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**WHAT ARE THE THEATRICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN WRITING A PLAY
WHICH BROADENS THE DEBATE AROUND TRANSGENDER ISSUES?**

**A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Philosophy
in English
at Massey University, Manawatu,
New Zealand.**

ROBERT JAMES GILBERT

2014

Abstract

Against a backdrop of derision and ridicule, transgender characters have been poorly represented in theatre throughout history. After lengthy interviews with two transgender subjects, consideration is given to theatrical form, narrative, and metaphor in the creation of a new stage play that explores transgender issues in contemporary society. *Trans Tasmin* counters the historical discrimination of transgender representation by placing the transgender characters as credible protagonists. By considering transgender representation in New Zealand plays, and examining models of socio-political plays, the debate around transgender issues is broadened beyond the realm of pantomime and grotesquery. *Trans Tasmin* removes transgender characters from ‘theatre-of-ridicule’ and relocates them to ‘theatre-of-acceptance’.

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What are the theatrical considerations in writing a theatre play, which broadens the debate around transgender issues?

INTRODUCTION

The focus of my thesis surrounds the issues that relate to being a transgendered woman in contemporary New Zealand society. I will investigate the theatrical considerations involved in the creation of a theatre play that will allow me to broaden the debate around those issues and, ultimately, I will consider how that might be evidenced through the writing of a play.

Why theatre? Since before the first recorded theatrical events, the notion of blurring boundaries between male and female has been explored, celebrated, theatricalised. As far back as Euripides' play, *The Bacchae*, through to William Shakespeare's cross-dressing comedies, men have dressed and acted as women for comedic purposes. The Victorian pantomimes, which still have currency in contemporary western theatre, exploited the transgender dynamic by using the 'dame' to deride and titillate, then as they do now. Edwin M. Eigner, former professor of English at the University of California and an expert on Victorian pantomime, pointed out that the character of the dame is the most important in the modern panto and, just as Victorian audiences appreciated the cross-dressing dame for the "madcap sexual element", the modern panto "is necessary for regeneration and rethinking of entrenched, patriarchal custom" (72-73). The history of laughing at a 'man-in-a-dress' in theatre through the ages has contributed to a society where transgendered people are widely discriminated against, misunderstood, ridiculed and even feared. Therefore, as a result of the traditional exploitation of the transgender dynamic in theatre, this thesis will use the medium of theatre to explore the topic.

Shape and form of thesis

This thesis is about developing my own learning, tolerance and understanding, whilst exploring the possibilities of imbuing experiences of transgendered women creatively through the writing and development of a play for theatre. I will examine the issue of providing oppositional elements and explore what happens when tensions are created

between characters in disagreement, and when oppositional languages are made manifest. And through that process I aim to broaden the debate around transgender issues through the representation of transgendered characters in my play.

First, I will discuss the issues related to transgender and what brought me to this quest. This will include the negotiation of matters related to the collection of personal stories and experiences, far from my own, and poeticising those stories. Next, I will examine transgender representation in three New Zealand plays, and explore the use of the metaphor of *The Bacchae* in my play. Finally, I will visit models of political theatre in another three plays to see if they can provide devices and frameworks, which I can synthesise into my own writing to strengthen its socio-political responsibility.

CHAPTER 1 – TRANSGENDER ISSUES

What is transgender?

Trans is Latin for across, hence transgender literally means ‘across gender’. Member of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health, Nicholas M. Teich, describes transgender as “an umbrella term with many different identities existing under it” (2). He says ‘transgender’ covers identities such as *gender variant*, *gender queer* and *cross-dresser*, as some examples. Interestingly, he also notes that the term *transsexual* is dated and “akin to calling a gay or lesbian person ‘homosexual’” (*ibid*). Similarly, renowned American sociologists, Patricia Gagné and Richard Tewksbury (1998), define ‘transgender’ as “a term that refers to a spectrum of individuals who express gender in ways that deviate from the gender binary, and includes transsexuals, cross-dressers, and others” (81).

Sociologist and author of *Transgender Voices: Beyond Women and Men*, Lori B. Girshick, reminds us that *gender roles* are behaviours and ways of thinking and that *gender identity* “is an individual’s internal sense of gender (whether that person feels masculine or feminine, a bit of both or neither, or however a person self-identifies, notwithstanding the traditional categories)” (2).

Teich cautions that *transsexual* and *transgender* are not exactly interchangeable. He states that, “by and large, *transsexual* refers to a person who identifies as the opposite sex of that which he or she was assigned at birth. *Transgender*, on the other hand, includes transsexual people, but the term also encompasses many more identities” (3). Furthermore, being transsexual does not necessarily mean that someone has changed sex, nor does it require surgery or any medical intervention. “Surgery or other medical interventions are not what legitimize someone’s transsexuality” (*ibid*).

The other major consideration in beginning to understand the dynamics around gender and gender identity is the challenge to the gender binary social construct. The *gender binary* is a social system where people are thought to have either of two genders: male or female. The gender binary system expects those genders to correspond to birth sex. From the sociological point of view, British gender experts Richard Ekins and David

King say in their distinguished text, *The Transgender Phenomenon*: “it is this binary gender divide which provides the principal social structural determinant within which all gender relations are played out” (233). Moreover, Teich claims that the gender binary system is rigid and exists for easy categorisation and labelling purposes (5). He points out that for most people this is taken for granted and accepted as natural:

Females who identify as women use the women’s restroom. Males who identify as men dress in suits and ties ... It is the way it is, and that fits well for many people (*ibid*).

Girshick challenges the bi-gendered view of humanity: “Equating sex with gender expression is stifling and, ultimately, limits a lot of wonderfully masculine women and feminine men in their expression of their humanity” (32). She offers a new conceptualisation of sex, gender, and sexual orientation that allows for “all configurations of bodies, identities, and attractions” (180-181). She does this by considering a framework of sex continuums. These consist of parallel continuums all of which exist within each individual.

Ekins and King note further, “many MTF [Male to Female] trans people know, for sure, that they are not men; but they do not consider themselves ‘women’ in the same sense that birth-assigned girls have become women. Many MTF trans people consider themselves ‘trans women’, or ‘women of transsexual experience’, for instance” (224).

Therefore, notwithstanding the generally accepted broad definition of *transgender*, for the specific purpose of my play and this thesis the term *transgender* will refer to those MTF [Male to Female] transitioned individuals who identify as, and present themselves as, female. This includes, but is not limited to, those who have undergone hormone therapy treatment and have had, or are about to have, gender reassignment surgery.

Ethical transgender representation

Professor of Philosophy at the University of San Diego, Lawrence Hinman, defines ethics as: “the conscious reflection on our moral beliefs with the aim of improving,

extending, or refining those beliefs in some way” (5). In view of that, I want to create a theatre play that poeticises real stories shared by transgender women, and my aim is to treat them, and their stories in a manner that is fair, rational, and sensitive to them and the transgender community. It will be a play that defies a theatre tradition that uses cross-dressing and other transgender representations as figures of ridicule, such as the panto-dame from the Victorian age that continues in a tradition today of low comedy and grotesquery. As Professor of Musical Theatre and Director of Postgraduate Research Students at the University of Winchester, Millie Taylor points out, “the pantomime dame refers through innuendo or irony to ‘his’ maleness within pantoland asides and comedy” and at whom audiences can “laugh at aspects of the grotesque character being presented” (106).

Elizabeth Wood, director of the 1982 documentary, *The Pantomime Dame* observed that, “when you watch a dame in a pantomime, you’re watching society’s attitude to women, and by laughing you condone those attitudes” (cited in Senelick, 250). Conversely, I contend that by laughing at the dame, audiences are reflecting society’s attitudes toward *transgendered* women. Psychologist Dr. G.G. Bolich, at Webster University in South Carolina, agrees. He says, “by laughing at the crossdressed entertainer, we keep crossdressing itself relegated to the realm of the foolish” (58). Therefore, it is my desire to write a play that changes the realm that transgender characters occupy. I want to put transgender characters and the issues around being a transgendered woman at the core of my play and, in doing so, I aim to interact with and represent members of the transgender community ethically in all respects.

