trying to move away from TERRY.)

TERRY

This is pretty fucking straightforward. You're gonna lie on this bench. And you're gonna tell me the fucking truth you fucking piece of shit. OKAY? HAVE YOU GOT THAT ARSEFUCK? AND IF YOU DON'T, I'M GONNA POUR THIS WATER ON YOU? OKAY? AND IT MIGHT DROWN YOU. AND IF IT DOES? WELL, THEN YOU DON'T GET YOUR HEAD CHOPPED OFF IN BARRACKS. OKAY?

(TERRY forces JORDAN into submission. TERRY shoves JORDAN down on the board and then buckles him in. JORDAN is shaking and crying. He is screaming and thrashing.)

JORDAN

Please don't do this. I'll tell you. I'll tell you!

TERRY

You're right. You will tell me.

JORDAN

He broke up with me...on the plane...on the way back. I was sad. I was so sad. He doesn't want to be with a 'faggot like me' he says. He...doesn't want to know me. And then...this happened. And he hates me. And he wanted me dead. Because it makes it easy. Doesn't it? Fuck...not a single moment in my fucking life...I never had a thing. I never had a fucking break. He...was so...handsome. He looked so rich and happy. He got me into his unit. He got me fags. He...got me extra food. He made my life...easier. I felt like shit what with having a boyfriend. And...him being married...he...he...knew what he wanted, and then he didn't...and to make a point...he did this to make a point. So I wouldn't tell...or...or...pursue him. He did this to...I...I...I...please. Please. Please. Have pity on me. Please...please. For the love of fucking god. Can't you see I'm not fucking lying.....??????

(TERRY pours the bucket of water on JORDAN. JORDAN chokes and stammers and screams. JORDAN appears to be 'out cold'. It should be unclear whether he is simply unconscious or dead. TERRY addresses the audience.)

TERRY

I trust you have taken notes.

(TERRY crosses to the table. He notices something on the seat. He wipes it off. He sits alone. He cries.

He gets out his phone. He plays 'Wide Open' by Yasmine Van Wilt. He lays down on the ground and screams.)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE 2 THE INTERROGATION ROOM

(All evidence of JORDAN is gone. The barren room has been made nice; clean; fresh. There are flowers on a table. There is a bottle of wine decanting. There are more comfortable, wider chairs set at the table. The lighting is softer.)

TERRY

Don't look at me like you're disgusted. This could be worse. You could be in collections. Do you understand?? I can send you all to collections if I don't think you can cut it. Now...if you're ready to pull your head out of your arseholes, we can get a move on. I have a different approach for this one. He needs to feel safe. We made the place pretty. He should be relaxed. And then, we'll give him wine. It's a good year. Then, after sucking up, I'll play dumb. And after that...I'll just have to bust his fucking balls. I don't expect this will be easy though. You should prepare yourself for that. A fucking cuntsucker like this guy? But he'll spill in the end. And if we get this wrong? It's our skin, our eyeballs, our fucking nutsacks on the chopper. Don't forget that...when you feel bad...for what's happening. Because it's them or you. And I've been here as long as I have cause I don't make mistakes. You watch and you fucking learn. Okay? Okay?!

(There is a knock. TERRY presses a button and the door opens.)

Do come in.

(MURRAY enters.)

Make yourself comfortable. Help yourself if you're thirsty... There's a Chateau Haut-Brion-Pessac.

MURRAY

No, thanks.

TERRY

Please. Sit. You won't mind if I have a glass, will you?

(The Colonel clearly does 'mind'.)

They say the first Chateau Haut Brion Pessac-Lognan contained the decanted blood of Marie Antoinette.

(Beat.)

TERRY

The last twenty years of this job, I have to say, have led me to understand this mixture of barbarity and pleasure. Humans are...terrifying and interesting animals. I'm familiar, of course, with the incredible successes of your last tour.

MURRAY

You'll know as well as I do that there aren't successes here. The enemy, are...pernicious. And determined to make us suffer...despite their losses. It's a terrible shame. For all of us. Of course.

(MURRAY is itching to shut TERRY up and get on with signing. TERRY presses this by continually stopping the Colonel from having an opportunity to speak. The Colonel, will, for example, open his mouth, and immediately, TERRY will jump in and shut him up.)

TERRY

Yes. And in such an age, we need heroes. You've won your fair share of medals over the years. I only deal with the...shadows. So I'm never in any real danger....not like you. If we were meeting at a pub now...or at a range, I should like to commend you on your great services to our colours. But unluckily for us, we don't get anything quite so ceremonious. Do we? I'm sorry to be making your acquaintance in such unusual circumstances,/ but please do let me know, as we go, if I can do anything to make you more comfortable.

MURRAY

'Unusual.'/ That's one way to put it. Sordid and ridiculous was more what I had in mind. They told me you have some things for me to sign today.

TERRY

Just initial all the way through. Best to read everything as you go of course. And then, I just have one or two quick questions and you can leave. Protocol and all, you know how it is.

(A long beat. MURRAY signs. TERRY pours MURRAY a glass of wine. He hums "25 Minutes to Go" by Johnny Cash. This unsettles MURRAY.)

MURRAY

Do you mind? I'm trying to concentrate?

TERRY

Yes. Of course. Not at all. Ofcourse.

(MURRAY returns his attention to signing. His head is down. TERRY steps forward towards the audience. MURRAY freezes.)

TERRY

And now can we turn on the recording please?

(The sounds of a man screaming. The sound heightens. It sounds as if it is coming from off-stage right...)

MURRAY

What's that?

TERRY

What's what?

MURRAY

That...screaming...?

TERRY

Oh. I don't even notice these things anymore. That'll just be a detainee. I'd ignore it. How about some music?

(Van Wild's "Hush" plays in the background. The sounds of screams filter through. MURRAY struggles to finish signing. When MURRAY appears to be on the last page, TERRY gestures, as a nod, towards the audience. The music and screaming stop abruptly.)

And now if you're done. Can you please have a look at Exhibit A, from June 21st? Please recount, for us now, the events of the day in as much entirety as is possible.

MURRAY

Ahhhh. June 21st. I was just arriving back in the country. We'd had our two weeks' decompression, as you know. And then, I'd arrived back here at 11 hundred hours. I finished debriefing at 18 hundred hours, and then and then...I went home to my wife Rebecca.

TERRY

Yes. Of course.

MURRAY

Yes...

TERRY

And what occurred the following day?

MURRAY

I had a meeting with the unit heads, and then I joined friends.

TERRY

And then you 'joined friends' ...at the pub.

MURRAY

Yes. Nothing big. I had a few short drinks. I smoked a cigar outside with Field Marshall Wellfield, to celebrate his...medal, and then I came back inside and threw darts till 22 hundred hours when Rebecca came and drove me home.

TERRY

Did you at any point in the evening encounter Private Carver?

MURRAY

Absolutely, most certainly not.

TERRY

He alleges that you saw each other at 20 hundred hours.

MURRAY

To the best of my knowledge...no...

TERRY

Here is a list of all the allegations being made against you--

(TERRY hands MURRAY a stack of papers.
MURRAY looks at the top page and drops the entire
pack.)

TERRY

Should I be in your position, I might find it apropos to read through the entire packet.

MURRAY

Is anything different in this pack than the last? Are there any new allegations?

TERRY

Pardon me for saying so, but the existing list seems rather long enough, does it not? Although, I'm sure if we ask Carver, we could probably rouse a few more--

MURRAY

I don't find your humour appropriate.

TERRY

Am I being funny?/ I am sorry.

MURRAY

I am sure that Carver has any number of unmentionable injuries and injustices, but I would urge you to remember that...as I am innocent...it is frankly, not my business.

TERRY

You stand accused, Sir. Everything to do with your case is your business. One of the most pressing problems facing us in understanding your case is...a lack of clarity relating to the sequence of events...surrounding the attack. Perhaps if we could set the events of the attack straight, we might be able to immediately determine why Carver has named you as his attacker? I'm sure you'll be able to clear things up in no time.

MURRAY

Yes...of course. Well, firstly, I have never so much as done any of the things...suggested in that pack. Let me say that. Such...behaviour is absolutely un-befitting an officer of any rank, let alone...my...of, of, of, of, of, my...rank. I'm offended even by the thought of it. You can ask anyone who knows me well. I'm a religious man. And I love my. Wife. We've been together eleven years. And we have a family. I wouldn't. I couldn't. I find it reprehensible.

TERRY

I'll happily note your feelings, Sir. But I'm afraid, you've not really answered my question. Can you detail the events surrounding the attack?

MURRAY

I'm trying to...I'm... The POINT IS...I don't even know my...accuser. I don't even know Private Carver outside of the normal. Interactions one might expect. He's...he's...very, very, very...junior. And I'm...well, you know. I'm one of the most...I'm certainly his most. Senior officer. I feel as though I shouldn't even be made to say it -- given, given the offence of, given how outrageous the offence is. I absolutely, certainly, did not assault...my accuser. If you look in the case files for--you'll see that the mental health of the--the ability of the Private had come into question as early as February. If you enquire with Dale Drummond, you'll see that there had been questions regarding the Private's...his state, his psyche. I don't think anyone was convinced of his ability to, ability to....well...to perform. In fact, if...if I remember correctly the Private had been on several courses of anti-depressants since the preceding year. In fact, Carver was on quite a lot of medication. He'd been prescribed drugs to treat PTSD.

TERRY

And how was this information made available to you?

MURRAY

The Commanding Officer of Lima Company, who is directly under me, Michael Fletcher, alerted me. There was a problem on a recon mission and... So I spoke with Drummond, the attending. To report the problem and....get Carver...attention.

TERRY

If the Private's psychological health was under examination, why was he not recalled from active duty?

MURRAY

They both determined Carver was fit to serve.

TERRY

And did any of them report to you any situations under which the Private might be experiencing duress?

MURRAY

I don't recall.

TERRY

You don't recall? Perhaps I might show you a few articles of interest. This is Exhibit C.

(The sound of screaming commences again. This time it is shrill. It is followed by the sound of a loud thud.)

TERRY

These are the medic's notes...regarding injuries for which Carver sought medical attention. If you'd like, I can read the notes aloud so you don't have to trouble yourself. The font is rather small: 'Severe bruising to the anus. Severe bruising to the upper thigh. External and internal bleeding. Likely the result of trauma.' These notes relate to Carver's first tour of duty under your command. Can you remember when that will have been...

MURRAY

Why would I remember?

(The sound of screaming again.)

TERRY

I'm surprised that you don't remember given that you were his acclimatisation officer. And then his commanding officer. And now his...unit's leader.

MURRAY

I vaguely remember. You do understand that I have had no less than 15,000 soldiers under my command. Details...regarding the outpatient care of the---

TERRY

I have in my hand a document linking you to Carver's first reported injury.

MURRAY

You have no such thing because no such thing exists.

TERRY

These are Carver's release papers. He was released to your custody.

MURRAY

An entirely customary practice.

TERRY

If I move forward to Carver's second hospitalisation...this time for more serious injuries...I find....Carver has listed you as primary emergency contact. That's peculiar isn't it?

MURRAY

I fail to see how any of this is related to the allegations being made against me. Can we just get the fuck on with it?!

(The sound of screaming tunes in again.)

MURRAY

This has nothing to do with me.

TERRY

This is your phone record.

MURRAY

How did you get my phone record?

(A beat.)

MURRAY

For fuckssake, why don't come you straight out with it?

TERRY

Truth is, I know quite a lot about your interactions with Carver. With your accuser.

MURRAY

We've had very little phone interaction. Just the normal--

TERRY

The evidence....seems to point to the fact that you have engaged in sexual activity.

MURRAY

No. Absolutely not.

TERRY

Absolutely not. As in. No, you have never had sex with Carver.

MURRAY

No, I have never had sex with Carver.

TERRY

So you are saying that the evidence is wrong?

MURRAY

I believe you have been misinformed.

TERRY

You don't stand on trial accused of having sex with Carver. You are accused of--

MURRAY

I know the accusations, thank you. I haven't had sex with Carver...consensual...or otherwise.

(TERRY steps forward and approaches a trap door embedded in the floor. MURRAY takes note of his stepping forward and pays concentrated attention. TERRY leans forward and clears his throat.)

TERRY

(He shouts loudly into the trap.)

Can I have Exhibit A2 please?

(There is a knock from the floor. A gun comes up through the same small hole through which it came earlier. TERRY lifts it and points it at MURRAY. He unlocks the trigger.)

MURRAY

Jesus Christ, what the fuck are you---

TERRY

Sorry Sir. We've got a junior in evidence today. It won't happen again.

(TERRY knocks on the floor. The small hatch opens again. TERRY deposits the gun back in the hatch and pushes it down. He knocks again.)

TERRY

Exhibit A2 please. For the Carver/MURRAY case. Thank you.

(The hatch re-opens. TERRY pulls out a small recording device.)

TERRY

This...is Carver's confession. I won't bore you with the beginning.

(He presses play.)

JORDAN V.O.

‘We...fucked a couple of times’.

(TERRY stops the recording.)

TERRY

The confession gets pretty interesting after this...So...what do you make of it?

MURRAY

The Private appears to suffer from very troubling delusions.

TERRY

Delusions. Hmm. On what basis do you say ‘delusions’?

MURRAY

Carver is clearly confused.

TERRY

So you didn’t have sex with Carver?

MURRAY

I already answered that.

TERRY

And you definitely did not attack and violently rape--

MURRAY

He’s completely delusional. He’s...I already said it. He’s confused. What do you not understand about this? Confused...okay?

TERRY

Do you believe that Carver was raped?

MURRAY

I don’t know. He may well have been. But if he was? I didn’t do it. For fuckssake, how many times do I need to say it?

(The sound of screaming rises in the background.)

MURRAY

And why the fuck does that person keep screaming?

TERRY

What part of the accusation do you believe to be 'confused'?

MURRAY

Well, I haven't done anything wrong so---

(Another shrill, piercing cry penetrates the stage area.)

TERRY

Perhaps we should try to stay on the topic. Which part of the accusation do you find to be 'confused'?

MURRAY

I don't know. All of it?

TERRY

All of it? Have you seen the photos of the injuries?

MURRAY

I...I don't see what this has to do with--

TERRY

It has rather a lot to do with what we're discussing, Colonel. I would suggest, for example, that the photos we have in evidence indicate that Carver experienced a very traumatic, very violent attack. That there is little delusion regarding the severity of suffering or the aggressiveness of the attack.

MURRAY

Now that's not what I---

TERRY

Perhaps you think Carver's attack has been engineered...? Perhaps you'd like to see photos of his injuries?

(A slide comes down. Several photos from the slide project revealing bloody wounds.)

This is a photo taken from--

MURRAY

And if we say, yes, this is true. Carver was raped. Just because Carver accuses ME doesn't mean I'm guilty.

(TERRY puts up a new slide.)

TERRY

And this is a photo of the back of the victim's head. This is the entry wound where glass from, it appears, a broken beer bottle, entered the flesh. And this is bruising around the back of the pelvis, a sign of rope burn, a possible--

MURRAY

But this does not prove that I AM the perpetrator. It may prove Carter was attacked...in some way. In which he sustained these injuries.

TERRY

Your logic could be sound. You're saying it is not: ipso facto.

MURRAY

Pardon?

TERRY

I thought they taught Latin at boarding school? Oh...yes. I'm sorry. Cricklewood isn't a boarding school is it? It's common as fuck, like you. If you could create a personality. If you could pretend to be...of an entirely different class...in order to get ahead in a profession. Then, pardon me if I'm wrong, but it seems to me that you could probably also lie your way out of a situation. Especially a situation which would ruin your life and the lives of all around you. And all future generations who have the misfortune of bearing...your name. Even by coincidence. And not relation. I would pity even those people if word of this got out. I'd rather not waste another minute though, MURRAY. So this is what I know, alright? I know you used to fuck. I know you'd call Carver up and say when and where.

MURRAY

I have a whole team of juniors waiting for inspection and--

TERRY

Your superiors have been notified that you will be absent.

MURRAY

What?

TERRY

I have notified your superior officers that you will not be returning.

(TERRY steps forward. He looks to the ceiling.)

TERRY

Can you bring forward Exhibit B please?

(A noose falls from the ceiling.)

MURRAY

What the fuck?! We don't do things like this in our...our colours!

TERRY

Oh, I am sorry. That's not Exhibit B. But then, you'll know that, won't you?

(MURRAY is pacing like a mad animal. He is measuring the distance to the door.)

It was a terrible error. Please do sit. Now, can we try again. Exhibit B please.

(A small hole in the wall opens and a cellphone emerges, clasped in a mechanical arm.)

Much better. Thank you!

(He takes the phone from the mechanical arm and then pats the arm. The arm retracts.)

This is your phone. Is it not?

MURRAY

I can't be sure.

TERRY

Well, let me look at the obvious bits. There's a photo of you and a very attractive--

MURRAY

Well, then that would be Rebecca. My wife.

TERRY

So your wife is approximately 5'11.

MURRAY

Yes.

TERRY

Dark haired.

MURRAY

YES!

TERRY

And hairy.

(There is a long pause.)

Forgive me, but I think this is not your wife.

MURRAY

I have no idea who that is or what that is....AND I have no intention of answering any of your questions. I would like to now put in my application for external council.

TERRY

Sure. Sure. Would you like to see the photo? Here it is. This is Carver, is it not? Taken...on January 5th. That means this photo was taken three months into the Private's first tour of duty under your command.

MURRAY

I'm not putting up with any more of your bullshit. Will you please process my application for external council?

TERRY

Well, you know. I'd like to, but I can't.

MURRAY

What do you mean, you can't?

TERRY

I'm afraid...it is fairly...self-explanatory. I...cannot. Therefore I will not.

MURRAY

I would like to see your superior officer.

TERRY

Oh...of course.

MURRAY

So will you fucking get him?

TERRY

I'd like to, but I can't.

MURRAY

What do you fucking mean?

TERRY

I'm afraid it's fairly--

MURRAY

No. No. No more of your games. Get me your fucking superior now.

TERRY

Yes. Of course.

(A beat. TERRY coughs. He paces a little. He returns to MURRAY. He puts out his hand, offering an introductory 'shake'.)

TERRY

A pleasure to meet you. I'm Field Marshall TERRY Blessing, Head of Internal Relations.

MURRAY

I want to leave immediately.

TERRY

You have wasted the entire outfit's time by evading your responsibilities. If you do not address the issues at hand now. And I mean now. You will be facing a minimum thirty years' confinement. Most of it will be solitary.

(The sound of the front door being double-locked and bolted from the outside.)

All exits are now bolted. You will remain here until you confess.

(MURRAY is frantically examining the space for an exit.)

There is no exit.

MURRAY

This is not how we do things! This is not....Let me out of here. Let me out of here!!!!

(MURRAY attempts to use his cell phone.)

The fucking line is dead. This is incredible.

TERRY

You can give it to me if you'd like. It won't be any good to you anymore anyway. The walls, floors, and ceilings in this room...are special. Shall we say.

MURRAY

No! You cannot have my phone.

TERRY

I've had a long day MURRAY. I'm tired. Of today. Of JORDAN. Of you. JORDAN wore me out. You know he didn't want to give you up.

(MURRAY attempts to run for the door.)

I've got DNA evidence linking you to Carver. It was recovered thirty-two hours after his attack.

(An electric beep goes off. MURRAY falls to the ground. TERRY crosses towards MURRAY.)

Bad dog. You crossed the line. Get up you piece of fucking shit.

(MURRAY stays on the ground. TERRY gets out a taser from his pocket and puts it to MURRAY's balls.)

What? That doesn't get you off? From the pictures I saw...I thought you liked it kinky? Get up you fuck.

(MURRAY gets up.)

This is the part where you confess to having fucked Carver repeatedly.

(TERRY hits the buzzer again. MURRAY dry heaves.)

NO? Nothing? Okay then. Maybe Exhibit C2 will jog your memory.

(The slide projector comes down again. The photos described in the actions are shown. Only MURRAY sees the photos.)

You dressed in leather with a red leather ball gag. Look at you facing the camera. What a fucking novice. Exhibit C3: Carver giving you phallacio. Exhibit C4 you penetrating Carver's--

MURRAY

Fine. Fucking hell. Yes, I had sex with Carver.

(The slide projector retracts.)

TERRY

Where did you meet?

MURRAY

I was his acclimatisation officer.

TERRY

I have an internet subscription which suggests you go back a little further than that.

MURRAY

Fuck off.

(TERRY reaches into his breast pocket. He retrieves a pair of nail clippers. He clips his nails.)

TERRY

These are funny. Because on one side they're regular nail clippers, but on the other, they're not...

MURRAY

We met online....

TERRY

On a dating site.

MURRAY

My wife and I had...taken a break....So fucking what? We didn't meet at the--

TERRY

I'm afraid the big deal here is that....you lied. You lied at the beginning....a number of times. Do you need me to remind you?

MURRAY

Okay. We met on that fucking dating site. We got on. We became friends. That was it...

TERRY

Until you suggested that maybe...Carver should enlist?

MURRAY

No. No. No. JORDAN asked could I help...I thought. I thought...that the colours...might be a good... If I'd fucking known then what I know now.

TERRY

Does it look like you have a sympathetic audience? Hanh? Stay on the fucking topic.

MURRAY

I didn't think that...things would be so difficult.

TERRY

You thought you could keep a little piece of--

MURRAY

I didn't think that...I didn't realise that JORDAN would have such a hard time. I didn't realise that...

TERRY

What kind of a hard time?

MURRAY

Bullying. Being...weak-minded. Jodan's not...strong-minded It wasn't so easy for...JORDAN to deal with what I've dealt with.

TERRY

And what have you dealt with?

MURRAY

Combat. Hazing.

TERRY

Well it's not every junior who has a sugar daddy in command. I could see how that would be hard to adjust to.

MURRAY

I wasn't...a sugar daddy. For fuckssake. I had...I was...honourable.

TERRY

Let me ask you something.

(He gets a buzzer out of his front pocket.)

TERRY

Does this hurt?

(An electric shock sound goes out. MURRAY winces and screeches.)

TERRY

I'm going to make this easy for you. When you tell me the truth, you don't get the buzzer. When you lie, you get this.

(MURRAY whinces again.)

TERRY

Do you practice fetish sex?

MURRAY

Yes.

TERRY

Have you ever engaged in fetish sex with Carter.

MURRAY

Yes.

TERRY

Isn't it true that you met Carver on an exclusive, underground, fetish sex site for officers?

MURRAY

Yes.

TERRY

Isn't it true that Carver was enlisted for the explicit purpose of being your sex object?

MURRAY

No.

(MURRAY gets buzzed. He screams.)

TERRY

Isn't it true that Carver was enlisted for the specific purpose of being your sex object?/

MURRAY

No!

(MURRAY gets buzzed. He whinces.)

MURRAY

We had sex...

TERRY

You wanted Carver nearby at your disposal.

MURRAY

You are making this out to sound way fucking worse than---

TERRY

You stand accused of rape---

MURRAY

I DID NOT RAPE CARVER!--

TERRY

For which the sentence is public execution.

MURRAY

YOU CAN'T KILL ME!

TERRY

Oh not you. JORDAN. JORDAN will be decapitated tomorrow at noon.

MURRAY

What the fuck? Why?

TERRY

For lying. For accusing a senior officer of something he didn't do.

MURRAY

FUCK YOU'RE GONNA KILL CARVER?

TERRY

Yes. And like you've said, it's nothing to do with you.

MURRAY

It is...I...I...I care for him.

TERRY

Isn't it true you fucked Carver too hard?

MURRAY

A few times. Yes. Carver likes it rough. OKAY?

TERRY

And did you ever have sex when Carver didn't want to.

MURRAY

No, I'd never.

TERRY

Isn't it true that you and Carver fucked...in the twenty-eight hours before the attack was reported.

MURRAY

I don't know.

TERRY

Between the time when you took the unit photo and the point at which you were called in for--

MURRAY

Yes, we did. We...behind the mess. At my HQ office...and then on the plane...and...we...

TERRY

And isn't it true that you had sex one more time?

(The buzzer goes off. MURRAY screams.)

MURRAY

Yes...

TERRY

Your semen was found on the--

MURRAY

Yes...we had sex...yes. One more time. Yes! But I didn't fucking rape Carver. Okay? I DIDN'T RAPE CARVER. Carver was a fucking mess. Okay? A fucking mess. Carver is a fucking mess. Do you have any idea? Do you realise? If you saw messages, between us then you also saw...the manipulation and the cunning and the...Carver was out to fucking get me. I don't know...what the fuck happened that led to...I don't know how a person gets so fucking fucked in the fucking head. I did it for...love. I'd never have hurt...I did everything for... He wanted into the colours. Got him a place. Wanted into the unit. Got him a place. Wanted fucking protection. Well, I did that. Didn't I? I did that. No training. No education. No future. I felt...a responsibility. If you love someone, even if it is insane, you...you owe it to them and you do what you can. I wish I could go back and change it. I'd get some help. I did the sex. Like I said. I had it. It was fine. It was better than fine. Then it was...all...I miss you. And I love you. And I fucking need you. And you can't leave me. You can never leave me. We fucked like...dogs in the fucking alley. And I left. How is this my fault? You've got to help me. I never did a fucking thing wrong. Once or twice. Rough sex. I said it was fetish cause you were fucking buzzing my balls. But it was just...rough sex. It's so far from home. I was lonely. And...I...fucking loved Carver. I never... Not in a million years, even when...even after...coming for me. Trying to make me seem like some kind of...even then, even then...

TERRY

Carver told you to leave your wife. That last time you had sex.

MURRAY

Yes.

TERRY

And?

MURRAY

I said...I couldn't. I may have been weak, but I'm not... This is not my fault. I didn't. I absolutely did not fucking do that. You have to help me. You have to fucking help me. It wasn't me. I don't know...what happened. Carver was so drunk. I shouldn't have. Honestly, I should have said no. Had some short drinks myself, like I said. And...god, you know when something has you round the fucking balls. Like you can't get enough and its all you ever wanted. I couldn't say no. Maybe it was the last time. I said it would be. Carver, I think. Carver wants to take me down. I am not a bad man. You've seen what I've done. You know I did my best for all my men. Did he tell you how I got him special training? Did I tell you? Did I tell you about all the young ones that have come in here that I've helped get training????

(TERRY coughs loudly. The screams begin again.)

TERRY

That's Carver you know. He's being prepared for public execution.

MURRAY

Please...you can't...I did it. I'm guilty.

TERRY

You would rather die than let Carver die?

(A long pause. Muray weeps.)

MURRAY

Yes.

BLACKOUT.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In this critical commentary, I introduce the possibility of the existence of a new, hybrid dramatic form: the magical-real new history. In support of this postulation, I examine the work of significant dramatists, focusing particularly on Canadian postcolonial dramatists whom I believe employ magical-real new historicism in their work and then compare and contrast their uses of this form with my own; I then go on, in further depth, to examine the work of Canadian First Nations Métis dramatist Marie Clements and to examine how I employ magical-real new historicism in my own work. Lastly, I examine further devices that help to place my work within the Canadian dramatic landscape, focusing particularly on interrogating the role of research and the real in my practice by deconstructing the methodology behind the various elements of my dramatic sensibilities. The study of Canadian postcolonial dramatists has had a profound influence on my creative and critical thought and development; indeed, examining the work of contemporary Canadian postcolonial dramatists and critics has given me greater insight into my dramatic cultural inheritance, and into the literary landscape of the dramatic canon to which I hope, here, to be making some small contribution. This critical section of my doctoral thesis contains six chapters and is allowed, according to university regulations, a maximum of only 30,000 words, as this component makes up thirty per cent of this predominantly creative practice-focused thesis. As a result, I cannot touch on all the themes outlined in this analysis in the depth to which I would like. Consequently, in postdoctoral study, it is my hope to continue further investigation into the proposed ‘magical-real new history’ form, paying particular attention to the function of magical realism as a tool for the disruption of what could be considered mainstream narratives of history and the present.

1.1 Magical-Real New Historicism and the Object

As the name suggests, magical-real new historicism is a hybrid of magical realism and new historicism. Although this proposed mode certainly seems to exist in numerous creative forms including, but not limited to, literature, visual art, film and drama, for the purpose of this doctoral examination I discuss it only within the context of drama.

In the broadest possible terms, in drama, magical realism occurs when the

familiar or ordinary coexists onstage with the magical, with neither the familiar nor the magical holding greater import. For example, in William Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, the witches or Weird Sisters, despite being entirely outside the realm of verisimilitude or naturalism, are presented as real and appear onstage and interact with characters who are not, in and of themselves, magical. Arguably one of the most famous of all contemporary works of magical-real new historicism – Tony Kushner's *Angels in America* trilogy – explores the late-twentieth-century American AIDS epidemic from the perspective of a group of gay men living in NYC and incorporates, for example, both dead and supernatural characters. Indeed, although I believe there to be many magical-real new histories written or staged in numerous eras and geographies, my focus in this thesis is on the work of postcolonial, particularly Canadian, dramatists, because, given my upbringing and citizenship, this examination is most relevant to the critical framing and position of my own work. In other words, because I identify as a Canadian citizen.

Works in this genre vary greatly in subject matter, but they always present a new history of an established story, and they present this new history through the use of magical realism. Yet, the text does not question their realness – it places them squarely in front of the audience or reader, gives them agency and import, and proves, through the unfolding of the narrative, their existence, despite being magical. Moreover, magical realism necessarily refutes absolutes because it is a revisionist tool that forces the dramatic coexistence of two or more otherwise static states. Magical realism allows time, space, sexuality, gender and so on to be understood as fluid rather than finite or fixed; indeed, sanity and insanity and even life and death are often represented as existing within a continuum because magical realism resists the notion that such states are binary, and thus mutually exclusive or incompatible. It positions neither state, in each case, as being privileged over the other, because magical realism is necessarily defined as the confluence of the rational and irrational.¹ Given the numerous ways in which magical realism can be made manifest in postcolonial drama, it is my suggestion that further classification is necessary. Following Jeanne Delbaere-Garant's delineation of the categories of literary magical realism,² I argue for the

¹ Wendy Faris discusses the roles of magical realism in her seminal essay, 'Sheherazade's Children'. My reference here is inspired by her discussion of existing definitions of magical realism between pages 163 and 181.

² Jeanne Delbaere-Garant, 'Psychic Realism, Mythic Realism, Grotesque Realism: Variations on Magic Realism in Contemporary Literature in English', in Zamora and Faris, eds., *Magical Realism*, pp. 250-62.

existence of five sub-types or modes of postcolonial dramatic magical realism: epistemic, psychic, mythic, grotesque and spectral. In epistemic magical realism, magic springs from the clash between differing epistemic frameworks. Many indigenous, autochthonous dramatic pieces incorporate epistemic magical realism. For example, *Age of Iron* explores a creation myth from a hybrid, half-Western, half-First Nations perspective: the magical realism springs from the incongruence of the two epistememes. Psychic magical realism springs from the protagonists' psyche. For example, Clements's *Burning Vision* dramatises the visions of the protagonist. In mythic magical realism, the magic comes from the setting. Indeed, the world itself is magical, as in the same author's play *Copper Thunderbird*. Grotesque magical realism occurs because of anthropomorphosis. For example, in *Burning Vision*, the character Fat Man transforms from a bomb test dummy into a real man. Lastly, spectral magical realism transpires either when dead characters inhabit or haunt the dramatic world, or when the worlds of the dead and the living overlap. For example, in Clements's most recent play, *The Edward Curtis Project*, living and dead characters inhabit the same dramatic space simultaneously. This is also the case in a number of my plays, including *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, my first creative submission piece. This kind of magical realism also occurs in Robert Lepage's *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*. As is described in more detail below, one of the characters, a spectre who perished in a concentration camp during World War II, haunts the protagonist, a man who is dying of AIDS during the 1980s. As is required in a spectrally magical-real play, the reader or audience does not question the realness of the spectre; the spectre's world is as important to the narrative as the world of the living characters in order for this subgenre to occur. In many magical-real postcolonial dramas, these subgenres do not occur alone. Indeed, in many cases, plays will utilise numerous forms of magical realism either simultaneously or at different points throughout the narrative. For example, as I describe in greater detail in the second and third chapters of this thesis, a spectre can be a manifestation of the psyche of living characters – in which case a play both can be psychically magical-real and spectrally magical-real – or can spring forth from the setting – in which case it is both mythically magical-real and spectrally magical-real.

In some postcolonial drama, a magical event or state can be revealed in the resolution of a dramatic work; this is the case in Canadian postcolonial dramatist Judith Thompson's plays *Habitat* and *Sled*. Conversely, magic can pervade a piece, as it does in my own work and that of Marie Clements. In either case, magic must be

subject to the rules of the dramatic world in which it occurs; moreover, the magic cannot be ‘explained’ or rationalised through science or logic. Magical events should not take place in a radically different world to our own; this kind of setting would suggest that a work might be science fiction or science fantasy.³ It also cannot occur in dream. In order for an event to be magical-real it must be simultaneously real and magical. It must make the familiar uncanny.⁴ Although characters do not necessarily need to be aware that magical events are occurring, the audience must be able to recognise that the magic is occurring. If characters discuss magical events that occur off-stage, for example, but that are not consequently evidenced in some kind of tangible onstage manifestation, then this cannot be considered magical realism. The audience must have evidence of the occurrence of the magic within the otherwise real dramatic world. My understanding of ‘new historicism’ and ‘new history’ draws upon theorist Stephen Slemon’s interpretations of Bakhtin’s polyphonic discourse.⁵ New dramatic histories create discourses with more established, popular histories through the convergence of characters whose epistemologies are in direct conflict. In explication, new histories are created when characters whose epistemologies support the pervading state-sanctioned historical narratives coexist with, and are consequently challenged by, characters whose epistemologies challenge the homogenised, pervading narrative. The confluence of these characters’ conflicting epistemologies within a single dramatic text creates a multivocal or polyphonic new history that is more thorough and inclusive than the pre-existing or commonly accessed mainstream hegemonic history. As I will discuss in greater depth in the second chapter of this critical commentary, these new histories assert the epistemologies of the abject.

In this thesis my interpretation of the abject is extrapolated from Kristeva’s *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. In this work, Kristeva positions the abject as an other who is viewed by those in power as being simultaneously ‘a conjunction of waste and an object of desire’.⁶ Those in power abject these others because their

³ Fredric Jameson, ‘On Magical Realism in Film’, *Critical Inquiry* 12: 2 (Winter 1986), pp. 301-25.

⁴ I use the term ‘uncanny’ as Wendy B. Faris does; her interpretation is itself derived from that of Tzvetan Todorov. ‘When a reader hesitates between the uncanny, where an event is explainable according to the laws of the natural universe as we know it, and the marvellous, which requires some alteration of these laws’, we can understand something as uncanny. Wendy B. Faris, ‘Sheherazade’s Children’, in Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, pp. 163-90.

⁵ Stephen Slemon, ‘Magical Realism as Postcolonial Discourse’, in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, eds, *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), pp. 407-26.

⁶ Julia Kristeva. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 185.

very presence or existence ‘disturbs identity, system, order’.⁷ She suggests that the feeling of abjection can be likened to ‘a vortex of summons and repulsions’.⁸ She elaborates that abjection of an other is ‘immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a friend who stabs you’.⁹ In this seminal work, Kristeva dissects the experience of the abject and the process of abjection by referencing numerous canonical psychoanalytical, religious and literary texts that present complex representations of the abject and the process of abjection. In this thesis, it is her analysis of the characterisation of the abject in anti-Semitic twentieth-century French novelist Louis-Ferdinand Céline’s work upon which I primarily draw.

The abject characters in the magical-real new historical dramas I analyse are predominantly women. Many are identified as indigenous peoples, members of diaspora populations, those who experience severe psychological or mental trauma and illness, or homosexuals; moreover, all of the characters I identify as abject are, without exception, explicitly, deliberately and radically excluded by those in power. In my own work and in the work of Clements, the abject are often also victims of violent, life-threatening or life-taking biopolitical actions by those in power. It is also my position that these abject characters should be understood to be *homo sacer*. Giorgio Agamben suggests that the *homo sacer* are those who, whether by his/her own government or a ruling colonising or neocolonising power, can be tortured or sacrificed as a result of, or in the name of, necropolitical action. In either scenario, no one is punished for the violent action against the *homo sacer* because he/she is considered worthless. In ‘Necropolitics’ postcolonial critic Achille Mbembe expands upon, amongst others, the works of Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben that discuss biopower and biopolitics by positioning political action that endangers the safety of citizens as acts of war.¹⁰ I focus particularly on Mbembe’s examination of Foucault’s *Il faut défendre la société*¹¹ and Giorgio Agamben’s *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique*,¹² although I rely upon my own interpretation of Agamben’s *homo sacer*. My understanding of the *homo*

⁷ Ibid., p 4.

⁸ Ibid., p 1.

⁹ Ibid., p. 4.

¹⁰ Achille Mbembe. ‘Necropolitics’ (Chapel Hill: Duke University Press, *Public Culture*, Winter 2003), p. 13.

¹¹ Michel Foucault, *Il faut défendre la société: Cours au Collège de France (1975-1976)* (Bertani, M. & Fontana ed.) (A. Gallimard; Seuil: Paris, 1997), pp.200-234.

¹² Giorgio Agamben. *Moyens sans fins. Notes sur la politique* (Paris: Payot & Rivages, 1995), pp. 50-51.

sacer, bare life and biopolitics draws from different examples to those used by Mbembe. Indeed, the role of the homo sacer in my work and in my discussion of the work of Clements, in particular, should be understood to be informed primarily by my reading of Agamben's seminal text, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

My reading of the relationship between magical realism, the abject and the *homo sacer* expands upon Mbembe's outlining of the circumstances and manifestations of necropolitics. I suggest that the persecution of *homo sacer* in the contemporary world, and certainly in the dramatic worlds constructed by Clements and me, spring not simply from the exactment of conditions of war or neocolonial nation-building or power exercising, but also through the building of, or support of, corporations or companies that are supported by governments or supranational organisations that are above the punishment or recrimination of those said organisations and of external surveillance. Indeed, my plays, and to a large degree Clements's plays, propose magical scenarios in which the abject are transformed into the *homo sacer* through their sacrifice. The abject, who, by simply existing, threaten the safety of normativity or homogeneity, are expunged by those in power. Agamben positions the concentration camp as the ultimate site or example of bare life,¹³ in which the *homo sacer* was executed by the Nazis and the Allied Powers. Similarly, I position the reservations and internment camps that existed throughout the colonial period and until World War II in North America as examples where the abject were made *homo sacer* and sacrificed by both governments and corporations in the name of nation-building and economic development. In my examination of my play *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, I use necropolitics to explain the abjection and, ultimately, the attempted sacrifice of the protagonist Curtis, a character who, as a result of his experiencing an event that challenges the mediatised, accepted history of the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster, is transformed into a *homo sacer*. In the simplest possible terms, in my work and the work of Clements I have come to see the *homo sacer* as an abject person who suffers as a result of necropolitics or state-sanctioned, approved or mandated torture, death or execution. These abject characters are, as Kristeva states, 'close...but cannot be assimilated'.¹⁴ My interpretation of Kristeva's abject was influential in the development of my understanding of my own craft; in dissecting the representation of the abject and abjection in my own work, I came to see magical

¹³ Giorgio Agamben. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998): pp. 30-70.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p 1.

realism as a deft tool for the dramatisation of the precarious experience of the abject. Indeed, it is my position that the privileging of the epistemology of abject characters, particularly the *homo sacer*, is necessary in order for a play to be considered a magical-real new history.