Why transgender?

My interest in understanding and coming to terms with transgenderism was largely brought about by the transition of a significant male role model in my life. As a young man whose biological father was absent from an early age, and whose stepfather was a distant figure, I subconsciously sought meaning and guidance on male gender expectations elsewhere. That is to say, I was looking for someone to show me what it meant to be a man, and how to behave as a man. The person who was that role model for me, agreed to a four-hour interview in January 2013, and a 20-minute follow up interview in April 2013. I will call that person, ‘Subject-A’.

For more than 20 years, Subject-A was the man I wished to be. As a man, he was a former representative rugby player, yet loved theatre and poetry. He served in the army, had kids, drank beer, played the guitar and sang soulfully. He was a strong family man, and a decisive, driven and bold businessman. He also cared deeply about humanity, people's feelings, and was a social activist. He showed me that you could be a heterosexual kiwi male, yet it was okay to express a softer side with compassion and artistry. He was, what was termed in the 1980s, 'a sensitive new age guy.' That is who I wanted to be.

However, life was a lie for Subject-A. When he was in his late 50s, Subject-A had sex reassignment and became a woman; now, more than a decade later, she self-identifies as a transgendered woman or wakawahine. By this time I was an adult and had been living my life trying to follow in the footsteps of a wonderful man. Like him, I loved rugby and theatre equally. I loved music, poetry and played golf. I loved my family and was decisive, driven, bold and expressive. So when I learned that Subject-A's gender representations were not what everyone thought, it made me question my own sense of maleness and moral values. As one of the characters, Todd, says in *Trans Tasmin*: "It's not every day someone comes along and tells you that the sky is green" (81). I needn't have concerned myself, of course. That moral guidance was as good as it gets and the role modelling Subject-A provided me, although never asked for, still holds me in good stead. He was a good man then, just as she is a good trans woman now. Indeed, a good person. Nonetheless, the thinking I did after Subject-A transitioned was a major determining factor driving the choices I made in the writing of *Trans Tasmin*.

Subject-B I had known for 20 years as well. However, I had only ever known her as a woman. She had her gender reassignment in the 1960s. For the first five or so years of our friendship I only ever thought of her as a woman. One day a colleague of mine whispered to me, "you know she used to be a man?" I was shocked. "You can tell," they said, "big hands." This derogatory stereotype found its way into *Trans Tasmin*:

SIMON: I reckon you could tell the men easier than the women.

TASMIN: Really?

SIMON: Mmm. Big hands.

TASMIN: Pardon?

SIMON: Most men have bigger hands.

TASMIN: That's a bit of a generalisation, isn't it? (76).

So for the next 15 years I knew that Subject-B was transsexual but we never discussed it. I ignored the gossip of my friends and colleagues, and the derogatory comments of countless others over the years. It bothered me that people could be so negative about her for I simply accepted her as she was: a creative, clever, witty, fascinating person. I conducted a four-hour interview with Subject-B in January 2013, also.

The interviews

Both subjects are, as the vast majority of transgender people are, “well educated and [have] long employment histories in the skilled trades and professions” (Gagné, Tewksbury, and McGaughey, 485). However, it was the hurtful backstabbing and gossip from others about both Subject-A and Subject-B that made me consider the hardship and difficulties these two must have endured and continue to endure. The judgement, condemnation, and discrimination both of the subjects surely face must impact on their wellbeing and worldview. The ongoing discrimination suffered, is discussed in *The Human Rights Commission 2007 Report of the Inquiry into Discrimination Experienced by Transgender People*:

Trans people in New Zealand face discrimination that undermines the ability to have a secure family life, to find accommodation, to work, to build a career and to participate in community life. At worst, there was constant harassment and vicious assault. Trans people faced daily challenges simply to find acceptance and do the things other New Zealanders take for granted (3).

Consequently, I had to consider: what right did I have to delve into the most private and perhaps painful experiences of two people, both of whom were friends? Was it also fair for me to use aspects of their stories in a theatre play? The answer lay in the prospect of a broadened debate about the issues around being transgendered, and with two willing subjects the debate was already going into areas I had not anticipated.

Teich points out that, “transgender people readily answer nearly every question that people ask about being transgender, including questions that no one would ever dream about asking a nontransperson” (xvi). Therefore, from the outset, I resolved not to ask questions related to anatomy. As Tasmin says in *Trans Tasmin*, “What I’ve got in my knickers is nobody’s business but mine” (87). And so, in the two four-hour interviews we did not discuss surgery details or anatomical aspects of being transgender. However, the interviews did provide an astonishing array of shared experiences, many of which would make their way into one or more drafts of the play.

To protect the subjects, and myself, a contract was drawn up to ensure the subjects’ anonymity. With the permission and guidance of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee, the agreement explained the procedure, potential risks, and identified three key points:

- 1) confidentiality of information collected for the project and the anonymity of the subjects’ participation
- 2) interviews and related materials to be kept completely anonymous, and that matter from the interview may be published in and/or produced into a play
- 3) data from interview may be used ‘verbatim’ and/or re-interpreted and poeticised for theatrical purposes.

Prior to each interview I followed Teich’s advice for these situations, namely “to give the transgender person an out if he or she feels like you are overstepping your bounds” (xvi). During more than eight hours of interviews, at no point did the two subjects object to the direction of the discussion, nor did either subject opt for an ‘out’. Indeed, Subject-A began the interview process by telling me “nothing is off limits.”

As with the 1997 research conducted by Gagné *et al*, my subjects were also encouraged to tell their life stories as they pertained to their transgendered feelings and experiences. They were guided through several areas of inquiry, including: “... their earliest transgender experiences or feelings; being discovered cross-dressed; acquiring girls’ or women’s clothing, makeup, and wigs; learning about and refining a

feminine appearance or persona ... finding therapists ... and experiences with the medical community” (485).

In the interviews I also spent time attempting to identify and label emotions, feelings, behaviours, and identity; and more broadly, the co-relation between “behaviour and identity; and political and gender attitude” (*ibid*).

What emerged was an overwhelming record of private stories that were deeply personal, tragic, funny, inspiring, disturbing, bewildering, and moving. Consequently, I felt a tremendous responsibility to honour the gift of time and the gift of the stories that each of the subjects shared. I also felt a certain weight of responsibility to represent the wider transgender community accurately and in a way that would not cause distress or harm. This was highlighted to me when I received an email from someone called Dianne Sparkes following some media exposure about my project:

I am a transgender woman, the project seems well meaning but!
How many true transgender people have you met or recorded their actual stories that you believe you can actually and responsibly portray them.
Our lives are difficult enough and over the years may have tried to tell it like it is and failed, the public are misled as to the real us, so that we are even more ridiculed. We continue to be the target for jokes and violence, so your project and its success places a very strong responsibility on you to get it right. Trans* people deserve to be seen as who they really are, not as a target of entertainment [sic]. (Personal email 10 July, 2013).

Although, she does mitigate her concerns somewhat by saying that my “intentions are respected, education and acceptance is the only way we will be seen differently” (*ibid*), she urges me to be cautious and hopes my project will benefit “all trans* people with fairness and dignity” (*ibid*).

It was a delicate process deciding what elements of the varied and complex stories to include in the play, and what to leave out. I always planned to theatricalise and poeticise the stories of my subjects, and so, much from those original interviews remains in the final draft of *Trans Tasmin*. From the interviews the following aspects,

based on the subjects' stories, remain in the play (I have labelled 'A' or 'B' referring to either Subject A or Subject B depending on the source of the material):

TASMAN –

Being dressed in girls clothes as a child (A)

Being placed in a boys' home as a teenager (B)

Making puppets (B)

Father destroying puppets (B)

Being sexually abused (A and B)

Being beaten by police (A and B)

Lovers, who were surprised, but pleased at discovering male genitalia (B)

Being assaulted by lovers (B)

Being rejected after disclosure (A and B)

Having to get psychological clearance (prove normalcy) (A and B)

STANLEY –

Being a secret cross dresser (A and B)

Secret promiscuous sexual behaviour (A)

Gay experimentation (A)

'Coming out' to wife and being rejected (A)

Self-harming (A)

Attempting suicide (A)

Presenting oneself as overly macho (A)

Lying to family and friends (A)

Being arrested (A and B)

Whilst these elements are inspired by the true stories the subjects shared with me, more importantly, what the interviews gave me was a depth of understanding so I could give the characters' voices a sense of authenticity. When writing dialogue for the two protagonist characters, Tasmin and Stanley, I wanted to be particularly careful to honour what was shared with me in the interviews. I was also especially mindful of the responsibility to not denigrate transgendered people, or add to misunderstandings and negative stereotypes. I also wanted to defy the tradition of having transgender characters as bawdy comic grotesques that invited derision. Throughout the process, I

have endeavoured to be aware of the difficulties and the sensitivities around the subject matter and the real-life stories of my subjects, whilst balancing the responsibility to the wider transgender community and – if the resulting wider debate around transgender issues is to be met with understanding and tolerance – the need to ‘get it right’.

CHAPTER 2 – FINDING THE THEATRICAL DYNAMICS

I am endeavouring to write a play that challenges the accepted place of transgendered people in theatre, a play that shifts transgender characters from a place of ridicule and derision, and puts them as the central protagonists, yet has them represented fairly, with integrity and with dignity. The theatrical dynamics in writing such a play are understood by considering the ways that transgender characters have hitherto been represented in theatre. Theatre audiences have been laughing at a man-in-a-dress throughout history. The tradition was best exemplified in Victorian times in the form of the ‘dame’ in pantomime. Expert on Victorian pantomime, Edwin M. Eigner says that cross-dressing “remains today one of the essential features of pantomime” (67). Moreover, the dame, always played by a man, “represented a middle aged woman with uncontrollable sexual desires and a misplaced passion for the hero, which, when frustrated, turned into dangerous malice” (*ibid*). The function of the dame then, was to titillate and ‘play for laughs’ and thus ridicule the transgender dynamic. Biographer, Jane W. Steadman, concurs, stating that “[m]en did not impersonate women seriously on the nineteenth century stage” (29). Male actors playing the dame “could hope only for low comedy, at best rising to grotesque characterization” (*ibid*). What then, might my play offer against a backdrop of abuse and derision of the transgendered in theatre tradition, yet still explore the male/female dynamic within us all?

A few New Zealand playwrights have created transgender characters that defy the custom of abuse and ridicule as evidenced in theatre experiences such as the pantomime. Richard O’Brien’s *The Rocky Horror Show* celebrated transvestism in a burlesque-style musical that went from an experiment in the 60-seat Theatre Upstairs at London’s Royal Court in 1973 to become an ongoing worldwide phenomenon on stage and screen. It was never intended to offer meaningful insight into the world of transgenderism and, more like Victorian pantomimes, its success lay in light-entertainment and titillation. Nonetheless, critics such as Mark Siegel note that within *The Rocky Horror Show* there is a ‘disguised paradigm’, “the most obvious feature of which is acceptance of alienation from normal human society” (311).

By looking at recent New Zealand plays I hope to learn about the ways transgender characters have been represented in recent New Zealand theatre history. I aim to do that by examining the form and narrative structures they offer.

Alexandra Matheson's *Pursuing Juliet* was written more than thirty years after *The Rocky Horror Show*. It is a non-linear poetic piece of 'extreme theatre' that challenges and confronts viscerally, however it makes no attempt to address the socio-political issues around being transgendered. Nor was it meant to. Neither was Mitch Tawhi Thomas' award-winning play, *Hui*, which has a transgendered character – Tina. The themes and issues in *Hui* are largely cultural, and issues around gender identity are only touched on briefly. What *Pursuing Juliet* and *Hui* have realised, nonetheless, is they have moved transgender characters from 'theatre-of-ridicule' and placed them firmly in 'theatre-of-acceptance'. Something I aspire to achieve.

In theatrical terms, I will also consider the use of the metaphor of *The Bacchae* in *Trans Tasmin*. In Euripides' ancient play, Pentheus rejects Dionysus and his bacchic rituals. Through his attraction to the androgynous Dionysus, Pentheus is forced to accept his own femininity, however it is his rejection of Dionysus that is his ultimate downfall. I suggest that society's rejection of transgendered individuals often leads to the downfall of the transgendered and that this is manifestly unjust. If theatre can do anything, it can illuminate; it can show that we need balance; and there has to be some kind of tolerance. I contend that by threading elements from *The Bacchae* into my play, these moral viewpoints might strengthen my work and allow me to discover ways that these themes can be explored.

Finding form

On a quest for theatre form, I was searching for one that would be sympathetic to transgender characters. I initially considered burlesque, as it was a form that I was attracted to because of the success of many drag acts that explore the transgender dynamic. Burlesque, then, seemed a 'good fit' because it was a place where transgender characters were already accepted. When one considers transgender representation in theatre in New Zealand, Richard O'Brien's burlesque-style musical, *The Rocky Horror Show* comes immediately to mind, as does one of the show's most

memorable and notorious lines: “I’m just a sweet transvestite from Transsexual, Transylvania.” The author self-identifies as *transgender* and was motivated by the idea that society should not dictate gender. *The Rocky Horror Show* has also helped liberate O’Brien to exist on the gender continuum:

I think being transgender I was always an outsider ...[however], I like being in the middle of the sexes and I’m very happy there. I can go out in a frock or whatever and nobody ever says anything. I’m completely and totally free to be myself without any fear of rejection” (cited in Doyle, 1).

O’Brien’s self-identification as transgender appeared to legitimise the representation of transgender characters in *The Rocky Horror Show*. However as Marshall Cavendish, author of *Sex and Society*, points out: *The Rocky Horror Show*’s “bizarre sexual array of exploits and musical numbers does little to explain or examine representation of transvestism” (874). Indeed, I advance that the stage-show, and subsequent film, maintain transgender characters’ location as figures of titillation and ridicule. Richard O’Brien clearly concurs with this idea: “I thought it would be nice if you could ... watch a little bit of everything that you liked, a collage, a rock and roll show with a storyline, with a little horror, a little sex, bit of titillation ... no message, just a bit of entertainment” (cited in Pickart, 62). Therefore, despite its popularity, *The Rocky Horror Show* offers me little in the way of form, or thematic inspiration, or insight into the transgender debate, which will assist me in the writing of *Trans Tasmin*. That is largely because the form lends itself to caricature and what I want is to find a form that would enable me to give an in-depth psychological dimension to my characters. I would like to portray characters that are believable and psychologically complex, in order to do justice to my research and to my subjects.

I decided to opt for a realistic form since this gives me an opportunity to develop in-depth characters and to build a range of characters with diverse views and life histories. However, given the nature of the subject matter, I decided to see if I could exploit aspects of ‘extreme theatre’ using language that is sometimes designed to shock. ‘Extreme theatre’ is the sort of theatre “that confronts the ultimate in human experience so that we can seek to understand what humans are and how they create humanity” (Bond, cited in Saunders, 190). Similar to Antonin Atrtaud’s ‘theatre of

cruelty’, Howard Barker’s ‘theatre of catastrophe’, or the extreme cinema of Quentin Tarantino, extreme theatre is often violent, confronting, and verbally brutal. Saunders describes extreme theatre as an experience where the violence and bloodshed are often “accompanied by an equal reliance on black humour and a flippant sense of irony” (23). Extreme theatre, however, goes beyond registering shock and outrage from its audiences. Rather, it offers “a powerful warning, by showing the tragic but logical conclusion of humanity’s escalating, destructive behaviour. Simultaneously they force us to confront our shared responsibility for the brutal reality which already exists” (Langridge and Stephenson, 129).