In dramatic magical-real new histories, histories silenced by, or deliberately omitted from, state-sanctioned or hegemonic histories are privileged through the use of magical realism. Thus, it is my position that in magical-real new histories, magical realism is by definition a subversive tool because it makes room for new histories through the interjection of the irrational, the otherwise inexplicable. As will be elaborated upon in the second and third chapters of this thesis, in my play *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, for example, the audience or reader sees the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster from the perspective not of BP, but of a man, Curtis LaFontaine, who was aboard the Deepwater Horizon rig when it exploded. Curtis suffers from severe psychological trauma, mental illness and addiction, and therefore his epistemology, despite his existence in an otherwise rational world, is irrational. Indeed, dramatists will often employ magical realism in order to render a state-sanctioned historical narrative uncanny – to present the ordinary or established view of such a narrative in a way that causes it to become unfamiliar, even terrifying.

Conventional history is thus subverted by the dramatisation of magical-real new histories. Such new histories are designed to make audiences question the completeness or authenticity of mainstream history by proposing alternate, and simultaneously magical, new histories. By positioning itself as the true history, or by proposing the incompleteness or narrowness of the state-sanctioned or hegemonic history, the new history hopes to earn agency. Furthermore, magical-real new histories present, or rather re-present, the state-sanctioned histories from the perspectives of characters who have experienced the subversive new history.

As I will show in detail, *Burning Vision* dramatises the visions of a See-er, a First Nations visionary (of the Dene tribe), who, in the late-1880s, had a vision which some have interpreted as a foreshadowing of the detonation of the atomic bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Many well-known postcolonial plays could arguably be considered magical-real new histories. Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, for example, dramatises a real event through the device of magical realism.¹⁵ Epistemic and mythic

¹⁵ Here I use 'event' to mean a known or documented history.

magical realism highlights the struggle between the Yoruba people and British colonial society. By using magical realism, Soyinka illustrates the clash between the cosmological, teleological, epistemological and ontological perspectives of the British and the Yoruba. The British repression of Yoruba culture in the play functions as a metonym for British violence against the Yoruba people. Similarly, *Princess Pocahontas and the Blue Spots*, Monique Mojica's play about the relationship between the Pocahontas myth and the history of North American indigenous colonisation, uses psychic magical realism to dramatise the mental state of the protagonist. In another example of the genre, Judith Thompson's *Palace of the End* presents the perspectives of two highly publicised figures associated with the Iraq War, as well as another lesser-known perspective of a *homo sacer* who is killed as a result of American aggression. The play's first soliloquy tells the stories of Lynndie England, the woman soldier court-martialled for her part in the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib. The second soliloquy dramatises the last moments of weapons expert Dr David Kelly, the whistleblower who exposed the UK Government's complicity in the forgery of evidence supporting the claim that Saddam Hussein's government was manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. The final monologue tells the story of a woman who was killed in Operation Desert Storm during an American air raid. She tells the story of how Saddam Hussein's thugs murdered her family, and finishes both her soliloquy and the play with the story of her own death. A victim of both the necropolitical action of her own government and the invading American Government, she is a *homo sacer* through the act of being positioned as collateral loss. No one will ever be punished for her murder. Unlike the other two plays discussed in this introduction, the magical nature of the setting comes as a revelation in the resolution of the play. The audience becomes suddenly aware that the characters exist in a kind of purgatory, and that the protagonist is a spirit.

Polygraph and *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* – two works by Robert Lepage and his Ex Machina theatre company – represent very different types of magical-real new histories.¹⁶ *Polygraph* explores a murder case that occurred in Montreal, in which Lepage was, for a time, a suspect. Although the play is not told from François's perspective, magical realism privileges his perspective by means of flashback and flashforward scenes. Furthermore, the play positions François's interrogation as a kind of psychological torture, thereby questioning the efficacy and morality of the Quebecois policing system. It poses these

¹⁶ These plays are different not only in context but also in authorship. Lepage devises his work with fellow Ex Machina collaborators.

questions as a result of the overall mishandling of the case in question. Ultimately, this questioning of the police force functions as meta-narrative because Lepage has dramatised his experiences as a suspect, in which he was subjected to maltreatment by the police force. Furthermore, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* presents vignettes that dramatise twentieth-century peoples' histories. Its central narrative concerns the after-effects of the radiation emitted by the detonation of the atomic bombs on the lives of Japanese civilians. The play uses magical realism to simultaneously stage different time periods, states of reality and places. In the play, a character who is dying of AIDS in the late-1980s shares the stage with a character who died in a concentration camp during World War II. This incorporation of a focal dead character makes the play spectrally magical-real because neither the reality of the living nor that of the dead is privileged above the other; furthermore, a parallel is created between these two characters who are abjected by their societies. Their respective physical and societal abjection and suffering tighten the link between their otherwise disparate realities. They can both be understood as liminal characters who exist on either side of death and who desperately want to be alive.

For example, *Burning Vision* dramatises the little-known World War II history of Clements's people, the Métis and Sahtu Dene of Deline (Northwest Territories).¹⁷ This new history brings to light 'the imperialist practices that continue to inform Canadian society'.¹⁸ The play can be understood as an attack on the 'necropolitics' of the Allied Powers.¹⁹ Like *Burning Vision*, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* explores the lives of a community of people affected by an environmental catastrophe. Unlike *Burning Vision*, however, it does not explore necropolitics from the perspective of war. *We're Gonna Make You Whole* attacks the US Government's relationship with the petrochemical industry by dramatising the two bodies as one unit: 'The Company'. The Company then becomes synonymous with any official body or organisation that seeks to limit the power of the people through direct action, be it biopolitical or otherwise (although here the primary focus is The Company's necropolitical agenda). Like *Burning Vision*, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* attempts to interrupt mainstream history.

¹⁷ *Burning Vision* can alternatively be described as a subversive World War II history play.

¹⁸ Cynthia Sugars, ed., *Unhomely States: Theorizing English-Canadian Postcolonialism* (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2004), p. xxii.

¹⁹ See Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture* 15: 1 (Winter 2003). My definition of the *homo sacer* derives from Giorgio Agamben's work on sovereignty. See Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds., *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty and Life*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.

Both plays dramatise the abject characters' struggles to assert agency, to share their stories despite the dominance of a more popular, state-sanctioned history. Like the term *homo sacer*, the 'abject' can refer to a group or an individual, but in either case it refers to a person or people rejected by or removed from society. In these two plays, many characters can be considered abject; indeed, in *Burning Vision* only a few characters – the prospecting LaBine Brothers, Lorne Green and Fat Man – are not abject. Although, on first inspection, not all characters in *We're Gonna Make You Whole* might be considered abject, all the antagonistic forces in the play in fact spring from Curtis's psychological state, and are therefore projections of his own (real and perceived) state of abjection. Ultimately, both plays use abjection and magical realism to explain the psychic states of their protagonists.

For example, *Burning Vision*'s protagonist, the See-er, is a Dene visionary. The play dramatises his visions, and so is told from his perspective – indeed, the entire play elucidates his psychic state. Although he never appears physically onstage, the audience hears him chanting throughout the play, and he is sometimes seen in projection in scenes with the Little Boy character. In effect, by watching the play, we see World War II and the radium trade from his perspective. This gives agency to this indigenous perspective of World War II because it not only makes audiences aware of the experiences of the Métis and Dene, but also positions the First Nations characters in the play as survivors, as people who fight against insurmountable odds, ultimately attaining restitution. Similarly, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* positions the well-known mainstream news coverage of the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster against the little-known perspectives of those who live in the Gulf of Mexico and experienced the disaster first-hand.

Chapter 2

Staging New Histories: Magical Realism and Subversion

This chapter examines two magical-real new histories: Marie Clements's *Burning Vision* and my play *We're Gonna Make You Whole*. In other words, in these plays, subversive new histories are staged using magical realism. Both plays offer mythic and psychically magical-real spaces for the metaphysical and dramatic transformation of catastrophe and the reclamation of silenced, abject histories. *Burning Vision* disrupts the hegemonic historical understanding of World War II by, firstly, introducing an alternate Sahtu Dene history of that war. The play is also intended to be cathartic for the Dene people, many of whom wrestle psychically and spiritually with their guilt in having indirectly contributed to the decimation of Nagasaki and Hiroshima.¹ A compact, two-act play, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* presents an alternate account of the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster and attempts to disrupt the state-sanctioned mediated history of the disaster by inserting the alternate 'people's' perspective of the catastrophe into hegemonic, state-sanctioned history. This chapter both examines magical-real new history plays and explores the contexts of their anti-colonial agendas.

2.1 *Burning Vision*

Burning Vision premiered at the Firehall Arts Centre in Vancouver in April 2002. It was nominated for a number of awards in Canada, including the coveted Governor General's Literary Award. It was published by Talon Books in 2003, and won the Canada-Japan Literary Award for Excellence in 2004.² *Burning Vision* is noted for its muscular social agenda and masterful poetic imagery. The play's complex, hybrid dramaturgical structure draws from both artistic traditions – the oral and theatrical – of Clements's mixed heritage.³ The play simultaneously stages the four spatialities – as represented within the Dene See-er's visionary consciousness – affected by radium mined from the Great Bear and Great Slave Lake regions of the Northwest Territories:

¹ In 2001, a group of Sahtu Dene elders travelled to Japan to offer their apologies to the survivors of the Nagasaki and Hiroshima bombings. Marie Clements notes that this experience is dramatised in the final scene of the play. She cites this scene as evidence of her desire to make amends, theatrically, for the role the Dene/Métis people played in the creation of the atomic bombs. Marie Clements, *Burning Vision* (Vancouver: Talon Books, 2003), p. 82.

² This information comes from Talon Books' author's page for her: talonbooks.com/authors/marie-clements (accessed 16 October 2013).

³ Clements is a Métis; she is half-Anglo-Celtic and half-Sahtu Dene.

the Dene/Métis, the Japanese, the American, and the Canadian. These four spatialities are staged as a series of overlapping circles (demarcated by small coloured rocks and chalk) with the Dene circle being the central/pivotal stage area.⁴ This tangible signifier reinforces the principle that the Dene perspective and Dene history are most important. Also, this representation has meta-theatrical implications. The physical convergence of spatialities – the negotiation of space and boundaries onstage – mirrors the narrative and historical (and geographic) overlapping and clashing of the various groups. Indeed, at the beginning of the play, the script indicates that these stage circles contain those who inhabit them.⁵ Moreover, they can also be seen as a metaphor for the Canadian Government's enforced containment of the Dene and the Japanese.⁶ Furthermore, this circular representation reinforces what Kurt Van Wilt calls the 'circle people's' or 'aboriginal people's' epistemology of the time-space continuum as being cyclical/circular – fluid, unbounded and infinite – which directly opposes the 'Western Square' epistemology of time and space as being linear and finite.⁷ Indeed, *Burning Vision* stages the clash between the First Nations' and colonisers' epistemologies, revealing what Gilbert refers to as the imperial 'cartographic gaze' directed at land, resources and bodies: the Western colonising impulse.⁸ The play dramatises the tension between these two epistemic systems by presenting the Dene way of life before and after the radium trade. The play begins in the late-1800s, just before the discovery of radium.

This first section in the discussion of *Burning Vision* examines the sociohistorical context that inspired the play, including an overview of the radium trade during the 1930s and 1940s, an inspection of the Canadian Government's involvement in the radium trade, and an exegesis of the lasting effects of this trade on the Dene of the Great Bear and Great Slave Lakes. Later sections address language and characterisation, the carnivalesque, heteroglossia, stratification and chronotopia, and magical realism.

⁴ Photos of the premiere production of *Burning Vision* can be found on the author's webpage, at <marieclements.ca/#live-performance/c13ay> (accessed 12 August 2013).

⁵ This comes from Clements, *Burning Vision*, p. 5.

⁶ At various stages during the colonial period, the Dene were forcibly kept on reserves of land. During World War II, Japanese-Canadians and Japanese-Americans were detained in internment camps. See <histori.ca/peace/page.do?pageID=279> (accessed 16 April 2012).

⁷ Kurt Van Wilt, *The Visionary: Entering the Mystic Universe of Joseph Rael, Beautiful Painted Arrow* (San Francisco: Council Oaks Books, 2011).

⁸ This comes from Helen Gilbert's monograph entitled *Sightlines: Race, Gender, and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998), p. 62.

2.1.1 The Historical Backdrop

Burning Vision positions the radium trade as a metaphor for the history of Canadian colonial rule; it draws connections between the Canadian radium trade and the deaths of millions of people – both those who died of radiation exposure or contamination, and those who died in the atomic bombings of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. The revered Sahtu Dene prophet Louis Ayah, the man whose visions are dramatised in *Burning Vision* and upon whom the Dene See-er character is based, had predicted in the late-1880s that the mining of the ‘money rock’ would poison the Dene people, as well as their land and animals, and end the Dene’s nomadic way of life forever.⁹ George Blondin, a Dene elder, recounts Ayah as having sung ‘a strange vision of people going into a hole in the ground – strange people, not Dene. Their skin was White. I wondered if they would harm my people ... the people they dropped this thing on looked like us, Dene.’¹⁰ Nikiforuk maintains that Ayah

repeatedly warned his people that the waters in Great Bear Lake would turn a foul yellow ... ‘That there would be suffering and death.’ Fifty years after the first atomic bomb, the Cold War, and the economic boom that was uranium, the elders ... understand the meaning of [his] disturbing vision.¹¹

Dene elders from tribes all along the Dehcho River region of the Northwest Territories (NWT) recount that, during the early 1900s, the Dene made oral ‘peace treaties’ with the Canadian Government in which the Canadian Government pledged to respect the sovereignty of Dene land claims (which encompassed most of the NWT and parts of the Prairie provinces). Dene elders say the government breached these peace settlements within two years, using Dene land for resources, encouraging white settlement and creating residential schools.¹² By 1920, prospectors, miners, missionaries and furriers had settled on Dene land. After approximately 1920, Dene children, alongside those from many other tribes, were forced to attend residential schools. At these residential schools, First Nations children were required to learn English and acculturate to the

⁹ George Blondin, *Yamoria the Lawmaker: Stories of the Dene* (Edmonton: NeWest Press, 1997), pp. 21-42.

¹⁰ This quote derives from Clements’s programme for the play.

¹¹ Andrew Nikiforuk, ‘Echoes of the Atomic Age: Cancer Kills Fourteen Aboriginal Uranium Workers’, *Calgary Herald*, Saturday, 14 March 1998, p. A4.

¹² Gurcharan Singh Bhatia, *Peace, Justice and Freedom: Human Rights Challenges for the New Millennium* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 2001), pp. 130-50. See also Blondin, *Yamoria the Lawmaker*, pp. 21-42.

‘Canadian way’.¹³ White settlers of Dene land brought flu epidemics reducing Dene populations; then, in 1930, Gilbert and Charles LaBine found radium-containing pitchblende ore while mining Dene land.¹⁴ Many Dene took jobs as guides, stevedores, and ‘coolies’ at the LaBines’ Eldorado Mining Company.¹⁵ The Dene worked 14-18 hours a day transporting radium in burlap sacks hundreds of kilometres across their territory.¹⁶ Many of those who did this work eventually died from complications associated with radiation poisoning.¹⁷

As early as 1931, the Canadian Government was warning its own employees that

[t]he hazards involved in the handling of high-grade radioactive materials make[s] necessary the adoption of certain precautions. Recent investigations in the field of radium poisoning have led to the conclusion that precautions are necessary even in the handling of substances of low radioactivity. The ingestion of small amounts of radioactive dust or emanation [i.e. radon] over a long period of time will cause build up of radioactive material in the body, which eventually may have serious consequences including cancer, bone necrosis, are possible disease.¹⁸

This Canadian Government action or inaction could be interpreted as a form of necropolitics, if interpreted according to Mbembe’s definitions.¹⁹ As Nikiforuk reports, one Sahtu Dene proffered: ‘I think my people were used as guinea pigs. They were never informed of the dangers.’ The chair of the Dene Deline Uranium Committee has agreed: ‘It’s the most vicious example of cultural genocide I have ever seen and it’s in

¹³ See Eric C. Howe and Jack C. Stabler, ‘Native Participation in Northern Development: The Impending Crisis in the NWT’, *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques* 16: 3 (September 1990), pp. 262-83.

¹⁴ Robert Bothwell, *Eldorado: Canada’s National Uranium Company* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1984), pp. 14-40.

¹⁵ Like that of the Cajun people in *The Gift and We’re Gonna Make You Whole*, the Dene situation could be described in terms of Mbembe’s *conditio inhumana* or Agamben’s bare life, as elucidated in the introduction. Please see Achille Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, *Public Culture*, Winter 2003.

¹⁶ <ccnr.org> (accessed 5 May 2012).

¹⁷ Or cancers related to radiation exposure. See <ccnr.org/deline_deaths.html> (accessed 16 October 2013).

¹⁸ The 1976 *Royal Commission on the Health and Safety of Workers in Mines* – known as the Ham Report after its commissioner, James M. Ham – examined the evidence against the Eldorado Mining Company and suggested that, although there was significant evidence proving the injury of miners who had worked for the company, the state, because of jurisdictional issues, was not liable to pay compensation to these workers. James M. Ham, *Royal Commission on the Health and Safety of Workers in Mines* (Toronto: Government of Ontario, 1976).

¹⁹ Mbembe, ‘Necropolitics’, pp. 12-25.

my own home.²⁰ Gordon Edwards, President of the Canadian Coalition for Nuclear Responsibility, supports these statements, noting in reference to the report: ‘The government knew full well ... and published this for their own people handling radium in Ottawa ... The reason this document could be published in 1931 is because the dangers were already well-documented in the 1920s.’²¹ As Hank Bloy, an Eldorado engineer, has stated: ‘The Americans were buying our uranium and wanted it badly and didn’t cooperate too much on the health standards.’²² The Dene and the Committee of Original Peoples Entitlement (COPE), a First Nations’ organisation that lobbies for First Nations’ peoples’ rights, has been battling the Canadian Government for compensation for the Dene losses for over twenty years, without success.

As Clements and Blondin suggest, some of the losses the Dene feel they have suffered cannot simply be ‘fixed’ through financial settlement. Apart from the human and environmental loss, Dene traditions have also been affected. As Dene elder George Blondin says, the Sahtu Dene are a patrilineal tribe, so that with the grandfathers, fathers and brothers who perished, so also died many Sahtu Dene traditions. Furthermore, many of the Dene people carry a burden of guilt over their complicity, albeit inadvertent, in the destruction of Nagasaki and Hiroshima. In 2001, a group of Sahtu Dene elder representatives travelled to Nagasaki and Hiroshima to apologise for the part they had played in the mining of the radium used to make the atomic bombs that destroyed the cities. Clements notes that this event, this meeting of the Dene elders and Japanese atomic bomb survivors, inspired her to create *Burning Vision*.²³

2.1.2 What It Does: Storytelling

Like many Canadian First Nations postcolonial plays, *Burning Vision* can be understood as highly syncretic – as a composite of Anglo-Canadian, European and indigenous creative practice; indeed, dramatised through indigenous storytelling practice and presented from the indigenous perspective, the play is a complex cultural hybrid. *Burning Vision* indigenises the Western concept of direct address by positioning it as the tool of the storyteller. All the abject characters speak in direct address throughout the play; indeed, as figments or projections of the Dene See-er’s liminal consciousness they seem almost to explain the vision to the person who has the visions. Indeed, this

²⁰ Nikiforuk, ‘Echoes of the Atomic Age’, p. A5.

²¹ Ham, *Royal Commission*.

²² Nikiforuk, ‘Echoes of the Atomic Age’, p. A6. Deline is called the ‘Widow’s Village’ because at least thirteen men who lived in the village had worked at the Eldorado Mines, and had then died as a result of exposure.

²³ Marie Clements says this in the playbill.

palimpsestic style, of dramatising one story upon the next, recurs throughout the play and creates new sites for magical realism. For example, in Movement One,²⁴ the audience meets all the characters, but only the colonial collaborators, the Brothers LaBine – who discover radium – share their stories at length. Thus, Movement One becomes the bottom layer of the palimpsest – the story of the discovery of radium – upon which all the following stories, as told in the last three movements, unfold. Then Movement Two dramatises the relationship between the mining of the radium and the detonation of the atomic bombs, but it explores the story from the perspective of those who ultimately die as a result of the radium trade. Movement Three explores the future of the Dene people by dramatising how the land, traditions and animals died as a result of the radiation poisoning; it presents this story from the perspective of the Widow who has lost her husband, a stevedore we see in his youth in Movement One. In Movement Four, the Dene and Japanese seek restitution through mutual understanding and forgiveness.²⁵

Throughout the play, characters continually speak over each other as they tell their stories, unaware of each other's presence, further reinforcing the idea that multiple, subversive World War II histories exist – that each individual or community owns its own history. This kind of postcolonial storytelling style further reinforces the subversive power of the magical-real new history subgenre because it asks not only that the audience absorb a new, complex history through an uncanny, magical lens, but also that it receive this story from an indigenised framework. Audiences probably perceive that the familiar storytelling trope has been manipulated, but because the play is dense and amorphous: without reading the text it is possible that many audience members may not understand that, beyond being simply a narrative tool, the storytelling serves as a meta-narrative device.

The fact that the storytelling in *Burning Vision*, at points in its staging, was performed by real-life Dene storyteller, George Blondin, meta-theatrically references Dene storytelling practice.²⁶ This casting decision gives agency to the storyteller – both real and fictional – and positions him as a kind of local, community or tribal hero. This is a characteristic which Gilbert and Tompkins see as common to postcolonial

²⁴ Clements names her acts Movements.

²⁵ For a discussion of the complexity of the spatiotemporal frameworks of this play, see Theresa J. May, 'Kneading Marie Clements' *Burning Vision*', *Canadian Theatre Review*, Fall 2010, pp. 5-12.

²⁶ In the original Rumble production at the Firehall Arts Centre, he performed live.

storytelling.²⁷ As noted in *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, ‘One of the most significant manipulators of historical narrative in colonised societies is the storyteller ... Story-telling’s presentational style and format challenge the naturalistic conventions by which western theatre usually stages its subject matter’.²⁸ The use of storytelling also resists Western finite spatio-temporal frameworks and teleology, because the setting, time-frame and world of the play are highly magical-real. Indeed, the story is not told chronologically, but rather as the Dene See-er experiences it; consequently, the four movements of the play are arranged thematically, rather than chronologically. For example, the character Koji describes his ‘death discovery’ to the audience while he is transported across the world (from Japan) to Canada, and lands in the waters that Captain Mike and the Dene stevedores navigate.²⁹ The ‘story’ only becomes complete in the end, when we have heard each of the four visions or stories of the Dene See-er. Indeed, each movement adds a new layer atop the previous layer, creating a kind of palimpsest.

2.1.3 The Story

The play opens in ‘intense darkness’; this darkness is interrupted by a flash of lights representing the atomic bomb detonations.³⁰ This opening could be understood as a bombardment of the audience’s senses. Indeed, this first scene contains a number of culturally specific spatio-temporal signifiers; this is intended to locate an audience in time/history (World War II), if not place. The darkness of the opening also heightens the impact of the dramatic sound effects. Indeed, a specific sound effect of the ‘deep earth’ can be considered a leitmotif because it appears throughout the play to indicate that the scene is taking place beneath the earth, in the mines. This ‘deep earth’ sound is always accompanied by other signifiers – darkness, for example – and also occurs in conjunction with the entrance of a Native character, or during the singing/chanting of the Dene See-er, and thus should help to illustrate the intense connection for the Dene between their land and their traditions. It could also be understood as a subversive tool in this new history. Furthermore, the darkness of the ‘deep earth’ also reinforces another basic difference – between the natural comfort that the Native characters seem to associate with the dark, and the Western characters’ apparent fear. Indeed, this kind

²⁷ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 126. My analysis of the mode of postcolonial storytelling-theatre is informed by this landmark work. See pp. 126-36 for their comprehensive discussion of this style or mode.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

²⁹ Clements, *Burning Vision*, p. 39.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

of signifier helps to show an audience whose ‘story’ this is – that the history that is unfolding is an autochthonous history. It helps to connect the poisoning and exploitation of the land with the suffering and catastrophe associated with the illness of the miners and the Deline land, and the aftermath of the atomic bomb detonation. Applying Delbaere-Garant’s writings on psychic realism, I interpret the darkness and eeriness of the setting as yet another physical manifestation of the Dene See-er’s psychic state; alternatively, extrapolating again from Delbaere-Garant’s work, this ‘deep earth’ can also be interpreted as a form of mythic magical realism because other magic springs from this place, the ‘deep earth’, as the internal/external landscape of the Dene See-er’s consciousness, and as the ‘setting’ for the play, becomes a site for the conjuring of other magical events.³¹

Characters appear as they are conjured in the vision, usually from the darkness. They should seem to step into being from nothingness, as if they only exist when the Dene See-er senses them. Throughout the play, the white non-abject characters stumble upon and ‘discover’ the abject characters while prospecting for radium in the darkness. By shining their flashlights directly on them, in an instance of what can be interpreted as Gilbert’s ‘cartographic gaze’, the Brothers LaBine – the neocolonial collaborator characters – enact a kind of comedic parody of the ‘discovery’ myth.³² This ‘cartographic gaze’ can, I argue, be seen in the neocolonial collaborator characters’ drive to exploit people and resources.³³

The first moments in which a character is introduced become important for the audience’s developing understanding of the role of a character in the story. Movement One, with the exception of the dialogue between the Brothers LaBine,³⁴ is written in soliloquy, which highlights the characters’ isolation and allows the audience to understand *Burning Vision*’s many different cultural microcosms. As characters are introduced in rapid succession, the soliloquies often overlap and interrupt individual characters’ stories. This interruption establishes the concept that the story does not belong to just one individual or nation (although the autochthonous magical new history is clearly privileged).

³¹ Zamora and Faris, *Magical Realism*, pp. 249-55.

³² Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama*, p. 142. This could also be considered mimicry.

³³ In this way, this act becomes a kind of subversion of Plato’s Allegory of the Cave; the Brothers LaBine discover all the ‘leading’ Native characters: the Métis heroine Rose, the Widow, and the ‘atomic bomb’ Little Boy.

³⁴ It is my argument that even this dialogue is in fact a soliloquy, because Brother LaBine 2 disappears halfway through the play. Before this point, he functions as Brother LaBine 1’s conscience, expressing his trepidation that what they are doing may not be ‘right’. Essentially, throughout the play, Brother LaBine 1 murders his conscience – BrotherLaBine 2.

At the end of Movement One, the Dene See-er, disguised as the Multi-Coloured Indian Chief, attempts to stop the Brothers LaBine from ‘discovering’ radium, personified in the character of Little Boy, through prayer and vigil. Despite the Chief’s efforts, the Brothers LaBine literally pick up Little Boy and carry him off-stage, leaving the stage in ‘complete uncomfortable darkness’.³⁵ The movement ends with Round Rose’s wartime ‘Orphan Annie’ radio broadcast; the broadcast catapults the time-frame forward from the 1930s to the 1940s.³⁶ While Movement One essentially separates the characters into their respective microcosms, Movement Two begins to fuse these individual worlds into one macrocosm. Movement Two, which once again opens in darkness, introduces the stories of two poor white characters – the Radium Painter and the Miner.³⁷

In this movement, Rose now works as a cook aboard the *Radium Prince*, the freighter carrying radium ore that the Icelandic Captain Mike helms. Little Boy, following the relocation of uranium from the Eldorado Mining Company to the US, has ‘landed’ in Fat Man’s house. Thus, the two bombs embodying the diametrically opposed American Government and the Native epistemologies are united. Convinced that where children appear women must be nearby, Fat Man adopts Little Boy.³⁸ Fat Man also undergoes anthropomorphosis, losing his atomic-test-dummy stiffness, and gaining emotions such as lust, rage and paranoia. His appetite and thirst, presumably metaphors for American colonialism/expansionism, become insatiable.

Fat man’s growing paranoia is expressed as fear and the exoticisation of the ‘Other’. Fat Man masturbates to his own psychologically projected image of Tokyo Rose/Round Rose, foreshadowing the growing conflict between the American, Canadian and Japanese governments. This action, this fetishisation, calls Tokyo Rose from fantasy into reality. She literally steps out of his sexual fantasy and into his living room. However, when she approaches Fat Man, it is not as the ultra-sexualised Tokyo Rose, but rather as the plain, mild-mannered Round Rose. Fat Man forcibly ‘adopts’ her as his wife, and they become the ‘parents’ of Little Boy. Movement Two ends abruptly with Little Boy ‘summoning’ the Dene See-er’s chanting, in a desperate

³⁵ Clements, *Burning Vision*, p. 41.

³⁶ Orphan Annie was a character Tokyo Rose or Iva Toguri often used in her ‘Zero Hour’ broadcasts. She claimed this character was meant to convey the mutual relationship of abandonment she shared with the American troops stationed in the Asia Pacific.

³⁷ The Slavey Announcers – a voice from the future – cross into the story, whispering unheard words of love to ancestors, some of whom are the First Nations characters in the play, who are receiving prayers from the future from their loved ones (some of whom are not yet born). The rush forward in time – to the meta-theatrical present – should help the audience to understand that *Burning Vision* is a story unbounded by chronological time.

³⁸ Clements, *Burning Vision*, p. 60.

attempt to 'go home'.

Throughout Movement Three, the Brother LaBine 1 justifies his actions in several asides to the audience: he confesses that he and the government 'speak the same liar language'.³⁹ Since the role is played by a Native Canadian actor, this utterance can be interpreted as subversive. It can be seen as a kind of empowering mimicry, a role reversal, in which, by his playing the colonial collaborator, the Native Canadian character asserts his agency and attempts to subvert the state-sanctioned Canadian 'discovery' myth.⁴⁰

At the same time, on the other side of the theatrical world, the Japanese character Koji is sucked into a kind of dark vacuum, transported to the Great Slave Lake, and – crucially – saved by the crew of the *Radium Prince*, the ship where Rose works as a baker.⁴¹ Koji and Rose meet and fall in love. Simultaneously, in a different area of the stage, the Widow, a shamanic character from the future, 'spirits' her dead husband, the Dene ore carrier, into being. She hears the sounds of the big game herds travelling in the distance and remembers their marriage and nomadic life together. This interaction between husband and wife reveals the Dene hunter-gatherer way of life before the heyday of the radium trade. Meanwhile Fat Man, who is growing increasingly paranoid, expels his 'adopted' wife and child from his home. This expulsion is, of course, a metaphor for the real-life experiences of Tokyo Rose; moreover, Fat Man's actions could also be considered metaphoric for the Canadian and American governments' incarceration of Japanese citizens in internment camps.

In Movement Four, the countdown to the atomic detonation returns, heralding danger. Rose is pregnant with Koji's baby; the Radium Painter has lost all her hair and her face is disintegrating; the Miner has begun to develop lung cancer; Fat Man descends into madness; and Tokyo Rose and Round Rose face complete abandonment by Fat Man. The ticking of the Geiger counter, a countdown to detonation – a gothic leitmotif that serves as a reminder of the impending danger – becomes intolerably loud. For the first time in the play, all spatialities converge and the whole stage is lit; all characters are aware of each other. In the following moment all the characters except the Widow die in the explosion. But the play ends on a hopeful note, with the Widow

³⁹ Ibid., p. 80.

⁴⁰ Indeed, this play has many mechanisms that subvert the Canadian discovery myth – relating to contact, land claims, the 'cartographic gaze', and even the 'discovery' of radium.

⁴¹ This wormhole-like travel becomes important meta-theatrically because it shows the interconnectedness of time and place, and because the passage through the wormhole represents the transition from life to death; Clements calls this transition Koji's 'death discovery' (Clements, *Burning Vision*, pp. 39-60).

and Koji (the son of Rose and Koji) placing flowers on his parents' grave. Koji becomes a paradoxical symbol for restitution, perhaps referencing the Dene elders' trip to Japan on the fiftieth anniversary of the Nagasaki detonation.⁴²

2.1.4 Gest

In *Burning Vision*, characters wear or carry a physical signifier or 'gest', indicating to the audience what role that character plays in the narrative. (The characters' names, which are functional rather than personal, should also underlie this. Fat Man, for example, is a fat man.) The characters appear with an object in one form or another throughout the play. When this object appears onstage alone, the audience should know that the characters will soon be physically or psychically present. Furthermore, a gest identifies characters as either neocolonial collaborator or collective oppressed. The gests of the neocolonial collaborators are always technological implements, whereas the collective oppressed gests are objects derived from nature. For example, the gests of the Brothers LaBine are flashlights, and Fat Man's gest is the television, while Rose's gest is flour, and the Widow's gest is her 'visioning fire'. Interestingly, characters always appear onstage alone with their gests. The visual cues provided by the gests also often reinforce the characters' isolation. This could be interpreted in many ways. Firstly, this makes it easier to absorb the fact that the gest is a key characterisation tool – that the gest will become important in developing an understanding of the characters' function in the narrative, and thus that it will be an important construct in the new history. Secondly, this device also illustrates the different microcosms within the play, and helps to make clear that the characters are simply tools of the new history – that they are not necessarily intended to be characters with whom the audience identifies strongly; rather, gests should dramatise the fact that the characters are holotropes for real people involved in the local, and consequently new, history. Lastly, from a purely practical perspective, since many of the actors are double- or even triple-cast, the gests help the audience to identify whom an actor is playing at any particular time.

⁴² The play, perhaps inadvertently, seems to assert that reconciliation and restitution occurred, ironically through miscegenation – or rather reconciliation through union. Koji the son becomes what I term a tragic holotrope. In a similar stratum to that occupied by Gerald Vizenor's comic holotrope, I posit that *Burning Vision*'s use of the magical-real epic's tragic holotrope works with cathartic, communal images of loss.

2.1.5 Characterisation: Stereotype

I argue that Clements's stereotyping of white male characters exemplifies Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque. Clements often employs stereotyping in her work. Her white male characters are typically either buffoons, at best, or criminals. In *Burning Vision* in particular, Clements illustrates that in this dramatic world, 'life is turned inside out' by showing us 'the reverse side of the world' in which 'all distance between people is suspended'.⁴³ The character Fat Man is a fascinating example of what can be argued is the presence of the carnivalesque in Clements's work as his behaviour and interaction with other characters demonstrate all four of the modes through which Bakhtin believes the phenomenon of the carnivalesque manifests itself: 'profanation', 'carnivalistic mésalliances', 'eccentric behaviour' and the 'free, familiar contact' between people of very different social classes. In stereotyping Fat Man, Clements places 'emphasis on physical pathology to incorporate those carnivalesque images which pertain to the "lower bodily stratum", Bakhtin's collective term for the digestive and reproductive systems'.⁴⁴ Indeed, Fat Man's fixation on the 'lower body strata' emphasises the stereotype of the greedy, fat, lecherous, perverse and ignorant American. Fat Man, whose behaviour is decidedly profane, enacts mésalliances through his unrestrained and eccentric behaviour and his lack of reverence for the Dene See-er and the Multi-Coloured Indian Chief; the differences between the sacred characters and him are heightened by his onstage masturbation and sexualised and fetishised objectification of Tokyo Rose.⁴⁵ Ultimately, his power is reversed and 'the distance between people is suspended'. He becomes powerless as a result of the Dene See-er's intercession. This intercession and consequent reversal illustrate the differences between the societal positions of those in power and the *homo sacer*; when he is robbed of his position of power, he experiences the vulnerability of the Little Boy and Tokyo Rose, *homo sacer* whom he has, until this point in the play, bullied and terrorised. Consequently it makes sense that, in the world premiere production of the play at the Firehall Arts Centre in April 2002, Fat Man was the only white male character played by a white actor. All other white characters were played by Native actors (who were also double- and triple-cast as Native characters). He is the only character who does not find redemption and who is not given a nuanced reading; as the embodiment of the profane, he is, essentially, from a Bakhtinian perspective, decrowned and dethroned by the Dene See-

⁴³ Mikhail Bakhtin. *Carnival and the Carnavalesque*.

⁴⁴ Helen Gilbert and Joanne Tompkins. (*Post-Colonial Drama*, pp. 224-5).

⁴⁵ Here, I compare Gilbert's accounts of the carnivalesque in Australian postcolonial drama to my interpretation of the Carnavalesque in *Burning Vision* (*Post-Colonial Drama*, pp. 224-5).

er, a holy man. Ultimately, the irony of holotropic stereotypes facilitates a trickster-like subversion of essentialism.

Both goodies and baddies are stereotyped. Self-aware (object) goodies ‘play’ on pervasive stereotypes by presenting themselves to the baddie characters as exaggerations of their stereotypes, and by then meta-theatricality addressing the colonising impulse of the baddie characters. Similarly, the antagonists also perform exaggerated stereotypes of whiteness. This paradoxical subversion works only because the characters are holotropic. For example, the Tokyo Rose/Round Rose character subverts Lorne Green and Fat Man’s orientalising male gaze by acting out exaggerated Canadian and American stereotypes of Japanese women. Thus, Tokyo Rose/Round Rose is able to assert her own perspective whilst simultaneously humiliating the ‘fool’, the now dethroned, reversed and vulnerable Fat Man. With Lorne Green she calculatedly interrupts his narrative, creating a polyphonic discourse between the characters, and thus positioning her own account of events as a direct challenge to his own, to the state-sanctioned historical narrative.

2.2 Border-Crossing

This section merges critical discussion of what could be described as border-crossing pedagogy with analysis of the effect of border-crossing on characterisation.

Furthermore, this section also defines what I term border-guarding: the reaction to unwanted border-crossing. In light of Rustom Bharucha’s argument – in *Theatre and the World: Performance and the Politics of Culture* – that the ‘West’ enjoys privileges not afforded to the orientalised or exoticised other, I suggest that, if border-crossing is visible and perceived in a dramatic space, it privileges those with power and forces the *homo sacer* to exist in, as discussed in the first chapter, a condition that Giorgio Agamben calls ‘bare life’.⁴⁶ In this play – and, as Clements suggests, in life – the Sahtu Dene (and all First Nations people) are ‘people who are abandoned by power, in the sense that power has no interest in them’.⁴⁷ This is essentially the message of *Burning Vision*.⁴⁸ Indeed, this is a motif I emphasise in both *We’re Gonna Make You Whole* and *The Interrogation*, that being a *homo sacer* and existing in bare life give those in power

⁴⁶ See Matthew Calarco and Steven DeCaroli, eds, *Giorgio Agamben: Sovereignty & Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ Costas Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire: The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge-Cavendish, 2007), p. 116.

⁴⁸ The abandonment of the *homo sacer* by the mainstream is a recurring motif in this and other magical-real new histories.

the assumed right to cross one's borders.⁴⁹ Examination of what I posit as Clements's complex dramatisation of border-crossing illustrates the way that exploitation of Dene land and resources became effectively not just a territorial invasion, but an act of ethnic cleansing – a border-crossing that brought the destruction of sacred ancestral land and the decimation of places of ritual worship and prayer.