Alexandra Matheson’s *Pursuing Juliet* is a dark, poetic, and psychological journey following the transition from man to woman. It is a deeply personal play that both confronts and challenges its audience:

It’s the truth, I swear to it.

The absolute truth.

But then, you can never believe anyone who swears absolute truth, can you?

He stands and dances briefly

My cock rules me and I rule my cock.

That’s the truth (7).

Pursuing Juliet, like no other play, examines transgenderism, and its multifaceted representations, complications and sensitivities. It is, in many ways, a stream of subconsciousness much like the troubled work of the late British playwright, Sarah Kane, who wrote about her personal experiences of depression before taking her own life:

– Why don’t you ask me why?

– Why did I cut my arm?

– Would you like to tell me?

– Yes.

– Then tell me.

– ASK.

ME.

WHY.

(A long silence.)

– Why did you cut your arm?

– Because it feels fucking great. Because it feels fucking amazing. (Kane, 217).

In a personal email, Simon Kane, Sarah’s brother and executor of her estate, wrote to me regarding *4.48 Psychosis*: “... fragmentation is an important theme of the play and this is reflected in its structure.” I think this is true also of Matheson’s *Pursuing Juliet*, and like *4.48 Psychosis*, it is fractured, painfully honest, and brutal. In the Auckland production of Matheson’s play, Brooke Petersen played the central role and, according to Matheson (personal email 19 November 2012), “... she made a wonderful job of it and it was a real challenge for her. The dance segments really worked.”

Stimulated by the work of both Matheson and Kane, I attempted to write in a similarly fearless manner and explored extreme theatre with extreme language. In ‘Playwriting: A Practical Guide’, British playwright, actor and director, Noël Greig, suggests that use of language comes first: “if you have dull sentence-work and lifeless imagery, then all you have is character and story” (41). In early drafts of *Trans Tasmin* I had included a monologue by the character that would become Stanley¹. He is talking to the police officer that had arrested him:

Indecent act? Indecent act?! (*Defiant pause*) What about the cop who goes into a public toilet, gets his cock out and asks someone to suck him off? Isn’t that an indecent act? (*Pause*) No? What about that same constable then coming in my mouth? Is that an indecent act? Or is that all in the line of duty?! Indecent act, eh? (*Pause. Then bitterly*) Well, I think ... kicking someone in the face while they’re handcuffed and on their knees is an indecent act. (*He spits blood*). What do you think about that? You have no fucking idea do you? Committing an indecent act in a public place. What’s public about being in a locked toilet cubical? Of course I was in the Women’s

¹ He was called ‘Dan’ in early drafts but as a result of the first rehearsed reading, I realised that ‘Dan’ and ‘Dad’ sounded too similar, so in the most recent draft I changed his name to ‘Stanley’, or ‘Stan’.

² Cisgender is a term used to describe people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth.

toilet. You really think I was going to go into the Men's dressed like this?
What's your fucking excuse?

I found this scene incredibly difficult to write. However, as the essence of the narrative was based on one of my research interviews with Subject A, and emboldened by the work of Kane and Matheson, I felt it might challenge an audience as much as it challenged me. Importantly, this monologue exemplifies a part of the writing process where I attempted to create a distance from the real story of my subject yet keep the thematic integrity by heightening the theatrical and poetical narrative. Ultimately, I had to cut this monologue from the play. By attempting to emulate extreme theatre and the brutality exemplified in the writing of Matheson and Kane, I realised the narrative trajectory of the character was being obscured. In essence, the brutality of the writing overshadowed the character's overall story.

I was very clear in the beginning that I wanted to use burlesque as a theatre form for my own play, however, in the end I didn't want to fall into the trap of cliché by giving the audience what it already knows and expects. As I was striving for was a play that would remove transgender characters from a place of ridicule, I opted for 'dramatic realism' with aspects of 'extreme theatre' as I needed form that would allow me to work with the characters with depth and psychological complexity.

Finding narrative

Determining form was an important step because the form greatly influences narrative. A comedy would inform a different kind of narrative than a musical, or melodrama and so on. Choosing dramatic realism as the form allowed me to develop story about two transgender people from very different perspectives. Through my research, and by interviewing the two very different transgender subjects, I realised that transgenderism was a complex and multi faceted dynamic. I decided that by telling the story of two different transgender characters, I could broaden the understanding around the different issues each of the characters would encounter.

I wanted to do this by having two different narrative trajectories for the two main characters. Tasmin's trajectory would be upwards, whilst Stanley's would be

correspondingly downward. It is a narrative, essentially, about two protagonists who have two very different transgender experiences. I determined that Tasmin would fulfil her destiny – having gender reassignment surgery – in a positive and uplifting way, despite the challenges she had faced; while Stanley would not cope with being exposed as a secret cross-dresser, and the rejection of those close to him would lead him to kill himself. I have built the narrative up around the rugby scene, as it is at odds with the transgender dynamic and provides a contrasting world, one where transgendered people are unlikely to be accepted.

Stanley begins the play as a seemingly typical rugby coach modelling typical male behaviour. He is strong, and sure of himself and his role in his world:

What a game! It would be fair to say that, today, history has been made. History, for this once great Rugby Football Club. Who can recall the last time that the mighty Wests made it through to the final? Twenty years is a bloody long time between drinks. But what a team that was. Me on the blind-side. My best mate, Todd Matthews, on the open-side. Everyone said we made a great pair of flankers! (43).

By the end of the play he is broken and rejected by everyone who is close to him:

You don't want to be like me, Simon. I wouldn't wish this on anyone. The Stan you know is a lie. And I'm sorry for lying to you, and your mother for all these years. The truth is I was lying to myself as well. I can't change that (88).

Tasmin, on the other hand, begins the play defensively, and unsure of what her psychiatrist wants from her:

My mother? What do you mean? Mum and I always got on fine. No, we never fought. She's not a fighter (43).

And by the end of the play, she is strong, resolute and assured of her future journey:

Ultimately, we are all alone, aren't we? We have our own thoughts, feelings. And we have to be able to live with ourselves. I can't wait to truly be who I know I am, in every way (89).

Around that narrative I aim to create a host of other characters with differing perspectives so that they can inform the central story. Each of the characters is on a different journey and each reflects different things about the central characters. For example, Todd sees Tasmin as a potential sexual conquest:

TODD: *(To Tasmin)* Come on gorgeous. Give me another one will yah?
Er ... another pint, that is.

He laughs at his own joke. Tasmin rolls her eyes and pours him a pint of beer
(45).

Whereas Hillary sees Tasmin as a threat:

HILARY: I've seen him eyeing up Tasmin.

SIMON: Eh?

HILARY: She's younger than me, and Todd has been flirting with her. He thinks I haven't noticed.

Simon is conflicted about Tasmin, and that is one of the central issues of the play – and for transgendered people in society – i.e: transgendered people are largely misunderstood, discriminated against, ridiculed and rejected:

SIMON: Don't worry, Lady ... Man ... whatever you are... I'm out. I'm out. I am gone. Fucking freak! (76).

I was inspired by some of the narrative elements in two New Zealand plays: *Pursuing Juliet* by Alexandra Matheson and *Hui* by Mitch Tawhi Thomas. Both plays have transgender characters, which are not objects of ridicule. Matheson's play has a strong focus on the individual, an individual with an acute self-awareness:

I fooled you didn't I. You thought I was a guy.

She dances

I thought I was a guy.

If I could fool myself ... (15).

I integrated this sense of self-awareness in some of Tasmin's narrative:

You would be surprised how many so-called straight guys are thrilled to learn there's a penis in my panties. A bonus boner (84).