I define border-crossing as movement outside of one's psychic, spiritual and/or physical space into another space. The boundaries for border-crossing in *Burning Vision* are to some degree determined by the set and stage directions, and by the characters' genetic inheritance: boundaries for border-crossing are lit or demarcated aurally, so the perceptive audience member will be aware when borders are being crossed; also, props and gestures highlight characters' 'multi-ethnicities'. In the Vancouver production, and as the published script seems to suggest, Clements intends the stage to be divided into three separate sub-stages. I suggest four types of border-crossing are demarcated: political, apolitical, inherent (abject), and meta-theatrical. Border-crossing is political if it is motivated and intentional. Border-crossing can also *become* political if it is unwelcome (even if it is unintentional or apparently unmotivated). Apolitical border-crossing, conversely, constitutes that which is unmotivated and unintentional, and which is not perceived or protested against by an other. (Of course, this crossing can be interpreted as political by the audience.) Meta-theatrical border-crossing involves the conscious, and therefore motivated and political, crossing of a character from outside the narrative into the narrative, and vice versa. Although this kind of border-crossing is not always consciously perceived by all the characters within *Burning Vision*, it does direct the telling of the story – and is also, of course, intended to be perceived by the audience. Inherent border-crossing is written on the skin and tongues of the *homo sacer* characters. More subtle varieties of border-crossing include non-physical or psychic border-crossing – which can be political, apolitical, meta-theatrical or inherent. For example, the entire play takes place in a liminal space, in the consciousness of the Dene See-er, and thus the very staging of the play crosses the border from outside his consciousness or liminal psychic space into the 'public' and 'private' space of the characters' worlds (and the audience's perception, of course).⁵⁰ Furthermore, some characters experience this liminal state as a result of their own birth/rebirth/death, in

⁴⁹ Douzinas, *Human Rights and Empire*, pp. 113-19. See also Chapters 10 and 11 of Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

⁵⁰ This crossing into other worlds becomes a kind of visual and aural heteroglossia. Again, see Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama* (pp. 83-5) for a discussion of polyphonic discourse in postcolonial, carnivalesque theatre.

addition to experiencing it indirectly as members of the Dene See-er's consciousness.

In the case of *Burning Vision*, border-guarding can be seen in divergent circumstances: the neocolonial collaborators cross the borders of the *homo sacer* and the collective oppressed. The collective oppressed, groups of *homo sacer* who are forced into the same shared space, and the individual *homo sacer* sense this, and so they guard their borders. But the neocolonial machine also practises border-guarding by isolating the collective oppressed and *homo sacer*.⁵¹ Thus a cause-and-effect dialectic or duality unfolds, fuelling combative crossing and guarding. In order to undertake intentional border-crossing, one must see some value or reward in crossing. Of course, given their divergent epistemologies, the neocolonial collaborators and the collective oppressed often value different things, although they do share some basic desires. Both groups, albeit for different reasons, see the value of the land and all things associated with it (flora and fauna, rivers, mountains, and so on). For the neocolonial collaborators, the land is a resource that can be financially exploited. For the autochthonous characters, the land is a source of life, a kind of relative, and a giver of sustenance. The autochthonous peoples see their relationship with land and nature as symbiotic. In other words, the neocolonial collaborator's relationship with the land is profane, and the autochthonous relationship is sacred. As a result, the deconstruction of divergent value systems plays a significant role in deciphering how autochthonous characters see border-crossing in *Burning Vision*.

Peter Kulchyski's articles, 'From Appropriation to Subversion: Aboriginal Cultural Production in the Age of Postmodernism' and 'Primitive Subversions: Totalization and Resistance in Native Canadian Politics', elaborate the Marxist and LaCaprian notions that the totalising, commodifying system of the West 'crosses' the 'primitive' value system through economics.⁵² Indeed, the neocolonial collaborators' late-capitalist system attaches value to power, material wealth, and the control of resources. In this late-capitalist system, nothing is denoted as 'sacred'; indeed, this system desacralises animist and pantheist or autochthonous beliefs. Hence, the border-crossing into the Dene territory can be considered both epistemic and ontological. This concept of the settler's biopower or ability to control, enter and

⁵¹ This isolation can be seen meta-theatrically in the economic exploitation of the Dene by the Canadian Government and by colonial collaborators. It can also be seen in the Americans' and Canadians' internment camps for Japanese émigrés.

⁵² See Peter Kulchyski, 'From Appropriation to Subversion: Aboriginal Cultural Production in the Age of Postmodernism', *American Indian Quarterly* 21: 4 (Autumn 1997), pp. 605-20. See also Peter Kulchyski, 'Primitive Subversions: Totalization and Resistance in Native Canadian Politics', *Cultural Critique* 21 (Spring 1992), pp. 171-95.

delineate the territory of the *homo sacer* becomes a central theme in *Burning Vision*; the neocolonial collaborators cross others' borders at will. The subversive dramatisation of these border-crossings literally rewrites or repositions the neocolonisation of the Sahtu Dene as histories of oppression, rather than as a glorified history of conquest, war or economic advancement. Indeed, the desacralisation of the Dene borders and space by the Brothers LaBine instigates a cycle of 'crossing' and 'guarding' that extends even beyond death. In this sense, border-crossing and border-guarding position the body and space, and thus the body in space, as a text upon which history can be written, rewritten and subverted.

In Movement One, the Brothers LaBine trespass on Dene territory. The Sahtu Dene resist the 'crossers', guarding their borders in an act of protectionism. The Brothers LaBine assert their land claim by officially creating the Eldorado Mining Company. Famine, created by white overhunting of caribou, forces the lowering of the Dene's guard; the Dene cross over the newly demarcated white border by taking jobs working for the Brothers LaBine (and concomitantly for the Canadian Government). Illustrated pictorially, this process would look like a series of concentric circles, in which he or she who is crossed retreats, redrawing his/her borders slightly inside the preceding boundary, until the contained and guarded space becomes so small that it effectively implodes. This collapsed space forces the crossed to cross outwards into the space of the original crosser. Simply put, the *homo sacer* must move outwards, in the case of the forced diaspora or exile, and/or inwards (onto a reserve, for example). The neocolonial collaborators succeed in 'crossing' and 'guarding' borders. The *homo sacer* and the collective oppressed who attempt to border-cross ultimately fail. Moreover, in *Burning Vision* the *homo sacer* and collective oppressed characters' bodies create another, subtler kind of border crossing, because they 'disturb identity, system, order'.⁵³

In *Burning Vision*, border crossing can occur through intermarriage – a subtle, albeit inherently dangerous and political event. The skin of those born from intermarriage reminds both parental groups of their mutual disgust, resentment and hatred, and thus the body becomes a site of abjection, the embodiment of disdainful otherness. As Marc Maufort states in *Transgressive Itineraries*, 'The sense of hybrid identity is reinforced when one deals with *half-caste* characters, who feel it impossible to identify either with the values of their Aboriginal ancestry or with those

⁵³ Julia Kristeva, *New Maladies of the Soul* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), p. 4.

of the white world'.⁵⁴ In *Burning Vision* this is the case for Rose and her son Koji. Métis heroine Rose is the motherless daughter of a Dene woman and an Irish Catholic man. Rose is abjected by both her family, community and country. Her presence is expressed in the 'gothicisation' of her surrounding world. In Movement Two, Rose describes in soliloquy her exclusion from both sides of her family, first describing her mother's relatives to the Widow: "Sit in the parlour," My Irish father would say when the Indians came ... Their red feet never touching the floor of the cabin. Never touching us, the half-breeds.'⁵⁵ Here one sees Rose's father physically forcing her separation from her Native family. Obviously, however, the exclusion is dualistic: the 'Indians' 'never touching' them signifies the otherness that the 'Indians' assign Rose. Further examples of this abjection emerge in the initial tension between Rose and the Widow. Interestingly, Rose's relationship with the Widow is strained at the beginning, revealing the conflicts between 'full-' and 'mixed-blood' communities. Upon meeting the Widow, Rose says: 'I am a Métis.' The Widow replies, 'You don't have to tell me. I can tell from the way white sticks to your bones.'⁵⁶ Further examples of her abjection, by her father and 'whiteness', occur when Rose describes her father sending her away 'up North', to work and marry.⁵⁷ The Widow interjects: 'What's wrong with our good men?'⁵⁸ The tension which exists between 'our' and 'their' heightens the sense of Rose's abjection. Perhaps it is this binary exclusion from both 'pure' communities that helps to foster Rose's bond with the outsider, Koji. Rose gives birth to Koji the Son. The birth of the character Koji the Son can arguably be interpreted as a metaphor for Canada's potential to become a cosmopolitan, tolerant country. His birth establishes Rose's symbolic role as intercessor between Canada's past, present and future. Koji the Son also becomes a kind of phoenix – he is literally born from the ashes of his parents' atomic pyre.

The Widow is another important border-crosser. She constantly crosses borders, as she is not bounded by the time-space continuum. She is a shaman who seamlessly slips into the spirit world and can shape-shift between the archetypes of maiden, mother

⁵⁴ I consider the phrase 'half-caste' highly contentious; my quotation of the phrase here, I hope, functions to show that the topic of hybridity or miscegenation (which is also a contentious phrase) is a critical minefield. For the purpose of this study, however, I am not problematizing this point. This quote comes from pp. 10-11 (emphasis added).

⁵⁵ Clements, *Burning Vision*, p. 38.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁵⁷ For a discussion of how Marie Clements is readdressing the myths of the Canadian 'North', see Sverrir Jakobsson, *Images of the North: Histories - Identities - Ideas* (New York: Rodopi, 2009), p. 57.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

and crone. She exists simultaneously in ancient and modern Dene spatialities. I term her a chronotopia-shifter, a character who can traverse multiple spatialities and liminal states. The Dene See-er sees the future most clearly through the Widow because she is a chronotopia-shifter, because she enacts the entire history of Dene colonisation. She experiences the time of plenty before the mining companies took over the land; the time of change, when her husband goes off to work in the mines instead of fishing and hunting; and the time of loss, when, bereaved, she is left without partner, income or home (as she intimates in her final monologues, the land and animals are poisoned and she and the people can no longer safely live off the land). Indeed, she is the only character in the play with the ability to cross spatialities intentionally.

By crossing these spatialities she is also able to meta-theatrically present the audience with the modern-day Dene reality. In a sense, she tells the new history by virtue of her magical-real ability to traverse spatio-temporal reality. As she says in monologue, ‘The Coolies, the Indians, the Dene, the People – our men, my man worked hauling those sacks, in long lines, from one man to another. A chain passing the rock. A rock we called the money rock.’⁵⁹ This dialogue, which is delivered in direct address, becomes meta-theatrical because it speaks in the past tense of something that the audience sees in the present tense, in the following scene, through the stevedores and Captain Mike. Her crossings ultimately come to be political, apolitical, inherent and also meta-theatrical. To the Native audience member, this character becomes an empowering figure, capable of traversing time – of embodying language, tradition, sacredness. Furthermore, the Widow’s double-casting/shape-shifting into the Japanese Grandmother reinforces the Widow’s shamanic border crossing. Her shape-shifting into the Japanese Grandmother reinforces her role as a spiritual intercessor in the time-space continuum. She becomes a collector of spirits – one who welcomes spirits into the liminal space between life and death.

By comparison, the Dene See-er’s crossing introduces the possibility for meta-theatrical devices to be perceived by characters within the story. His border crossing is perceived as neutral by some and as antagonistic by others (and yet is completely unperceived by a few). For example, in Movement One, when the Dene See-er appears on Fat Man’s television chanting and dancing, his resplendent costume flashing, Fat Man understands this as infiltration by the enemy. As this can be interpreted as an act of intrusion, since the apparition is uninvited by Fat Man, in whose ‘home’ the television sits: this is a political border crossing. This border crossing can also be

⁵⁹ Ibid.

interpreted as a reappropriation of space, as Fat Man's house is on what was at one time Native soil. Effectively, this intrusion can therefore be seen as a retaliatory border crossing. It can also be interpreted as border-guarding, because the Dene See-er's appearance coincides with Little Boy's presence in Fat Man's home. Conceivably, the Dene See-er has entered this world to protect Little Boy, to guard the treasure of his people. Fat Man, paralysed by fear of the invasion, begins to distrust Little Boy.⁶⁰ Moreover, as I have discussed, this border crossing and border-guarding are also magical, further illustrating how magical realism can be an effective tool in the construction of new histories.

⁶⁰ Little Boy 'colonises', and actually steps into the clothes of, the Dene See-er in order to embody the border-crossing; he becomes the host body for non-parasitic, symbiotic coexistence with the Dene See-er. Thus, from here onwards, the Dene See-er also exists physically, and not just psychically, inside the story.

Chapter 3

Research and Practice: *We're Gonna Make You Whole*

There are a number of different kinds of documentary theatre. Verbatim, perhaps the best-known mode of documentary theatre, is based on the words of interviewees. Tribunal theatre does not rely on interviews, but rather uses material from court cases or tribunals. A further genre of documentary theatre – testimonial theatre – is performed and written by the other. For example, South African Yaël Farber has constructed and directed a number of plays about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and apartheid with fellow apartheid survivors.¹ The plays dramatise the experiences of the writer and deviser(s)/performer(s). Having read a number of postcolonial documentary plays I came to understand that my own work could not be neatly described as documentary because, ultimately, I was not attempting to document or present documented events, but rather to challenge the mainstream narrative through direct, magical interjection.

It was through this realisation that I began to see the possible existence of the magical-real new historical genre. In my own work, leading up to and including the plays I developed for this doctoral thesis, I have grappled to define my identity. A half-Canadian, half-American, despite having spent more of my childhood in the United States, I have always ‘felt’ more Canadian. In undertaking this examination of my work, I read the work of numerous American and Canadian dramatists, and ultimately felt that my work was much more closely aligned with the work of the Canadian dramatists. I never felt fully at home in the United States; since both French and English were spoken in our home, I experienced a sense of shame and embarrassment associated with my otherness. In the two plays I have submitted for examination, I attempt to locate my identity through my conflicting experience of duality.

Having grown up in Florida, one of five states that border the Gulf of Mexico, I was gravely distraught by the 2010 BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster. Driven by rage and disgust, I decided to write a series of plays that would challenge what I saw as the highly problematic mediated version of events. The plays, listed in order of construction, *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, *The Gift* and *Live and Unplugged* offer subversive perspectives of the events surrounding Hurricane Katrina and The

¹ Yaël Farber, *Theatre as Witness: Three Testimonial Plays from South Africa* (London: Oberon Books, 2008).

Deepwater Horizon Disaster. *We're Gonna Make You Whole* and *The Gift* are both magical-real new history plays, and my one-woman show *Live and Unplugged* is a folk musical that employs new historicism. In this critical analysis I touch lightly on *The Gift* and *Live and Unplugged*, but focus predominantly on *We're Gonna Make You Whole* because it was the first play I wrote for the doctoral process and because it was published by Oberon Books in 2011, at the end of my first academic year.

In creating *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, I spent a great deal of time in and around the Gulf of Mexico, read a multitude of sources, spoke to people living throughout the Gulf, and watched hours of footage of the disaster. Like Marie Clements's *Burning Vision*, my play *We're Gonna Make You Whole* is magical-real new history play that privileges a subversive, abject perspective of real events. In magical-real new history plays, like documentary plays, the dramatised events are researched, edited and carefully constructed. They also often dramatised some elements of first-hand experience. Like *Burning Vision* (which incorporates elements of Clements's personal experience), *We're Gonna Make You Whole* incorporates some small aspects of my own experience, primarily of the process of conducting the research itself. The play is also inspired by the experiences of other real people. Indeed, the character Nancy's story is based on some of my own experiences, but primarily those of my good friend, the film-maker Nancy Boulicault who did much more extensive research as part of her construction of a documentary film.² A great deal of the research on toxicology draws from the work of leading toxicologist Dr Riki Ott. I also dramatised the findings of journalist Dahr Jamail, who has endorsed my work and with whom I have had several conversations. I also indirectly reference Wilma Subra³ and Michael Robichaux,⁴ two Louisiana-based experts who have been instrumental in raising awareness of Gulf citizens' post-disaster health problems. (The character Nancy addresses two characters based on Subra and Robichaux – Wanda Sanders and Mike Rubineaux – in her pivotal soliloquy).

In contemplating this new history, I began, of course, to conceive of how this story might be told. What I was reading and experiencing was nightmarish. My home

² Ultimately, Nancy documented my work as part of her film *Facing the Gulf*. She recorded most performances of my August 2011 production of *We're Gonna Make You Whole*. The paintings from her *Facing the Gulf* portrait project formed the backbone of my productions' set.

³ There are a number of articles about Wilma Subra, recently including Julie Cart, 'A Strong Voice in Louisiana's Cancer Alley', *Los Angeles Times* 27 August 2013, available at <latimes.com/local/columnone/la-me-c1-subra-enviro-20130827-dto,0,6827309.htmlstory#axzz2l06U2iuN> (accessed 18 November 2013).

⁴ The personal website of Dr Robichaux can be found at <drmikerobi.com/home-page.html> (accessed 10 October 2013).

state was being deluged by swathes of oil, and BP was quite obviously lying to the Americans and to the world about the severity of the disaster. I watched hours of footage of rescue workers desperately attempting to clean and extract fauna from fiery infernos of oil and dispersant, and this was not occurring somewhere alien but rather on the shores of the state in which I grew up, where all of my American family live. Driven to depression by feelings of helplessness, I decided that the play I would write would need to be psychically magical-real; I did not feel any other form of new history other than the magical-real, and most specifically the spectral, could adequately depict the psychological suffering of someone who had directly experienced the explosion of the rig or the loss of a loved one as a result of the explosion. It became clear to me that this play would need to be spectrally magical-real. I decided that the play should follow the experience of a rig worker and should be an anti-hero's journey. Thus, I decided to make the protagonist's inner demons living, breathing characters. It also seemed obvious that the protagonist, like many of the workers who experienced the explosion, would be suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a psychological condition that some people who experience traumatic events develop. The Mayo Clinic suggests that 'Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event'.⁵

Having written a number of magical-real new history plays before beginning *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, I wanted to try something new with this play; I wanted to incorporate an omniscient chorus who could break the fourth wall, I also wanted all of the members of the chorus to be double-cast (and in some cases triple-cast) and to play a group of interrelated characters who were not omniscient. This was useful as it allowed a polyphonic discourse, but it was also practical as I was staging the play myself and did not have the budget to hire an enormous cast. In *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, the events of the BP Deepwater Horizon Disaster are the source of the family conflict: everything revolves around the disaster. In centring the conflict around the lives of Curtis and Rochelle, a young married couple, I intended to humanise the aftermath of the BP disaster. I wanted to present a situation – domestic conflict – to which a theatregoer might be able to relate. The Chorus speaks on behalf of the ordinary residents of the Gulf of Mexico. The Chorus speaks directly to the audience

⁵ The Mayo Clinic describes the primary and secondary symptoms of PTSD in the following online article: <<http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/post-traumatic-stress-disorder/basics/definition/con-20022540>> (accessed 18 May 2015).

about the real, unfolding events that surround the conflicts between Curtis and the other characters. The Chorus clarifies the important details of the BP disaster. Furthermore, the Chorus also performs its own magical-real functions. As a projection of Curtis's psyche, the Chorus materialises, and even undergoes anthropomorphosis, by transitioning into an undead woman – a dead colleague and ex-lover of Curtis who is, in the play, an embodied dramatisation of Curtis's tortured psychic state. In re-enacting her death through Curtis's post-traumatic flashbacks and nightmares, the text brings her suffering into the present; this forces Curtis to exist in a liminal state where the time- space continuum bears no relevance to his experience of reality. Like The Widow in *Burning Vision*, Curtis is a chronotopia-shifter. Four years later, I would, realistically, have written this play very differently. It does, realistically, represent a leap in my aesthetic journey, a turning point in my understanding of characterisation.

3.1 Characterisation

In constructing *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, I began to interrogate the importance of understanding and developing the physiological make-up of my characters. In examining the relationship between PTSD and the psyche (and the side effects of PTSD on a person's physical state), I began to recognise the importance of understanding where each of the characters 'held' his or her emotions; as a performer, I had often employed 'feeling' responses to particular events (from a character's past or from events in a play/film) in different parts of my body, in order that I could most effectively explore the physicality of my characters. I began to employ some of my own acting techniques to my writing process. One of the results of this was the creation of an exercise I call 'vivisection'.

3.1.1 'Vivisection'

In 'vivisection' I essentially construct the physicality of characters in order to gain a better understanding of the relationship between the characters' physical make-up and their personality, syntax, voice, sexual orientation, intellect, and so on. This is an elaborate visualisation exercise. I begin by standing with my feet a shoulder's width apart. I close my eyes and visualise my body as if I am observing it from the outside, as if I have an omniscient perspective on myself. I then visualise unzipping my skin, as if it were an outfit. While continuing to step outside of this visualised skin 'outfit', I also begin to concentrate on the sensation of having exposed bones and flesh. And then I begin constructing a character by creating a complex character mould over my

imagined, flayed body. I begin with the head, from the crown, and then visualise hair, and so on, and proceed all the way down to the soles of the character's feet. After this process is completed, I begin to search for the character's relationship with his/her body.⁶

3.1.2 The 'Interview'

I begin interrogating the character's relationship with his/her body by conducting a kind of interview. I preselect 100 questions. These questions examine the character's genetic make-up, early life, physical health as a result of early life, sexual orientation and proclivities, and so on. The answers to these questions help me to construct the inner and outer landscape of the character. I conduct these 'vivisections' for all of my characters.

3.1.3 'Group Interactions'

Having conducted 'vivisections' and interviews on all the characters in the play, I ask each of the characters (using the interview process again) questions regarding their relationships with the other characters. I use research to develop a better understanding of the ways in which characters interact with their worlds and with the audience. In *We're Gonna Make You Whole* (and later *The Gift*, *Live and Unplugged* and *The Interrogation*), the 'vivisections', 'interviews' and 'group interactions' served as the beginning of the character-construction process. After conducting these exercises, I proceeded to employ more intellectual and less intuitive or 'felt' characterisation tactics.

3.1.4 Using Research and Intellectual Processes to Develop Characters: Stereotyping

Like *Burning Vision*, *We're Gonna Make You Whole* employs stereotyping as a subversive tool, stereotyping attempts to reverse the colonising and biopolitical gazes. The characters Dr Melkin (the Company psychiatrist) and the Reporter (a Company employee) are stereotypical, exaggerated adversaries, or 'baddies'. This stereotyping of the antagonists creates a polarising effect in which Curtis, the holotrope, and his foes directly oppose each other. Curtis functions as a holotrope for all the employees of the Company who were injured in the disaster. This power struggle should heighten Curtis's sense of individual, social and cultural alienation. He feels persecuted, but he

⁶ This is also a practice I have begun employing in my work as a director.

also experiences acute shame because of his inability to address his trauma alone. He feels emasculated and embarrassed by his financial situation; he equates personal worth with career success and financial stability. Even as a young man, he provided for his family and helped raise his younger siblings (after his father abandoned the family); so when he finds himself, for the first time in his life, unable to solve his own problems, rather than reach out, he self-medicates with alcohol and drugs.

3.1.5 Misogynist Motifs

One actress performs all the ‘baddie’ roles;⁷ the actress who performs these roles should also play Antoinette, the protagonist’s cousin-in-law (whom the Company murders). This multiple casting creates a visceral juxtaposition that should concurrently heighten the suffering of the oppressed character Antoinette, and exaggerate the ‘badness’ of the Company characters, and consequently of the Company. This casting also gives Antoinette agency, because she ultimately ‘faces’ her antagonisers. Since all the characters in *We’re Gonna Make You Whole* emerge from Curtis’s psyche, this ‘casting’ should also shed light on Curtis’s attitudes towards women. Ultimately a deeply misogynistic man, Curtis subconsciously perceives the Company, his oppressor, as a hypersexualised woman, as can be seen in the characterisations of Dr Melkin, the Interviewer and the Dead Shipmate; this hypersexualisation simultaneously reveals his misogynistic perception of women, and exposes his suppressed guilt. That he hypersexualises the Company characters reveals his hatred for women. At the time of the explosion he was the leader of the Deepwater Horizon emergency firefighting team, and so feels overwhelming guilt, self-loathing and personal responsibility for the death of Maria, his lover, and of his other shipmates. His hypersexualisation of Maria is an expression of his guilt – for his inability to save her – and of his infidelity to Rochelle.

Curtis also feels guilt for his complicity in the environmental aftermath of the disaster; he subconsciously believes that the feminine force of the earth is taking revenge on him for ‘defiling’ her. This feminine ‘super-archetype’, a kind of Gaia character (and another holotrope), tortures him psychologically. In this manner, the actress who plays Antoinette and the Company (and Maria) also plays this feminine super-archetype.⁸ Ultimately, Curtis tortures himself through psychological projection, because he feels guilty for his part in his affair with his colleague, and in the act of

⁷ In the premiere I played these roles. This experience personally empowered me, because I felt that I tackled my own demons, my own sense of helplessness regarding the aftermath.

⁸ One might liken the feminine super-archetype to the Buddhist Dakhini or the pre-Hellenistic Gaia.

drilling, the explosion, the environmental aftermath, and the deaths of his colleagues.

3.1.6 Holotropes

As in *Burning Vision*, individual characters in *We're Gonna Make You Whole* represent groups of people or holotropes. Curtis's suffering should be understood to represent the suffering of all those employees of the Company injured or devastated by the disaster; furthermore, his ailments highlight the physical danger that clean-up workers were exposed to, and continue to face, as a result of their exposure to the oil and the dispersant Corexit. Curtis is the Gulf of Mexico's Everyman. Curtis's wife Rochelle, a scientist and clean-up worker, suffers a miscarriage as a result of her exposure to the toxins; she functions as a holotrope for all women who have miscarried (and there have been many) as a result of exposure. Furthermore, Rochelle is also a holotrope for all women who are abused by husbands affected by such disasters.⁹ Her concurrently direct and indirect suffering should convey the fact that people have undergone and will continue to experience both psychological and physical trauma as a result of the BP disaster – that not all repercussions of this accident can be seen or 'compensated' for.

Similarly, the character Antoinette, Rochelle's cousin – aside from her other functions as a holotrope – also dramatises the complexity of the suffering of Gulf residents. As a clean-up worker and activist, she experiences intimidation and harassment from the Company, but as a fiancée and daughter, she functions as a holotrope for all those who have lost loved ones as a result of the Company's negligence. Moreover, Antoinette's murder dramatises the fact that the Company fears nothing and no one, and does not operate by the moral codes or laws of any land. In short, stereotypes and holotropes in *We're Gonna Make You Whole* work in two ways: they attempt to destabilise the power of the biopolitical gaze by dramatising the Company's antagonism, and they reinforce the agency of the oppressed characters.

This play is intended to convey my belief that the biopolitical power of the US and of the petrochemical industries is absolute – that the power of the corporation supersedes even that of the US Government. I believe that true democracy – neither virtual nor representational – cannot exist until corporation and state are separated; my audience might subconsciously link this lack of separation with the current global economic crisis.

⁹ Studies link the BP disaster with rising domestic abuse throughout the Gulf of Mexico. In the worst-affected areas of Louisiana, reported domestic abuse has risen 40 per cent. See <blog.al.com/live/2011/02/rise_in_domestic_violence_may.html> (accessed 10 March 2012).

3.1.7 Primary Influences

As the characters from *We're Gonna Make You Whole* emerge from Curtis's psyche, they must be simultaneously stereotypical, as described in the above discussion of holotropes, and also archetypal. These archetypes, supertypes or super-archetypes drew on my reading of the works of William Blake, Haitian Vodoun and postcolonial theory.

Collectively, the Company represents a kind of exaggerated Blakean Urizen – ruled by a single, omnipotent, dogmatic, greedy godhead, 'Nobodaddy'. Given the play's underlying message, that corporation and government are one, it seemed appropriate that BP and the government be characterised as one single entity – the Company. The corpulent and carnivalesque godhead Nobodaddy rules over the Company. Nobodaddy is a metaphor for both the modern biopolitical power structure and the strictures of capitalist society. Nobodaddy rules over not only the rational, but also the irrational world; Nobodaddy even infiltrates Curtis's psyche, his unconscious and subconscious mind. Undeniably, when Dr Melkin gives Curtis his 'diazapanolinephrocholoride', she (and therefore Nobodaddy and the Company) enter his psyche. Dr Melkin – the first embodiment of the Company that the audience sees – functions as a kind of trickster archetype. Like the trickster,¹⁰ she presents herself initially as a sympathetic character, but when Curtis responds negatively to her questioning, she quickly becomes an adversary, blocking Curtis and forcing him to take the (Company's) medicine.

3.1.8 Music

We're Gonna Make You Whole incorporates an original musical score. I am also a singer-songwriter and recording artist. Since I have studied and performed music, composition and musical theatre from a young age, music plays an important role in my aesthetic sensibilities and playwriting process. I often, in fact, compose the music for a play before writing it. This occurred in the process of writing *We're Gonna Make You Whole*: I wrote 'No Riches, No Glory' before I began writing the play. Music is also an immersive device. As indicated in the stage directions, the music should be performed as the audience enters the space and should appear to erupt naturally; it should even be unclear whether or not the music is a performance because the stage space should be

¹⁰ In this play the character is also like a trickster in indigenous Native Canadian mythology. I look to Tomson Highway's trickster work as an example of trickster characterisation.

site-specific. The audience and actors should intermingle. When the play transitions seamlessly from music to theatrical performance, the audience should begin to question when exactly the play begins and the musical overture ends. Indeed, the actors who perform this piece must be able musicians. In the original performance, Lennard Sillevi and I performed all of the songs. Some audience members had heard our music independently of this performance, and so could not be sure whether we were a warm-up act, or whether we were actors in the play. This was deliberate; I aimed to immediately break the fourth wall so I could create a sense of intimacy and proximity between the actors and audience. The breaking of the fourth wall helped the audience to understand the double-casting (and triple-casting) because we transformed into other characters in front of them. We made the transformations obvious.

Chapter 4

Violence

In this chapter, I look at the evolution of the representation of violence in my dramatic writing, concentrating in greatest depth on the representations of violence in my second thesis submission play, *The Interrogation*.

4.1 Representations of Violence in My Early Plays

My unequivocal aim in writing violent plays is to draw attention to the causes and effects of human violence, looking particularly at the violent acts those in power commit against the *homo sacer*. By contextualising such acts within worlds in which they are 'normal', my aim is to engage audiences in a dialectic, to enter into a discourse that examines why humans are violent. I create worlds in which inanimate objects become real, violent memories have power, and the dead and living inhabit the same liminal space. My plays exist almost entirely in liminal states. The violence they contain occurs in the present, past and future. Characters move forwards and backwards in time, propelled by the enactment or memory of violent acts. The violence in these plays can be self-inflicted or psychological. Indeed, without exception, my plays dramatise some combination of the following forms of violence: domestic abuse, rape, physical and psychological torture, and suicide or murder.

Violence is rife in the work of Marie Clements, Judith Thompson and Robert Lepage, arguably Canada's three most prominent contemporary dramatists. Their protagonists are always *homo sacer* whose position in local and national and even international society is precarious. Often, as discussed in the preceding chapters, the perspectives of the abject reflect, and are metonymic of, the violence associated with the colonisation of Canada, with the construction of the nation. The tension between the characters who support state-sanctioned histories and those characters who refute these histories is played out through various kinds of overt and subtle acts of violence. There is a clear struggle in the work of these dramatists, to examine the present from the foreshortened dramatic lens of colonisation, to draw parallels between the violence characters commit against each other and the violence of their shared history. In Clements's work, the friction between the indigenous autochthonous epistemologies and those of the neocolonial collaborators is both metaphorical and literal; First Nations people across Canada continue to suffer abjection by those in power and are engaged in,

as discussed in the preceding chapter, ongoing land and sovereignty battles. In the work of Lepage, the tension plays out through the conflict between Anglo- and Franco-Canadian; in his earlier work, he often utilised both French and English, but privileged French. This privileging of language, which, as I described in the third chapter, is also employed by Clements in her work, simultaneously creates polyphonic discourse and subverts the power of the privileged because it is the abject audience member who benefits from the most complete understanding of the drama. Thompson's plays use similar devices, although the tensions between the abject and those in power are typically illustrated through the mental illness of her *homo sacer* characters, who are, almost exclusively, women. I see my own writing as existing very much in dialogue with the work of these dramatists; I feel we are all grappling with the same questions, with the same desire to understand the nature of violence in the contemporary world.¹ While this doctoral thesis addresses only my dramatic writing, it makes sense for me to acknowledge here that I consider myself an auteur.² I might have very different attitudes towards the staging of violence if I were not; I would never ask another actor to undergo any level of violent stage action that I would not be willing to perform myself. Indeed, I have often played the characters in my pieces who experience the most violent acts.

4.2 The Violent Relationship as Metaphor

I am particularly interested in the relationship between human interpersonal conflict and societal conflict. In dramatising microcosmic violent events, or interpersonal conflict, I have attempted to show the ways in which this violence is symptomatic of larger-scale societal violence. I have researched revisionist histories and new histories in order to understand the contexts in which various kinds of violence, especially epistemic violence, occur. As I noted in Chapters 1 and 2, in conducting this research, I tend to focus on primary sources and archived material remains. Engaging with primary source documents, particularly documents written by people who experienced events, from both the state-sanctioned and abject perspectives, gives me insight into how real people have experienced events in history. This kind of humanist research focus helps me contextualise violence. Researching both historical and contemporary conflict and violence has allowed me to understand how violence affects familial relationships,

¹ Robert Lepage, for example, performs in some of his plays – which he devises with other artists, primarily long-time collaborator Marie Brassard. In more recent years, Clements seemsto have performed in fewer of her plays.

² I began to perform and stage my own work in 2001.

communities and so on.

I feel that, by personalising these kinds of conflict, by creating small-scale scenarios in which violent acts occur, I can most effectively illustrate the complexity of violence (on the macrocosmic scale). In 2010 and 2011, I focused specifically on the dramatisation of epistemic violence, concentrating particularly on the clash between a small, primarily Cajun fishing community and the American petrochemical industry.³ I dramatise the epistemic clashes between the community and the petrochemical corporations that drill on the land and around the adjoining Gulf waters; the stories are told from the perspective of the community.⁴ In these plays, this struggle and violence are dramatised in the context of battles for self-determination.⁵ *The Gift* (2011-12) and *Live and Unplugged* (2012-13) take place in the same town as *We're Gonna Make You Whole* (2011). Since I studied postcolonial theatre and postcolonial criticism in my previous degrees, when the BP disaster occurred, I began researching the relationship between the Cajun people and the oil industry, and I immediately saw connections between the Cajun experience and that of many diaspora populations and postcolonial settler cultures, especially the Acadian and Quebecois, from whom the Cajuns are descended. It was this sense of strong identification with the Franco-Canadian ancestry of the Cajuns that drew me to write about their experiences. Had I not felt so drawn to study the Cajuns, I might have set all the plays in the BP trilogy in Florida, where I grew up.

The Oracles in *We're Gonna Make You Whole* treat the violence of humans as the context for the creation of the Company (and Nobodaddy). This dramatisation is meant to show a direct relationship between the violence of cosmological clashes and the violence humans commit against the Earth. Fundamentally, this violence is epistemic. In my BP trilogy, I illustrate this epistemic clash by juxtaposing two conflicting ontologies: the Cajun traditional practice of living from the land, and the mainstream American consumption culture.

The Gift follows a traditional Cajun fishing family's struggle with the oil industry. The violence in *The Gift* is literal, magical and phenomenological. The human destruction of the environment is literal, but the characters commit violence against each

³ I would place the representations of epistemic violence alongside the representations of rape in George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* or Judith Thompson's *Tornado*. In these plays, the bodies of characters become the sites of postcolonial geopolitical conflict (Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama*, p. 213).

⁴ Many groups in Louisiana and throughout the Gulf of Mexico are struggling to survive the repercussions of this environmental disaster.

⁵ This discussion of self-determination is supported by Jacques M. Henry, and Carl L. Bankston III, 'Ethnic Self-Identification and Symbolic Stereotyping: The Portrayal of Louisiana Cajuns', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 24: 6 (2001), pp. 1,020-45.

other through suggestion and ‘magic’, through touch or psychic will; indeed, the suggestion is that the protagonist, Clem LaFontaine, and the antagonist, Isabelle LaFontaine (his mother), have magical or phenomenological powers. In terms of the staging, this means that the violence is dramatised ‘magically’ because it is not inflicted through the use of violent instruments or weapons. The violence between the characters who love each other (mother-son and son-father) occurs as a result of psycho-spiritual or emotional stress; Clem’s inability to control his powers makes him dangerous; his emotional and psychological anguish causes others suffering because he cannot ‘harness’ his power, and therefore inadvertently ‘leaks’ bad magic. Conversely, the violence committed by Isabelle against those she hates is deliberate and absolute. Isabelle believes she is a powerful shaman-healer. She and Anna (Clem’s non-Cajun pregnant girlfriend) believe that Isabelle caused Anna to miscarry by simply willing her baby to die. Isabelle places her hands on Anna menacingly in order to make a clear point: ‘My son is not yours’. She is reversing Anna’s exoticisation of Clem – reversing Anna’s cartographic gaze on Cajun culture.

In *We’re Gonna Make You Whole*, Rochelle’s miscarriage occurs because she has been exposed to oil and Corexit-contaminated water, and because she is under extreme psychological duress. The miscarriage is primarily literal; it is also a meta-theatrical reference to the real miscarriages reported by women exposed to the toxins associated with the BP disaster.⁶ In creating *Live and Unplugged*, I began to contemplate the ethics of the representation of violence from yet another perspective – that of the audience. This understanding of the ethics and aesthetics of violence, which I developed further in *Live and Unplugged*, informed the other plays I wrote during this period (2012-13): the *End of the World* cycle.

A cycle in five parts, the *End of the World* plays are set in the near future, in a violent, war-ridden, global supernation on the verge of collapse. *The Draft*, the first play in this cycle, occurs just before and just after the war begins. But the remaining four plays have no assigned chronology or spatio-temporality aside from the fact that they are set in non-specific postcolonial cultures; as in the oil trilogy, they all occur in the

⁶ A number of sources discuss the rise in miscarriages in the Gulf states following the BP disaster. The research into the relationship between exposure to the chemicals in the water and miscarriages and other health problems is not yet conclusive. Studies will likely take years to complete. One online article that references this problem can be found at <news.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Health/Story/A1Story20110430-276455.html>. Another useful source is the video interview with Wilma Subra, at <youtube.com/watch?v=7BqMw_QSQL4>. The website of a law firm investigating the claims against BP regarding reproductive health is at <bpzoneclaim.com/blog/effects-of-corexit-on-reproductive-health>.

same dramatic space, and in the same physical location. I wrote them in this way so that they could be staged in any pairing or combination – or in repertory, for example. As in the oil trilogy, a few characters recur in the various parts of the cycle. The character Terry, for example, is the protagonist in three of the five plays. In *The Draft*, he is a young soldier struggling to accept his love for his best friend and fellow draftee, Danny. In *The Other*, he is Danny’s lover. The cycle attempts to dramatise the changing notions of identity in contemporary postcolonial society. I aim to suggest this through the transnational identity of the characters. For example, national identities are undefined; the characters speak in trans-English accents that are not easily identified with any specific English-speaking culture. The most powerful characters are American and British. The others – the abject – speak in more overtly postcolonial accents.⁷ The most clearly defined example of the use of accent as a metaphor for colonisation can be found in *The Interrogation*. Terry, the American tortures the postcolonial Jordan and the proposed rapist, the British Colonel Murray. In this play I aim to illustrate that violence is a tool for the exercising of power. Positions of power are reversed and subverted through the course of *The Interrogation* through the enactment and receipt of violent acts.