Director of Playmarket, Murray Lynch, recognised the startling absence of trans characters in New Zealand theatre: "Hui's characters are ones that have been absent from our stages" (1). In Tawhi Thomas's *Hui*, it is the gradual unveiling of that story appeals. Indeed, it is not until half way through the play that the transgender character, Tina, finally clashes with her brother, and they each state their position:

Pita: And who are you? You throw it back in God's face. You're nothing.

Tina: How dare you. This is my life.

Pita: It's all about choices.

Tina: And I'll make my choices.

Pita: Choice. Chooooooooicce! Choice Bro! (*pause*) Well the choice you have made is not choice. It's bad. It's wrong and it's evil.

Tina laughs.

Tina: I don't have a choice.

Pita: Un natural.

Tina: You're so full of hate. (38-39).

Similarly in *Trans Tasmin*, I have endeavoured to unveil Tasmin's story gradually. It is not until half way through the play that Tasmin's gender status is revealed. Tawhi Thomas has his moment gradually develop between siblings; mine is between lovers,

but both are between the transgendered character and what might be termed the cisgender² character:

TASMIN: I thought you knew. The Bacchae ... the vice-versa party ... the interest in my painting ... you said you knew!

SIMON: I didn't know you were queer ... or ... I didn't know you had a cock. How can you have tits and a cock?

TASMIN: Get out.

SIMON: You're a freak.

TASMIN: Get out!

SIMON: Don't worry, Lady ... Man ... whatever you are... I'm out. I'm out. I am gone. Fucking freak! (78-79).

I think the choices I made about narrative helped to broaden the debate about transgenderism. The creation of two contrasting narratives enables the audience to draw comparisons between two different transgender experiences. The varied responses of the other characters also helped to provide an overview of attitudes and perspectives; this helped to enliven the theatrical forum and gave the audience a sense of the diversity of opinion around the transgender debate.

Finding a metaphor

I want *Trans Tasmin* to be an exploration of the male/female dynamic, both within transgender and within us all. *The Bacchae* by Euripides explores these same dynamics, but it does more than that. I always questioned whether my play might be able to incorporate scenes from Euripides' *The Bacchae* and have it serve as a metaphor for 'acceptance' generally and accepting transgenderism, specifically, and to draw the parallels with the contemporary story. In *The Bacchae*, Pentheus originally rejects Dionysus and his Bacchic rituals. He rejects the femininity of Dionysus yet is attracted to it. It is Dionysus that shames Pentheus out of his masculinity as Ormand discusses:

² Cisgender is a term used to describe people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth. The opposite of transgender (*cis* being the prefix meaning 'on the same side' and *trans* being the prefix meaning 'on the opposite side') (Tilsen, xxxiii).

Before he is overcome by the god, Pentheus is the very picture of masculinity: strong, direct, controlling, and (perhaps) desiring. After he is dressed in a *peplos* that character changes. All this is shown on stage through his concern with his appearance and his willingness to resort to feminine tricks (hiding, spying) rather than masculine confrontation (12-13).

So, thematically my choice to include *The Bacchae* as a part of *Trans Tasmin* was to explore the notion of acceptance, understanding and tolerance: or lack thereof as evidenced by Pentheus' attitude towards Dionysus. The moral to be taken from *The Bacchae* is that failure to 'accept' can lead to one's downfall – i.e.: Pentheus' failure to accept Dionysus led to his downfall. Dionysus flirts with Pentheus, has him dress in women's clothing and forces Pentheus to accept his feminine side. Might the same be applied to *Trans Tasmin*? Stanley's failure to accept himself for who he really is; the failure of his best friend, wife, and stepson to accept him, all lead to his downfall. When Hilary talks Simon onto cross-dressing for the cast party, she forces him to confront his feminine side. Like Dionysus with Pentheus, she seduces him, thus showing how attractive his feminine side is.

There are other parallels to be drawn. Dionysus is very comfortable with his own androgyny, just as Tasmin is at ease with her own gender status and journey. Indeed every character in *Trans Tasmin* is an expression of the male/female dynamic and that is developed in the play by showing the audience a range of different attitudes with regard to the male/female relationship both between the characters and within themselves.

I originally intended every second scene in *Trans Tasmin* to be a scene from *The Bacchae* exploring this notion, with the Chorus linking the scenes with commentary. The first planning for *Trans Tasmin* looked like this:

ACT ONE Scene 1 – Thebes.

ACT ONE Scene 2 – Rugby Clubrooms.

ACT ONE Scene 3 – Thebes.

ACT ONE Scene 4 – Dan and Katrina's kitchen.

ACT ONE Scene 5 – Thebes.

ACT ONE Scene 6 – Tasmin’s bedroom / Dan and Katrina’s bedroom (split stage – both scenes occur simultaneously).

ACT ONE Scene 7 – Thebes

INTERVAL

ACT TWO Scene 1 – Hospital: post op’ (split stage).

ACT TWO Scene 2 – Thebes.

ACT TWO Scene 3 – Dan and Katrina’s bedroom.

ACT TWO Scene 4 – Thebes.

ACT TWO Scene 5 – Tasmin’s bedroom.

ACT TWO Scene 6 – Thebes.

ACT TWO Scene 7 – Tasmin’s bedroom / Danni’s Bedroom.

Of the fourteen scenes in the first draft, seven were a reworking of *The Bacchae*, as I was exploring the possibility of *Trans Tasmin* being a modern day Greek Tragedy. And as part of that tragedy, I included ‘self-harming’ as a way of documenting the personal self-loathing and inner turmoil of the character, much in the same way as Sarah Kane and Alexandra Matheson did with their plays. It was an issue that came up in the interview with Subject A and one that I thought was especially important. In early drafts, Dan, after being exposed as a cross-dresser, became confused and rejected and this culminated in the tragic ending of the play, mirroring the earlier scene in *The Bacchae* where Agave held the severed head of her mutilated son, Pentheus:

Music plays underneath. Dan goes to the wardrobe. He is searching for something ...

Dan has removed a sharp knife from out of the wardrobe ...

Tasmin completes her painting. She turns it around. The work depicts Tane Mahuta’s ascent to the 12th heaven and the three baskets of knowledge suspended within a building called Rangiatea. Within the painting, a naked woman, with kauwae (lips and chin moko), is reaching for the baskets of knowledge. The woman’s groin area is covered in blood, and the blood is pooling on the floor of Rangiatea ...

Dan cuts his wrist and bleeds. Chorus 1 & 2, and Servant, all masked, appear behind Dan and watch him die. (Draft 1, 62).

The ending is quite different now but the tragedy remains. In the final draft of *Trans Tasman* the audience will assume that Stanley has taken his own life.

One of the first decisions after Draft One was completed was to remove the scenes from *The Bacchae* and further develop contemporary characters and story. It was very clear that stylistically, the scenes from *The Bacchae* didn't work. The contemporary scenes were long and engaging with sustained character development, which made *The Bacchae* scenes jar and seem contrived. I was disappointed at this discovery because *The Bacchae* was very much part of my early thinking regarding transgender representation and theatre, and I had hoped that *The Bacchae* would make a strong point about 'acceptance'.

To replace *The Bacchae* scenes, I needed a new dialectic and something that would make just as strong a point about 'acceptance'. What I was searching for was a world where people like Dan shouldn't end up taking their own life. What I aimed for in the second draft was to see if I could create a genuine dialectic between what the theatre offers as a place of self expression and openness and the world of the other part of the play; the rugby world, which narrows and confines and stereotypes.

My thoughts turned to gender representations in Shakespeare. I explored the possibility of Simon having speech and drama lessons to help him with his after-match speeches at the rugby club:

HILARY: Here. Let's look at this small scene between Benedick and Beatrice.

SIMON: Bene-dick?

HILARY: And Beatrice, yes. (*She turns the pages of the script to Act 4 Scene 1*)

SIMON: Ben – e – dick?!