In the words of Susan Brownmiller, ‘All rape is an exercise in power, but some rapists have an edge that is more than physical. They operate within an institutionalized setting that works to their advantage’;⁸ such is the case for Jordan’s attacker. Whether he was raped by his boyfriend Murray is unclear. However, he was raped by someone with a position of power in his unit. This is clear. I have chosen to highlight that rape is a form of power enactment by making the entire cast male; my objective is to transition away from gendered victim-blaming. *The Interrogation* is the first play I have written in which there are no female characters; the violence occurs between men, and is committed as part of a performance of hypermasculinity. This represents another departure for me – I have routinely written more roles for women than for men. This has been part of a feminist agenda – to write roles that empower women, to create work for women. In the case of this play, it felt to me that the future must be depicted as

⁷ Refer to my first and second chapters for further information about my interpretation of Achille Mbembe’s postcolony. His work on the postcolony is outlined in: Achille Mbembe, ‘Provisional Notes on the Postcolony’, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 62: 1 (1992), pp. 3-37.

⁸ See Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (New York: Ballantine, 1975), pp. 256.

completely devoid of femininity. I see Jordan as a subaltern in the military sense, in that he is a subordinate officer, and in the postcolonial sense in that he is made abject by the neocolonial collaborators Terry and Murray. Gayatri Spivak explores this positioning of the subaltern in her critical work *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*.⁹

The violence committed during the interrogations derives from my research regarding colonial violence by colonisers and colonial collaborators against subaltern colonised peoples who rebelled against their colonisers. For example, the practice of victim-blaming was a common tactic employed by colonial powers before, during and after World War II.¹⁰ As I will discuss further in the next section, the violence depicted in *The Interrogation* is also inspired by that of British, French, German, Dutch, Spanish and Portuguese colonisers and their collaborators – and the events of the off-stage rape are informed by the details of real rapes, including those that occurred in the former Yugoslavia as part of the Serbs' campaign of genocide against the Bosnians.

In this play, Terry interrogates both the alleged victim and the perpetrator of an intra-military male-on-male rape. Private Jordan Carver, who has been raped, is a working-class expatriate of a British colony; he is uneducated and his language reflects this. His position is made all the more precarious because he is homosexual and has engaged in homosexual acts with a superior officer. Within the context of this world, being homosexual is not only dangerous but criminal – officers are strictly forbidden from engaging in sexual acts with fellow military personnel. Thus, his abjection, by those in power, by the entire military culture of which he is a part, heightens his experience of the periphery; indeed, he knows, though he desperately hopes it will not be the case, that incarceration or 'bare life' lies ahead.

The most violent play of the *End of the World* cycle, *The Interrogation*, is, despite being non-defined in terms of geographic location, positioned in a place of 'bare life'. *The Interrogation* is set in a prison compound that, like Guantánamo Bay, is a site for the torture and detention of *homo sacer*; the location is ungoverned by the rules or laws of any land or nation. Jordan, the *homo sacer*, and other abject characters who live in this world can be sacrificed by those in power at will within the walls of this prison. Indeed, Jordan's existence, like those of all *homo sacer*, is considered disposable by

⁹ See Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

¹⁰ This practice, as well as many other violent tactics of war, are described in Natalia Suárez Bonilla, 'Viol, blâme et contrôle social: le cas des enclaves paramilitaires en Colombie', in Raphaëlle Branche and Fabrice Virgili, eds, *Viols en temps de guerre* (Paris: Payot, 2011), pp. 87.

those in power. What this play ultimately dramatises, through the breaking of Jordan and Murray during interrogation, is that all members of the military in this world are considered disposable. They are simply tools of war. In the context of *The Interrogation*, both Jordan and Murray become *homo sacer*; Jordan, given his subaltern status, begins the play as a *homo sacer*, whereas Murray becomes a *homo sacer* as a result of his reversal of power during his interrogation. It is my hope that *The Interrogation* inspires the audience to question the relevance of torture, to challenge the efficacy of it as a means of fact-finding. As Elaine Scarry posits in her seminal text *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, and as I hope to have elucidated in this play, ‘torture is savagery and stupidity’.¹¹ It is a tool that is used by a regime to break the interrogated. ‘Intense pain is world destroying’, Scarry suggests; ‘the torturers compel the prisoner to record and objectify the fact that intense pain is world-destroying. It is for this reason that while the content of the prisoner’s answer is only sometimes important to the regime, the form of the answer, the fact of his answering, is always crucial’.¹² As the play dramatises, interrogation and torture destroy the lives of all those involved – Jordan, Murray and Terry. Terry garners no new evidence about the case as a result of the interrogation. Terry simply forces one of his victims to accept culpability, possibility at the cost of both prisoners’ lives.

4.3 *The Interrogation*: Postcolonial and Neocolonial Politics

Set in a claustrophobic interrogation room, this compact two-act, three-hand play examines violence, hypermasculinity, torture, love, lust and rape in military culture. The play employs multiple semiosis in order to dramatises the multiple ‘meanings’ outlined in the preceding section: the American Government’s role in the present global economic crisis, the relationship between American cultural hypermasculinity (and the government’s role in the construction of this behaviour) and the creation of American (military and civilian) rape culture. The play’s characterisation positions the soldiers in a triangular power structure that clearly identifies national prominence. Terry, the American, is the most senior officer of the three, and ultimately has the highest status; Murray, the English colonel, has the second-highest status; and Carver, the subaltern soldier, has the lowest status.

From a meta-theatrical perspective, readers or audience members may

¹¹ See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.). pp. 51.

¹² *Ibid.* pp. 28.

understand *The Interrogation* as a dramatisation of the power struggles between ‘postcolonies’,¹³ their former coloniser states, and neocolonial states; certainly the characterisations and the power struggle between the characters are meant to provoke discussion. The rape is a metaphor for the colonial and cartographic gaze – for the exploitation of postcolonies by both former colonial powers and present neocolonial powers. But the rape also has literal, meta-theatrical significance. It is intended to draw attention to rape culture, and to highlight the link between rape culture and hypermasculinity. The practices of victim-blaming and victim-bullying are used in the play in order to draw attention to the historical and contemporary US Government practices of victim-blaming and victim-bullying not only as tools of self-exculpation, but also as tactics of psychological and physical manipulation.¹⁴

As the play progresses, Terry forces the men to admit that their relationship is more complex than either had initially acknowledged. The Colonel ultimately confesses his love for Private Carver – but Carver’s feelings towards Murray are more complex. Thus, the play can also be understood from another perspective: as the story of two men who live in a world that does not allow them to express their sexual desire, or perhaps even love, for each other in an open, healthy way. Whether or not Carver really wants a relationship with Murray remains ambiguous; that he engages in some kind of ‘sexual exchange’ with Murray is clear. Whether it was coerced from the moment of recruitment and then ‘forced’ is unclear. Of course, the complexity of the relationship does not alter the fact that evidence suggests that Carver has been raped, and that it is possible that Murray has raped him. Thus, on a simply theatrical and human level, *The Interrogation* dramatises a complex sexual relationship gone terribly wrong.

4.4 ‘Violence and Hypermasculinity’¹⁵

In his essay ‘Hypermasculinity and Violence as a Social System’, Thomas J. Scheff discusses the relationship between emotional repression and hypermasculinity. He goes on to use Marxism as a lens for examining the relationship between this hypermasculine repression, consequent feelings of alienation and impotence, and violence. He suggests

¹³ Here, the ‘notion of ‘postcolony’ identified specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonisation and the violence which the colonial relationship involves’ (Mbembe, *On the Postcolony*, p. 102).

¹⁴ Of course, it is not just the US Government that has used, and continues to use, these tactics.

¹⁵ This quote comes from veteran Jeff Key’s closing statements on homosexuality and homophobia in the military as part of the dehumanisation process of ‘creating a soldier’, at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=XGYFaTQ7Mg4> (accessed 1 October 2013).

the societal acceptance of behaviours that foster violence leads to society itself becoming violent. Scheff sees the relationship between the repression of shame and anger (along with other emotions) as a result of hypermasculinity and the enactment of mass violence. He calls upon Marx's prediction that German emotional repression would lead to mass violence: 'In a letter (to Ruge, 1843) discussing German nationalism, [Marx] wrote: '[I]f a whole nation were to feel ashamed it would be like a lion recoiling in order to spring.'"¹⁶ Scheff goes on to posit that contemporary wars or incidences of mass violence can also be understood through this lens. I quote his argument at some length here because it is particularly pertinent to critical analysis of the violence in *The Interrogation*:

It may be impossible to understand collective conflict, especially gratuitous wars like Vietnam and Iraq, as long as we ignore its emotional/relational components. It seems particularly applicable to the followers of hypermasculine leaders. Leaders' desire for power and property may often be one of the causes of wanton aggression. Followers, especially the working class, have much less to gain and much more to lose. In her analysis of male, working class Bush supporters, [Arlie] Hochschild proposed that they appreciate his hypermasculine style, since it is either like their own, or a style they would like to adopt: shoot first, question later.

My research into the cultures of the US and British militaries led me to see both entities as essentially microcosms for all manifestations of violence. The majority of the research I conducted in preparing to write *The Interrogation* focused on the examination of US and British military rape culture. When beginning my research, I had numerous conversations with journalist Dahr Jamail about his experiences and observations of military behaviour in Iraq and Afghanistan. The primary focus of our conversations was the prevalence of rape and sexual assault in the US and British militaries during the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations. Dahr pointed me in the direction of the Iraq Veterans Against the War – a group of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan occupations who had become conscientious objectors and were staging organised acts of resistance. Many of the veterans involved in this and other anti-war organisations have openly discussed the prevalence of rape in the military. Indeed, a number of soldiers spoke openly about

¹⁶ This entire paragraph is inspired by the discussion Scheff develops between p. 2 and p. 9 of the aforementioned article, 'Hypermasculinity and Violence as a Social System'.

their attacks during the ‘Winter Soldier’ events.¹⁷ Jamail’s books, *The Will to Resist* and *Beyond the Green Zone*, suggest that a culture of fear in the US and British militaries prevents many men and women from reporting their assaults. In the words of Patty McCann, an Iraq veteran who had served in the National Guard, at the 13 March 2008 ‘Winter Soldier’ event, ‘rank structure was used to coerce women into sexual relationships’.¹⁸ Indeed, thousands of soldiers have come forward to explain how their superior officers coerced them into sexual relationships using either violence or the threat of violence, and many more have detailed their violent assaults at the hands of known or unknown assailants of all ranks and colours. The harrowing documentary film *The Invisible War* chronicles the struggles of men and women who suffered not only violent attack, but also the embarrassment, shame and alienation that result from victim-blaming.¹⁹ An investigation led by Leon Panetta, US Defense Secretary, produced findings suggesting that the numerous men and women who had come forward reported harrowing experiences in which they were, among other things, punished for reporting their rape.²⁰ In *The Interrogation*, the interrogator focuses not on proving or disproving the guilt of the Colonel, but rather on proving or disproving the character of the soldier who is raped. I position the rape as the foundation upon which rest the other episodes of violence that occur throughout the play, suggesting a link between sexual violence, hypermasculinity and the other forms of violence the interrogator uses in order to exert his influence: aggressive, homophobic and misogynistic language; physical intimidation; psychological coercion and torture; and, ultimately, physical torture. In the play, there are five specific acts of violence that I have dramatised as resulting from hypermasculinity and the repression of emotion, namely desire, the initial rape around which the interrogation is focused, the torturous polygraph test, the heated chair, the waterboarding, and the threat of execution.

In committing his crime, Carver’s rapist was violently expressing repressed hypermasculine shame and anger. Although the identity of the perpetrator is not

¹⁷ The ‘Winter Soldier’ event revisits the peaceful resistance movement begun by Vietnam Veterans Against the War in 1971 (Jamail, *The Will to Resist*, pp. 45-70).

¹⁸ This comes from the footage covering the 13 March 2008 ‘Winter Soldier’ event, at <www.youtube.com/watch?v=yEjXBPqhdn8#t=94>.

¹⁹ *The Invisible War*, and the struggle of veterans who suffer violent sexual assault, is discussed at <theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/the-womens-blog-with-jane-martinson/2012/oct/29/rape-military-shocking-truth>, and in many other articles.

²⁰ This assertion is taken from ‘Sexual Assault in the Military: 97.5% of All Military Rapes Aren’t Punished’, at <policymic.com/articles/29935/sexual-assault-in-the-military-97-5-of-all-military-rapes-aren-t-punished>.

known,²¹ it is known that the man who committed the crime had physical strength and stature, a higher rank and an anger problem. That Carver would be raped and punished but not murdered suggests that the perpetrator was attempting to teach Carver a ‘lesson’ and to exert his dominance. The suggestion that an audience or crowd watched while Carver was raped supports this argument. My intention in writing the rape in this way was to highlight that rape and rape culture exist not because men are incapable of controlling their desires or sexual appetites, but rather because the systems and social structures in which these rape cultures develop foster violence.

Informed by torture practices used by British soldiers against Kenyans during the Mau Mau Uprising and by Serbian torture of the Bosnians and Croats,²² the torture in *The Interrogation* aims to illustrate the perpetrators’ dehumanisation of himself and his victims.²³ In the context of *The Interrogation*, the interrogator has unlimited power; he represents the hierarchy of the society in which the play takes place. His decision regarding the fate of both soldiers makes him a kind of necropolitical agent. When he violently waterboards Carver, he exercises his power, proving that, if he so chooses, he can drown Carver. He only commits the waterboarding having already threatened Carver with public execution (beheading). Carver is seen limp at the end of the first act. It should be unclear if he is dead or simply unconscious. The interrogator’s violent necropolitical action is a metaphor for the necropolitics associated with America’s neocolonial agenda. In the opening monologue of *The Interrogation*, Terry addresses the audience, his trainee interrogators, directly: ‘Every motherfucking cuntsucker who comes in has given it as good as he’s got it. Our guy has had a shitty fucking time, but you know what: there is no fucking doubt he’s given it as good as he’s gotten it and worse. Now you get it.’²⁴ By suggesting that the first soldier who will be interrogated has ‘given it’ himself, he is attempting to dehumanise the victim by positioning him as deserving of punishment or torture. If the soldier being interrogated has experienced terrible things, this is inconsequential because he has also committed terrible acts against others. In this system, in this world, everyone is assumed guilty of *something*.

²¹ Colonel Murray never admits to the rape, and is not charged for it, so the audience never learns for certain whether he is the rapist.

²² <iwpr.net/report-news/witness-describes-sexual-torture-bosnia-serb-forces> (accessed 10 October 2013).

²³ Some of the torture practices used against suspected Mau Mau soldiers or sympathisers are detailed in ‘Kenya’s Mau Mau Uprising: Victims Tell Their Stories’, at <bbc.co.uk/news/uk-22797624>. Beverly Allen’s *Rape Warfare* was an important source in my research of Serbian torture practices.

²⁴ *The Interrogation*, pp. 5.

Whatever this something might be, the person is therefore guilty in general, and then liable to, or deserving of, punishment. Of course, it is the person in power who decides who is deserving of punishment. This world, this conception of power, is derived directly from my understanding of Achille Mbembe's seminal essay, 'Necropolitics'. In it he suggests that 'sovereignty means the capacity to define who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not'.²⁵

4.5 Abstract Characterisation and Moral Ambiguity

I wanted to create subtle characterisation in *The Interrogation* – to write the kinds of characters I most enjoy playing, those that challenge a performer, that force intellectual engagement with a text. I wanted to challenge myself to imagine a new, more nuanced characterisation encoded or embedded in the narrative. Since there are only three characters, none of whom needs to be double-cast (though Jordan and Murray can be if the director so chooses), they also do not need gesticulations, as characters did in some previous plays, like *We're Gonna Make You Whole*.

Since a great deal of the characterisation is alluded to but not explicitly defined, the process of creating the characters relies heavily on the construction of a clear, though unseen, backstory for each character. It took perhaps thirty drafts of the play for me to hone what I felt was an adequately subtle characterisation. In all of the oil plays, I explored the aftermath of the BP disaster in great depth, offering the audience explanations for the actions and reactions of the protagonists. In the *End of the World* cycle, the focus shifted towards creating a radically different narrative structure. In *The Interrogation*, the audience is asked to adopt a spectatorial role. (Indeed, the audience almost becomes a character; this is something I will have to explore in more depth in a longer, more developed staging.) As complicit observers, the audience members occupy a privileged but dangerous space. The rules of this world suggest that, as interrogators-in-training, the audience is being asked to occupy an active space. In this context the audience's reactions are implicit in the construction of the world.²⁶ The presence of the audience is known to Terry, the protagonist, but is unknown to Jordan and Murray. Furthermore, the assumption is that all of the events that occur in the play take place in a single spatio-temporal framework. There is no shift between past

²⁵ Achille Mbembe, 'Necropolitics', *Public Culture*, Winter 2003, pp. 27.

²⁶ The audience can, for example, react to Terry's prompting. Perhaps they will. In the event that an audience member reacts, the performer playing Terry will have to make a decision about how he should respond. Of course, potential responses can be presupposed and rehearsed before the staging.

and present. The interrogations take 85-95 minutes, just as the play does. The intermission between interrogations should seem to happen not because a set change or world change is required, but because Terry needs to clean himself and prepare the space. (I am actually rather fascinated by the audience watching Terry doing some of the clean-up.)

4.6 Casting

That the ethnicities and ages of the characters in this play are undefined is deliberate. While I have an imagined casting for these roles, I think that a director who can justify his or her casting choices (acknowledging the absolutes that are given) should certainly feel free to challenge societal stereotypes in staging. For example, I have not clearly delineated where this play can and cannot be set – so if it is staged, for example, in Trinidad or South Africa, I hope that the director will cast in such a way that the local social hierarchies and stereotypes can be subverted. If it is fully staged in Greece in the winter of 2013 or the spring of 2014, I will encourage the director to look within the social strata of her country to find metaphors that resonate with the power structure delineated in the play. It will not necessarily be in the play's best interest for it to be staged in Greece in the same way as it would be in the UK or the US.

In order to make this a play that might evoke the imagination and critical engagement of the audience, and that might call upon the ability of the performers to create connections between seemingly unrelated events, between the contemporary world and the world of the play, it feels necessary to enable the actors to create their own context, their own rationale, their own morality or ethics for their roles in this world – and thus their own backstories and characterisations. The clues towards the characterisations are embedded in the script, and serve as the backbone for the actors' character development work.

4.7 The Staging of Violence: The Enactment of the Metaphor

The violence in *The Interrogation* is carefully structured. It increases in measured increments so that the audience is not immediately bombarded. In the first moments, the character Terry speaks aggressively to the audience. He uses profanity and misogynistic language. This should have a jarring but clearly 'locating' effect. The setting and the language of this environment should be clearly militaristic and hypermasculine. The language of this world indicates a strange and heightened social sphere in which violent language is connected with physical violence. This hypermasculine scenario prepares

the audience for the suggestion that the play will, as the title suggests, involve interrogation. By the time the second character is introduced, the audience should be aware that violence is coming. It will not be a surprise. This, I think, heightens the building of dramatic tension. Furthermore, the violence in the play mirrors the violent progression of the structure of the prologue. Terry initially appears sympathetic to Private Carver; when Carver is not 'helpful', Terry begins to return to the threatening and aggressive language with which he addressed his audience in the introduction. This language then escalates, eventually leading to the first act of physical violence – the first in an escalating series of such acts. Although I have clearly delineated certain acts of violence in the play – suggesting, for example, that the polygraph be a giant torture machine – I have also left the descriptions of the blood and bleeding, and the other more violent acts, less defined.

Chapter 5

The Practice of Writing

In this chapter, I examine my writing methodology. In order to explore the processes of redrafting and revision, I include a discussion of my rehearsal practice. I begin by explaining how I determine my subject. I then explain the initial processes I undertake in order to find the characters. Having reached an understanding of the characters, I construct a musical score inspired by their backstories. After constructing the score, I derive the circumstances in which the characters' lives overlap and then develop a possible synopsis for the narrative. After becoming comfortable with this narrative synopsis, I begin to create an outline for the piece. From here, I break every scene into beats. After constructing beats, I then begin writing. After constructing, usually, three drafts, I begin to rehearse the piece and then carry out further edits. I then rehearse again, re-edit, and, finally, stage the piece.

5.1 The Development of *The Interrogation*: Selecting a Subject and Creating Characters

In my creative work, my inspiration has so far emerged out of issues or ideas that relate to my life.¹ I interrogate an issue as a first step in research and development, attempting to distance myself from my emotional reaction, in order to understand not only the complexity of the issue concerned, but also the nuances of my reaction: what does this topic say about the state of humanity, society and/or civilisation? What is the meaning behind my reaction to this topic? What does my reaction say about me? How many people know about this topic? How do other people react to exposure to this topic? Examining the possible responses to these questions is pivotal, because it forces me acknowledge or formulate my own perspective, and then put it to one side. If, for example, I am disgusted by the practice of torturous interrogation, then in this phase of my development process, I seek to understand why. I begin with questions: Do humans from different cultures have different attitudes towards this practice? Who becomes an interrogator, and why? Are interrogators sociopaths? Are they victims of a complex

¹ Even if I ultimately construct a comedy – for example, the mockumentary *Jenny and Vinny Uncut* (2013) – the impetus for writing the piece always begins with an immediate, visceral, negative reaction to something I have experienced, witnessed or researched. For example, *Jenny and Vinny Uncut* was inspired by the UK phone hacking scandals of 2011-13, as well as by a disturbing experience with a stalker; the mockumentary is a commentary on the parasitic relationship between the press, celebrity culture and the public.

system? Who has the power in an interrogation? Are there ever circumstances in which a torturer might also be a victim? If so, what might bring about this context? How can we define ‘victim’ in a context that is a state of exception?² In such states of exception, can right and wrong, good and bad, become ambiguous or even indistinguishable?³ And because no perspective is ever absolutely authoritative, wrongdoing can never be absolutely determined. Is someone entitled to be absolved of wrongdoing, for example, if the acts this person committed were intentional? Or does intentionality remove the potential for forgiveness? Conversely, is a person entitled to forgiveness if he/she is forced to commit an act of wrongdoing?

5.2 Characterisation

Undertaking to answer these kinds of questions leads me to construct psychological models for each of the major perspectives involved. This process was especially important during research and development of *The Interrogation*, because it helped me to achieve emotional but not intellectual detachment from the topic.⁴ The subject of the play is the ambiguity of truth – the complexity of guilt in the context of war or in a state of exception. I began to contemplate what a play might be like in which one character has been accused of a violent crime against another, and in which the character who is positioned as the victim is also, in the eyes of his society, a criminal. To add further complexity, I determined that, whether the audience knows it or not, the person who would commit the visible, tangible violent acts – the interrogation and torture – would need also to be guilty of a crime for which the victim is interrogated (sodomy with an officer). In previous plays, such as *We’re Gonna Make You Whole*, I explored many interconnecting relationships onstage. In this play, I wanted to try doing very much the opposite of this; I wanted to construct a play in which only some of what connects the characters is seen or defined in the piece. This kind of information- exclusion allowed me to create a dramatic world that might be considered a state of exception.

² See Giorgio Agamben, *State of Exception*, trans. Kevin Attell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

³ Of course, I can only perceive what my intelligence, education and so on allow. I will therefore also miss nuances and perspectives that actors and directors might notice.

⁴ After all, I endeavour to write thought-provoking drama and not didactic propaganda or activist-led exposés. I write because I hope to engage audiences, fellow theatre-goers, fellow citizens, in a debate about our contemporary world.

5.3 Staging and Backstory

After a staged reading of *The Interrogation* in Greece, two audience members approached the cast and creative team. They said that the play reminded them of events that had occurred during their youth under the dictatorship. One said that the play reminded him of his experience of a communal act of torture, in which he intimated he had been involved. He said that those in his community who had refused to torture others were themselves tortured. In this scenario, the average citizen, who would ordinarily – as this man suggested – be horrified by the idea of torturing another person, was forced to do so in order to spare his or her own loved ones. In this scenario, the act of wrongdoing, of causing harm, is intentional; however, it also takes place in a state of exception: Both the torturer and the tortured are dehumanised. The act of torture reduces both people to a condition of powerlessness. I determined that the play would begin after Terry had already undergone his character transformation, after he had discovered his ability to be violent.

The backstory of the play is as follows: Terry was on the fast-track to a high-profile battlefield leadership position. He was also in a secret sexual relationship with his best friend, Danny, a subordinate officer. Terry's superior officers discovered his secret relationship, and his life was instantly forced onto a radically different course. His punishment for having engaged in homosexual acts with a subordinate was that he must become an Internal Affairs interrogator. It was the belief of his commanders that being an interrogator would 'cure' him of his homosexuality. Terry struggles with his new position; ultimately, it is his desire to protect Danny that leads him to become a crafty, terrifying interrogator. He believes that if he advances rapidly in his career he will be able to afford, firstly, to buy Danny's way out of the military, and secondly, to enable him and Danny to build a life together. Highly motivated, Terry quickly rises through the ranks of Internal Affairs. Initially, he relies on his sharp mind to help him determine the guilt or innocence of the personnel he interrogates; he psychologically and emotionally manipulates those he interrogates, but he does not resort to physical brutality in order to extract his confessions. But Terry's anger (at the injustice of his and Danny's suffering) inspires revulsion in him towards all of the personnel he interrogates. After some time in the job, his psychological state declines and he turns away from his early tactics, taking his frustration and anger with his circumstances out on those whom he interrogates. In other words, the pressure of interrogating his fellow soldiers leads him to become, in effect, the dehumanised, dehumanising interrogator his unit chief wanted him to become. That Terry experiences coercion, and conducts

interrogations against his will, is never explicitly articulated in the play. The only clue to this fact is the suggestion that the new recruits – the audience – might be placed in a worse job, in *Collections*, if they make any mistakes. Although the activities of *Collections* are never discussed, the insinuation is that whatever takes place there must be dire.

5.4 Theory

In his monograph *On the Postcolony*, Achille Mbembe suggests that the mass, societal emasculation of men leads to a kind of hypermasculine violence. Mbembe describes the relationship between sexuality and violence in the postcolony as follows: ‘During the colonial era and its aftermath, phallic domination has been all the more strategic in power relationships ... because it has close connections with the general economy of sexuality ... [It comes] not so much from the threat to life during the war as from the individual male’s ability to demonstrate his virility’ Mbembe’s assertions regarding emasculation and ‘phallic domination’ inspired the power struggle dramatised in *The Interrogation*. As I have already noted in the previous chapters, I prefer to create stories that can and do occur in the world – if not exactly as elaborated in my dramas, then at least in ways that resonate with the experiences of real people.

Although I knew, intuitively, that I wanted Terry’s character to be radically transformed as a result of his work as an interrogator, I would not necessarily have decided to draw a connection between repression and physical abuse, on the one hand, and the postcolony or postcolonial theory, on the other, if I had not felt that these connections could be found in the ‘real world’. I began contemplating how the body, in this militaristic, hypermasculine world, could be a site for this postcolonial metaphor, for the struggle between the *homo sacer* and the power structure.¹ In *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*, Gilbert and Tompkins suggest the following:

The body which has been violated, degraded, maimed, imprisoned, viewed with disgust, or otherwise compromised has particular relevance to post-colonial literatures and invariably functions within some kind of allegorical framework. Most often, the personal site of the body ... becomes a sign which must be actively reassigned to a more productive representation ... In the theatre, the derogated body is a potent site of representation since the constraints and oppressions it endures can be visually displayed rather than

simply described.⁵

Gilbert and Tompkins's commentary on the derogated body, and Mbembe's assertions on the relationship between sexuality and violence in the post colony have informed my thinking about the relationship between power and the sexualised body. Through the exploration of the ways in which torture and physical abjection could illustrate the plight of the *homo sacer* I hoped to present the audience with complex dramatisations of power struggles that erupt from the necropolitical actions of the state. I wanted to create a context, through this interrogation, in which the power of the interrogated persons' bodies would be reduced by the state, by Terry – the personification of power. Making the connection that sexual violence and physical and psychological aggression were tools of subjugation within the militant, postcolonial fourth world (described by Gilbert/Tompkins and Mbembe) enabled me to acquire a better sense of how the dynamics between the characters would facilitate the escalation of dramatic conflict.

One of the more influential texts in the construction of Terry's characterisation was *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*. In this text, Derrida frames the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings as an example of a system of justice reliant on citizens' admissions not only of wrongdoing, but also of suffering. He suggests that wrongdoing, because of the difficulty and complexity of the practice of forgiveness, is difficult for humans to process. Indeed, the very concept of forgiveness is reliant, he suggests, on the ability of the suggested assailant or aggressor to acknowledge wrongdoing and promise to cease his criminal behaviour.⁶

5.5 The Musical Score

Having conceived of characters who inhabit the world that I am creating, I explore the characters' emotional states through music. Terry, for example, is a man who struggles with authority, who disguises a great deal of his emotion, as a means of survival, and as a means of protecting Danny. As a result, the songs that I write into the score that are associated with him juxtapose his internal and external worlds. Murray is a character who consciously constructs the personality he performs. He focuses, even in

⁵ Gilbert and Tompkins, *Post-Colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 221.

⁶ See Jacques Derrida, *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 2005.

his weakest moments, on how he will be perceived by others. So the songs in the score that relate to Murray must be more performative, more outwardly emotive, more driven by voice and less by a ‘band’ sound. Ultimately, constructing the score is a kind of pre-text phase that helps me to delineate the elements that define the characters – the rules for their interactions with each other, the world of the play. After developing the score, I move on to constructing beats.

5.6 Beats

As director Mike Alfreds states in *Different Every Night: Freeing the Actor*, ‘Beats are what actors actually play’.⁷ In the context of my writing process, I write every beat with the intention that it follow this logic. Constructing the beats in *The Interrogation* was perhaps the most important phase of composition, and perhaps also the biggest challenge. My aim was to create a piece that would be compact and orderly – easily imagined from a first read. Each beat needed to be precise and lean. The beats had to increase in size and in stake in a methodical and logical manner. Since the play occurs in real time, the sense of danger surrounding the interrogation had to be perfectly paced. The utterly banal minutiae of the case itself needed to be juxtaposed with semiotic clues, with loaded cues that could clarify not only the rules of the world but the characters’ actual behaviour. It was very important for the audience to be able to follow the details of the case, and also to get a sense of how the recollection of the case, and the interrogation, affect the two characters. Moreover, getting the details of the case across clearly was also important, because the events within each beat of the first act mirror the trajectory of Jordan’s military career, beginning with his recruitment and then quickly progressing to his attack. Terry constructs a psychological trap for Jordan by increasing the levels of violence he inflicts with every beat. Terry begins the interrogation with psychological harassment, and then progresses to other tactics using embarrassment, emasculation, aggressive coercion, victim-blaming, and, ultimately, violent silencing. These acts of violence are intended to remind Jordan of the intimidation he has already experienced while serving in the military. This structuring of the beats as a mirror is also designed to reinforce the point that power and status determine all of the relationships in this world. In a very practical way, it also gives the audience semiotic clues about where the story is going. For example, Terry begins by addressing his new underlings. In this address, he creates a relationship with the audience through a discussion about the training they are about to undertake. So the

⁷ Mike Alfreds. 2014, loc. 1824.

audience should understand that new recruits are treated badly, and made to realise that bad things happen to those who do not do well enough on the job.

After the end of the final beat of the introduction, Jordan enters and the interrogation begins. At first, Terry is friendly. However, events quickly escalate. The pace of the play quickens radically when Terry searches Jordan in a manner that simulates anal sex (or rape?); after this, Terry waterboards Jordan and renders him unconscious (or perhaps dead). It is my objective that this kind of methodical planning makes the play both comprehensible and disturbing. I intend that it reinforces Terry's intelligence. I hope the interrogation seems all the more disturbing because Terry's actions seem clearly premeditated. I hope his premeditation of the interrogation gives the audience a sense of the pervasive danger of this world. Moreover, the fact that each beat rises and then falls, tightens and then slackens in tempo, I hope successfully creates the intended dramatic tension between the characters; I also hope that the slackening of tension at the end of every beat allows the audience to be relaxed enough not to 'tune out' because the tension or violence is too extreme.⁸ The beats are measured in such a way that each one begins with action and focuses on driving forward, but then ultimately ends with a disturbance, a break in the tempo. The first beat of the first interrogation is the longest beat of the play. As it establishes the exposition of the play, the raising of the stakes is subtle. The reason for this is that I needed to convey a great deal of information without doing so in an overly expositional manner. I needed to be able to communicate the whole story quickly – though not so quickly that I would lose the audience – and then focus on the characterisation, on the relationships between the three men. Because the first beats in the first act focus on clarifying the context of the world and establishing the events of the attack, Murray's interrogation is shorter than Jordan's. I have much less to establish with the audience in the second act, so I can plunge straight into the relationships between the characters without needing to do the ground-laying necessary in the first act. Having determined exactly the necessary content, length, tempo and ultimate function of each beat, I begin the process of writing.

⁸ Rather than using magic in order to alienate the audience from pure emotional engagement, as I had in a number of my previous plays, I used manipulation of the fourth wall – as described in the previous section.

5.7 Writing

Writing *The Interrogation* was an interesting process. I had plotted out Terry's character and his trajectory throughout the entirety of the cycle – from naive schoolboy through to seasoned soldier – before writing the plays, so I already had a very clear sense before I began research and development (including the construction of the beats) where Terry would need to go through the course of the entire cycle.

In *The Draft*, Terry is young and hopeful. He aspires to go to university and pursue a career as a psychologist. He and his best friend Danny discuss the possibility of being drafted. Through the course of the play, they undergo the pain and frustrations of conscription, of becoming soldiers, of experiencing the reconfiguration of their lives. Danny had seen himself as a soldier; he had been excited by the concept of being drafted. When they arrive in the battle zone, he realises that war was not what they had imagined. Struggling with PTSD and physical strain, Danny develops a problem with authority. Unable to handle the pressures of war, he becomes addicted to both prescription and illegal drugs. This addiction also brings his latent desires out of his subconscious and into his conscious mind. He realises he is in love with Terry, and tries to initiate a sexual act between them. Terry is initially shocked and rejects Danny. Unable to face the realisation that the trajectory of his life has been reconfigured by his conscription, Terry interprets Danny's sexual advance as an attack, and thus reacts badly; he fails to recognise it as a loving, lustful act. This failed sexual encounter initially divides the two men; it is not until they face physical separation as a result of Terry's promotion and relocation to a different base that Terry realises he is in love with Danny. The play ends on a bittersweet note, with the two men engaging in their first sexual encounter, faced with the sadness of their impending separation.

The Interrogation occurs in the same spatio-temporal framework as the final three scenes of *The Draft*. So the characterisation of Terry transitions smoothly from one play to the next. I knew when I began constructing this play what Terry should be like in his silent, private moments, and what he should be like 'on duty'. A determined and focused man, Terry values the opinions of his superiors and fears the system into which he has been subsumed. In order to perform his masculinity, he plays a hypermasculine roughneck. Yet, he would much prefer an intellectual job; he would much prefer not to be at war at all – just to be somewhere safe with Danny. Although we do not see the links between these two plays, the continuous narrative between them informs my narrative construction of *The Interrogation*.

5.8 Conclusion

I have offered my reader the first and last of the eight new history plays I wrote specifically for this degree. The university determined that two plays would comprise the creative component, worth seventy per cent of my final submission, and I felt that it would be apropos to choose the plays that most accurately outline the evolution of my writing process during this study. *We're Gonna Make You Whole*, the first play, begins the cycle of magical-real new history plays. *The Interrogation* is the last of my cycle of five postcolonial history plays. I have also offered a brief critical study that makes up the remaining thirty per cent of the degree. In this critical component, I argue for the existence of a new hybrid genre of drama, the magical-real new history, by examining the work of several, primarily Canadian postcolonial dramatists, who I believe employ the form in their work. I then go on to position myself within the landscape of Canadian postcolonial drama by examining the ways in which I write both magical and non-magical new histories that privilege the perspective of the *homo sacer*.

Through this critical examination I have come to see that many more postcolonial Canadian magical-real new history plays exist than I thought when I first began this doctoral examination. Emboldened by the breadth of this genre, I look forward to further study of the form. I am also looking forward to the further staging of the work I wrote for this process. I hope to stage the oil trilogy in the Gulf of Mexico for the affected populations. My aim in writing this magical-real new history cycle was to raise awareness for the suffering of the people of the Gulf of Mexico; it would, consequently, be a great pleasure to bring this play to the audiences whom they are intended to privilege. I also hope to be part of future productions of *The Interrogation*, which I have now adapted for audiobook and novel. Given the complex power struggle between characters from both colonial and neocolonial backgrounds in this play, I would like to stage it in Canada and the UK. Doing so would allow me not only to work with my existing connections in the theatre, but also to compare the reception of the piece in both countries with the original reception in Greece.

Appendix II

Reference

Notes

There are a number of sources listed in my bibliography that I do not quote in any of the chapters of my critical writing. These sources served as research materials for my creative writing. For example, all of the BP disaster-related books explore the events surrounding the catastrophe. For example, the books on this topic were particularly helpful in allowing me to gain a better understanding of exactly how the catastrophe occurred. I was also fairly ignorant regarding the relationship between the political infrastructure of the southern American states, particularly Louisiana, and the petrochemical industry. These resources helped me understand the history of the relationship between these states and prominent oil companies such as BP.

The sources that detail the relationship between PTSD and behaviour were extremely important in my achievement of a better understanding of the psyches of Curtis LaFontaine in *We're Gonna Make You Whole* and Jordan Carver in *The Interrogation*. Although I do not draw upon the work of any particular source (regarding PTSD), my research on the topic has helped me in the construction of the aforementioned characters. Furthermore, reading critical work is also very important to my construction of my creative work. Slavoj Žižek's writing on violence helped me to determine how and why the characters in both plays might use violence towards themselves and each other. The work of Toril Moi and Elin Diamond has helped me to understand better how I can create empowering female characters.

Undoubtedly, the most important texts in the construction of both my critical and creative work are those written by Helen Gilbert. Dr Gilbert was my tutor at my previous institution. Her work is seminal in the field of postcolonial theatre; indeed, she is considered by most to be the pre-eminent scholar in the field. Her nuanced dissection of postcolonial theatre has helped me to understand why I write what I write. When I began to read her work, I felt as though I had suddenly discovered a legend – a key that explained everything I had ever attempted to expound in my writing. Indeed, reading her work, and then the work of other postcolonial critics, was a turning point for me as a writer. I realised that I was writing from within a landscape, or community of writers, and I felt empowered to speak to this group, to enter into a dialogue with those who were also attempting to address the issues emerging in a contemporary, postcolonial

(Canadian) world. Similarly, reading the work of Lois Parkinson Zamora helped me to understand that much of my writing was indeed magical-realist, at least in parts, and that this style of writing seemed to be emerging in many postcolonial countries. I also became further convinced that my work was magical-realist after conversations with Dr Felicity Gee, then my contemporary at Royal Holloway. It was she who told me she was sure many of my plays were magical-realist. Thanks to the introduction to magical realism that I garnered by reading Zamora (among others) and speaking with Dr Gee, I was able to see that I was using magical realism for the purpose of presenting alternate histories. This development of a sense of new historicism led me back to neocolonial and postcolonial critics like Stephen Howe. Howe's elaboration of the relationship between postcolonial politics and the construction of new histories led me to realise that I was constructing new histories.

Thus, although I do not cite all of the sources listed in my bibliography directly in my critical chapters, they have been important sources in the construction of my creative work, and are therefore necessary additions to the bibliography.

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