HILARY: Yes. You be Benedick.

SIMON: I'm not being anyone who's called Ben – e – dick.

HILARY: Fine. Read Beatrice then.
SIMON: I'm not being a chick!!
HILARY: Do you want my help, or not?
SIMON: Well, yes. But I'm not being a chick.
HILARY: Why not? Men and boys played all the female roles in
Shakespeare's day. Beatrice is actually written for a man.
SIMON: No wonder theatre people are all ...
HILARY: Simon!
SIMON: ... so theatrical. If it's all the same to you, I'd rather be Bene-dick
than Beatrice (Draft 2, 22-23).

This new focus on the dialectic between the theatre world and the rugby world also gave me an opportunity to develop an oppositional voice through the character of Todd:

TODD: Yeah, well you've got to admit the theatre's basically full of faggots. (Draft 2, 11).

Or:

TODD: ... not too much of the *drama* stuff, okay? We don't want him going all homo on us. Just give him some tips about speaking confidently in public. (Draft 2, 12).

The other major change in the second draft was to develop the female characters further. I gave both Hilary and Katrina new monologues. Katrina, in particular, showed her flaws by being able to talk about her alcoholism and I opened the second act with what I thought was a strong speech to give insight into her character:

I lost my real job. My career. The one I studied and trained for years for. The one where I felt like I was someone. The one where people respected me. Relied on me. You see I was a Charge Nurse in the geriatric ward at Public for twelve years and a registered nurse for more than twenty. But I was also a functioning alcoholic for ... well, all of that time. I can't tell you how many Sunday shifts I missed or had off (Draft 2, 48).

Reflecting on the second draft, it was clear that there were narrative trajectories that still seemed unconvincing. I felt the dynamics of the story and the dynamics of the relationships between the characters were solid, but there were still issues with the structure of the play. I asked myself: how do I build the trajectory of each story so they become compelling and convincing? And: how can I develop each story's shape and build those stories to a point of climax, whilst fulfilling their function of expressing thematic and socio-political values?

I had made some improvements to the play, but by removing *The Bacchae* completely I removed a powerful metaphor. In contemplating changes for a third draft I considered how I might have something of *The Bacchae* reinstated. Partly also because I had removed Simon from being in a play, and in doing so, I removed his conflicted voice and the feminine side of his character. So, for the third draft, Simon was back in a production of *The Bacchae* and I replaced the Shakespeare scene with a scene rehearsing *The Bacchae*, now directed by Hilary:

HILARY: Here, let's have a go at the Dionysus, Pentheus scene (*indicating the script*). I'll read in Pentheus for you.

SIMON: Okay. It feels a bit weird doing it here though. I'm not sure if theatre and rugby should ever mix.

HILARY: Don't be silly. Now come on. In this scene Pentheus, King of Thebes, is titillated by Dionysus.

SIMON: Aye?

HILARY: He ... he's attracted to him. He has the hots for him.

SIMON: Oh, shit. Um ... I dunno about that (Draft 3, 22).

I also took the opportunity to complicate Simon's character by allowing him to have romantic feelings for Hilary:

HILARY: Shh. Just relax. Try to breathe through your tummy, here. *She reaches around and places her hand on his bare abdomen. He turns to her. They kiss* (Draft 3, 25).

The objective was to add to Simon's inner conflict. He's conflicted about Tasmin's gender status, he's conflicted about theatre and rugby, he's conflicted about his own masculinity, and he's conflicted about his feelings for Hilary.

So, *The Bacchae* was a starting-point in my thinking about *Trans Tasmin*. It remains a strong metaphor for acceptance and understanding. There are, as Orland suggests, "readings of Pentheus that psychologize him as a homosexual pervert" (19). A possible contribution to Boyd's observation that society stills sees a cross-dresser as "a sexual deviant, a pervert" (11). Writing *Trans Tasmin* has given me an opportunity to redress that perception. It has also provided a representation of transgendered people that counters the abusive representations from the likes of the pantomime Dame. Furthermore, in considering *The Bacchae* as a theatrical metaphor within *Trans Tasmin* the debate around transgender issues has broadened into an area that examines other parallels: the masculine/feminine paradox within all humans; the exploration of the male/female dynamic between and within the characters, and what that means in society: and finally, the audience is invited to make their own connections to the themes that address femininity in men, acceptance of those who are different, and cross-dressing representation in theatre, and perhaps the female/male dynamic within themselves.

CHAPTER 3 – USING MODELS OF POLITICAL THEATRE

I want to create a play that deals with the socio-political aspects of transgender issues, one that can explore the difficulties people have in a society where some people feel compelled to hide who they really are. In this play I hope to debate the ongoing discrimination that transgendered people experience, despite living in a so-called enlightened society. Notwithstanding prevailing socio-political attitudes toward transgendered people, in *Trans Tasmin* I aim to present transgendered characters in a way not previously acknowledged in theatre plays in New Zealand. I want to be able to do this without ‘preaching’ to the audience, but rather through the voices of a range of characters who can contest their position in a way that engages, yet challenges the audience. To do this, I will look to influential political theatre exponents to see if I can identify successful elements in their work that I might select and adapt to my own.

I will examine three plays: Bertolt Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children*; Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls*; and Jean Betts’ *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Broadly, each of these plays provides a socio-political debate. Brecht’s *Mother Courage and Her Children* is a debate about war; Churchill’s *Top Girls* is a debate about Thatcherism; and Betts’ *Ophelia Thinks Harder* is a debate about another narrative – Hamlet. In *Trans Tasmin* my goal is to provide my own debate on society’s attitudes towards people who are different – i.e. transgendered women. Although it was the broad debates that drew me to these three plays in the first instance, they do also provide several elements, concepts, and devices that I can select like a kind of theatrical smorgasbord for my own work. I chose them, therefore, because each play provides a different approach to political theatre and each has specific devices and frameworks, which I can synthesise into my own writing.

Mother Courage and Her Children

In Brecht’s work I am inspired particularly by his use of direct audience address as a practical and aesthetic device. I will also consider his desire for the audience not to sympathise with the main protagonist, and finally I will endeavour to assimilate Brecht’s notion that the character, Mother Courage, is brought down by her own flaws and shortcomings – albeit as a result of the circumstances of her life. It is not my

desire to mimic Brecht's style, themes, or voice, but to carefully select some specific and theatrically challenging concepts and apply them to my own work.

As a PhD candidate in English Literature at New York University, Claire Gleitman astutely observed that *Mother Courage and Her Children* is a favoured text "for readers aiming to "deconstruct" Brecht's theoretical intentions" (148). One of Brecht's intentions is to utilise the alienation effect as in traditional Chinese acting. Brecht (in Willett) noted that the Chinese artists never acted as if there were a fourth wall and expresses an "awareness of being watched" (92). He put this concept to immediate effect in *Mother Courage and Her Children*, when Mother Courage first enters in scene one, she sings directly to the audience:

Stop all the troops: here's Mother Courage!
Hey, Captain, let them come and buy!
For they can get from Mother Courage
Boots they will march in till they die!
Your marching men do not adore you
(Packs on their backs, lice in their hair)
But it's to death they're marching for you
And so they need good boots to wear! (24-25).

The alienation effect is not to reject all representation of feelings but rather, as Brecht puts it, to "portray incidents of utmost passion ... without [the] delivery becoming heated" (cited in Willett, 93). And in her opening song, Mother Courage at once introduces herself and informs us that she sells boots to the soldiers. It is not merely exposition; she hints at an emotional attitude to the soldiers: "Packs on their backs, lice in their hair"; and the war: "they will march in till they die!"

In *Trans Tasmin*, I give Tasmin an opening address in Act One, Scene One. She speaks to an invisible psychiatrist. She begins with a traditional mihi, in te reo Māori, to provide cultural context. However, to the spectator, it would appear as if she is addressing them directly, ignoring the fourth wall:

So that's me. Tasmin Mahika. You asked. If you must know, I'm Māori. Not that that should make any difference but I'm Kāi Tahu, through my old man. His people are from Wairewa, on Banks Peninsula. Wairewa. Near Little River. They say his ancestor, *our* ancestor, was a hero. Apparently, he stood alone and fought off Te Rauparaha back in the day. There's a monument to him up on our marae. I guess that's what makes me a fighter. No, Dad and I aren't talking. Does that matter? Who cares? I don't know. Maybe it was something I said at the tangi. (*Pause*) Why should I tell you about that? Is that even important? My relationship with my dad? It was crap. So what? A lot of people's relationships are crap (46).

As with Mother Courage's opening song, Tasmin's opening monologue is not merely exposition; she hints at an emotional attitude toward her culture: "*our* ancestor, was a hero. Apparently, he stood alone and fought off Te Rauparaha back in the day"; and her father: "My relationship with my dad? It was crap. So what?" (*ibid*). It is a device that I use throughout *Trans Tasmin*. Tasmin has ten such monologues where the fourth wall is ignored, thus breaking the illusion of reality. Beyond that, Tasmin also is aware that she is being watched – by the psychiatrist/audience.

In Brechtian terms, she delivers her monologues without becoming emotionally heated or overwrought. Brecht did not want the audience to feel sympathy for Mother Courage, and as Bentley points out, "printed editions of the play indicate that he made changes in his script to render Mother Courage less sympathetic" (14). At the beginning of scene six, for example, Mother Courage is taking an inventory of her stock. She plays against the emotion of the death of the Chief and continues counting the items – *twenty-two pairs of socks ... only four lanterns left* – with a cool casualness that is at odds with the tragedy and the comment on war and death that surrounds the dialogue:

Pity about the Chief - twenty-two pairs of socks - getting killed that way. They say it was an accident. There was a fog over the fields that morning, and the fog was to blame. The Chief called up another regiment, told 'em to fight to the death, rode back again, missed his was in the fog, went forward

instead of back, and ran smack into a bullet in the thick of battle - only four lanterns left" (Brecht, 73).

Likewise, in *Trans Tasmin*, I have chosen to have Tasmin describe horrific events in a non-emotional manner:

I would lie in bed facing the wall, pretending to be asleep. He would slip himself under the covers. He reeked of booze and cigarettes. He would always start gently ... and always end violently. What hurt most was keeping the secret. "Don't you go telling your mother or she'll leave us both." I cannot begin to tell you what shame a child feels keeping their daddy's secret (62).

My intention is for the spectator not to feel sympathy for Tasmin. The moment is theatrically more potent if the lines are delivered in a matter of fact way. The spectator then sees the horror without the emotion. With Tasmin her lack of emotion is explicit:

I told him at the tangi. (*Without emotion*) I told him if he ever so much as looks at another child, I'd sneak up on him in the middle of the night, cut his cock off and stuff it down his throat. So, no. Me and Dad don't get along these days. Okay? (*ibid*).

The alienation effect allows the audience to take in not just that moment, but also where the moment sits in a wider socio-political landscape. In *Mother Courage and Her Children*, Brecht says the play is meant to show:

That in wartime big business is not conducted by small people. That war is a continuation of business by other means, making the human virtues fatal even to those who exercise them. That no sacrifice is too great for the struggle against war (cited in Willet, 220).

In *Trans Tasmin* my intention is to show that despite the physical and psychological trauma that shaped Tasmin, she is still simply a person and that all people, regardless

of gender identity or sexual orientation, deserve to live without oppression and discrimination.

In his programme notes for the first National Theatre production in 1965, British-born American critic and playwright, Eric Bentley observed that *Mother Courage* “was impelled by sheer necessity” and had “... a kind of inevitability combined with a degree of free will” (10, 14). For example, at the end of scene six, *Mother Courage* laments the tragedies the war has caused her:

It’s a historic moment to me when they hit my daughter over the eye. She’s all but finished now, she’ll never get a husband, and she’s so mad about children! Even her dumbness comes from the war. A soldier stuck something in her mouth when she was little. I’ll never see Swiss Cheese again, and where my Eilif is the Good Lord knows. Curse the war! (Brecht, 81).

Tasmin, too, laments the tragedies that circumstances have caused her:

I was the one with the broken jaw, yet I was charged with assaulting a police officer. At the station I was strip searched ... by a male officer. And I was put in a cell with three male offenders. Sometimes ... sometimes you just have no hope (80).

There is a relentless inevitability in *Mother Courage*’s narrative. She is forced by circumstances to continue her business despite the loss of her children. Bentley rightly asked, “What alternative had she?” (11). What use would it have been if she had saved Swiss Cheese’s life, for example, if she lacked the wherewithal to keep him alive? (*ibid*). So we ask ourselves, is she a victim of circumstances or of her own character? The same can be said of the other protagonist in *Trans Tasmin*, Stanley. Stanley also has “a kind of inevitability combined with a degree of free will” (Bentley, 14). Given his set of circumstances – outed as a cross-dresser and rejected by his best friend, stepson and wife – he is ruined and ultimately compelled to consider suicide. It is not, however, simply circumstances that bring down both Stanley and *Mother Courage*. They are each damaged by their own character flaws: Stanley tells lies because of societal pressure to conform as a macho male thus

destroying all of his meaningful relationships; and Mother Courage refuses to capitulate in the face of the deaths of her children because of her unswerving need to maintain business to survive. For, as Brecht advised, “Courage’s business activity, her keenness to get her cut, her willingness to take risks [is] a ‘perfectly natural’, ‘eternally human’ way of behaving, so that she was left without any alternative” (cited in Willett, 221). Stanley is like Mother Courage in that “[g]iven her character, Mother Courage had no alternative to what she thought – or, for that matter, to the various “bad” things she did” (Bentley, 14). Given Stanley’s character, he is compelled to lie and hide his secret life and, when caught out, he too has no alternative:

You don’t want to be like me, Simon. I wouldn’t wish this on anyone. The Stan you know is a lie. And I’m sorry for lying to you, and your mother for all these years. The truth is I was lying to myself as well. I can’t change that. But I can change me (91).

Like many other playwrights, I also have been influenced and inspired by Brecht. Specifically, in writing *Trans Tasmin*, I have looked for devices and concepts that might enhance and invigorate my play. Most notably there are ten scenes where the fourth wall is broken and where Tasmin, in effect, addresses the audience directly. Also, across these scenes there is a narrative trajectory that at once alienates the audience through lack of emotion, yet draws them in by allowing the spectator to see the fuller context of her life. Like Brecht with *Mother Courage and Her Children*, I do not want the audience to sympathise with Tasmin, for sympathy denies the spectator the view of a wider socio-political understanding. Finally, I drew from Brecht the idea that Mother Courage’s character is flawed but she has no alternative, given her character, and I applied that same sense to my second protagonist, Stanley.

Top Girls

Caryl Churchill’s feminist play, *Top Girls*, is especially inspirational, for when it was first produced by The Royal Court in 1982 it provided a voice for women hitherto unrealised in theatre. In his commentary on *Top Girls*, Bill Naismith noted that actress Harriet Walter had written that “the demands of actresses have traditionally been much less than on actors in the theatre”, and that “[w]omen in plays have been

regarded as simpler than men” (lii). As I am advocating for a voice for transgendered women in theatre through my play *Trans Tasmin*, I have examined *Top Girls* with a view to see if I might select some dynamics, as I have with Brecht, to strengthen the political value of my own work. I am particularly interested in how Caryl Churchill used oppositional language to highlight her feminist stance, and whether I can have a character that also opposes and rejects, but in doing so highlights the need for tolerance and understanding.

In the *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (Fall, 1989) Amelia Kritzer, Associate Professor in the Department of Theater at the University of St Thomas in Minnesota, points out that Churchill “does not ask audiences to suspend disbelief or surrender to the playwright’s point of view. Instead, by encouraging imaginative reciprocity, her plays empower the audience to question and see new possibilities in what has previously been accepted” (126). I contend that this is achieved through dialectic theatre and I hope to emulate that to some degree in *Trans Tasmin*.

Churchill has a strong sense of her own political voice:

For years and years I thought of myself as a writer before I thought of myself as a woman, but recently I’ve found that I would say I was a feminist writer as opposed to other people saying I was. I’ve found that as I go out more into the world and get into situations which involve women what I feel is quite strongly a feminist position and that inevitably comes into what I write (in Ashton, 18).

Churchill’s characters in *Top Girls* are women of varying ages and backgrounds and therefore she offers a wider perspective by contrasting these women in, often, oppositional ways. As Naismith comments, “[the characters’] dramatic function is partly to represent aspects of female psyche and partly to suggest a universal female experience” (xxix). She is able to offer a challenging social perspective through characters such as Marlene:

I know a managing director who’s got two children, she breast feeds in the board room, she pays a hundred pounds a week on domestic help alone and

she can afford that because she's an extremely high-powered lady earning a great deal of money (80).

Churchill clearly wanted to challenge her audience:

What I was intending to do was make it first look as though it was celebrating the achievements of women and then by showing the main character, Marlene, being successful in a very competitive, destructive, capitalist way ask what kind of achievement is that? The idea was that it would start out looking like a feminist play and then turn into a socialist one, as well (Betsko and Koeing, 82).

I have attempted to achieve something similar in *Trans Tasmin*. As the play begins, the audience might assume the play is simply a commentary on gender roles: the macho rugby male versus passive and submissive female roles. For example Tasmin tends bar and serves the men; Katrina drives the men home when they've been drinking; and Hilary does as Todd asks. By the end of the first act, and certainly by the end of the play, I hope the audience will realise that the play is about something much more complex: it is about tolerance and how we treat people, and how one sector of society still struggles against discrimination and oppression.

Churchill also creates heightened dramatic tension when two different social-class groups collide. Mrs Kidd's arrival in *Top Girls* provides a strong example of oppositional language as the characters from different social backgrounds holding incompatible views on the role of women:

MRS KIDD: ... I'm sorry if I'm interrupting your work. I know office work
isn't house work / which is all interruptions.

MARLENE: No, no, this is my niece. Angie. Mrs Kidd.

MRS KIDD: Very pleased to meet you. (57).

Mrs Kidd is replying in a manner that reflects her social class. It is conventional and polite – “Very pleased to meet you.” As the tension mounts in the scene and Marlene realises that Mrs Kidd has come to support her husband who has been overlooked for

promotion in favour of Marlene, the nature of Marlene's forceful reply gives the audience stark and contrasting world views of the characters and their place in society:

MRS KIDD: I had to do something.

MARLENE: Well you've done it, you've seen me. I think that's probably all we have time for. I'm sorry he's taking it out on you. He really is a shit, Howard. (59).

Through the tension in this scene, conservative middle class values clash with the feminist view through the portrayal of oppositional characters. The audience makes up its own mind about what is right and wrong through that process, and so a transformation of understanding occurs for the audience. I have attempted to explore this concept similarly in *Trans Tasmin* via the voices of the antagonist, Todd, and the two protagonists, Stanley and Tasmin. Todd is socially conservative, and misogynistic: "What's the matter with you? You a lezzo or something?" (54). Todd's function is to provide an extreme and contrasting view of gender issues. For Tasmin, Todd is a bore whose views are out-dated and prejudiced. For Stanley, Todd is a friend whose extreme attitudes provide a shield behind which he can hide the truth of his own gender identity crisis.

Critics, such as Georgiana Vasile, claim that the character of Marlene in *Top Girls* is a representative of right-wing feminism yet "endorses the very phallogocentric system oppressive to women" (256). And it is true that she has "attained professional success by the appropriation of masculine behaviour and domination techniques" (*ibid*). The character Nell, in *Top Girls*, observes: "our Marlene's got far more balls than Howard and that's that" (46). So, does that mean Caryl Churchill herself endorses Marlene's position, or does she, as Kritzer subscribes, "shake up patterns of perception that audiences may take for granted" (127)? Shaking up 'patterns of perception' is exactly what I want to achieve with *Trans Tasmin*. One example, I attempt to shake up the view that the cross-dresser or the transsexual characters are sexual predators. Neither of the protagonists is portrayed in this way. Nor is the misogynistic Todd. The only sexual predator in the play is the one that most spectators would least expect: Todd's

subservient girlfriend, Hilary. She takes advantage of Simon when he is especially vulnerable:

SIMON: I'm pleasing nobody at the moment.

HILARY: Maybe. Maybe not ...

She kisses him. Simon responds.

Still think you're not pleasing anyone?

They kiss again.

SIMON: Hilary. Sorry ... um ... I do like you ...

HILARY: But?

SIMON: But ... well ... Todd for one thing.

HILARY: Todd. Mmm. I've always been attracted to the strong, masculine type. He works hard, plays hard and ...

Hilary begins kissing Simon. (83-84).

I have endeavoured, as Brecht (in Willet) put it, to create realistic theatre “peopled by live, three-dimensional, self-contradictory people, with all their passions, unconsidered utterances and actions” (235). Marlene in *Top Girls* holds seemingly contradictory positions – a feminist yet playing the men’s game. So too, do the characters in *Trans Tasmin* hold contradictory positions. I have taken the dialectic approach evident in *Top Girls* and applied that to *Trans Tasmin*. Stanley is an all-kiwi rugby coach who secretly cross-dresses; Simon is a young rugby star discovering his feminine side through theatre; Katrina is an alcoholic who seemingly endorses the drinking culture at the rugby club; and Tasmin, for all of her femininity, is quite capable of taking a violent position more usually held by males: “One day he set fire to my puppets. So I stuck a pair of scissors in his face. He got to leave. I got to stay for two and a half years. No one hurt me after that” (89).

Caryl Churchill’s *Top Girls* has a powerful feminist and socialist message. It broadens the debate around capitalism and women’s role in a market driven society. Churchill achieved that by allowing some of her characters to take an opposite view to the one held by the author herself. Moreover, she drew complex, and at times, contradictory characters that allowed the themes to be explored fully and challenge what the audience might take for granted. I have attempted to take these dynamics and apply

them to my play. The character, Todd holds a position that is at odds with my own and completely against any notion of tolerance or understanding that I wish to advocate. Indeed, all of the characters in *Trans Tasmin* have some sort of inner contradiction. Finally I have, as Caryl Churchill did, tried to challenge the audience's preconceived ideas by providing characters that behave in ways that are unexpected.

Ophelia Thinks Harder

I have documented my intention to include excerpts from Euripides' *The Bacchae* in *Trans Tasmin* and, in essence, to include a 'mise en abyme' or 'play-within-a-play'. I was especially interested to examine New Zealander, Jean Betts' famous work, *Ophelia Thinks Harder*. Betts' irreverent take on Shakespeare's *Hamlet* retains the device of 'mise en abyme', and like the Elizabethan classic, this device provides enlightenment for the other characters. I wanted to see if I could have some sort of 'play-within-a-play' in *Trans Tasmin*, and likewise have it provide an enlightenment for some of the characters.

Like Brecht's character, Mother Courage, Jean Betts' central character, Ophelia, directly address the audience. She develops this convention by having Ophelia speak to an invisible Virgin Mary. The use of an invisible character has exciting theatrical possibilities since it provides colour and inflection to the direct address and gives the audience a deeper sense of involvement.

In *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, Ophelia has several monologues where she addresses and invisible Virgin Mary. The effect of this is that Ophelia is breaking the fourth wall. However, unlike a soliloquy – 'to be or not to be' for example – in these monologues it is clear that she is speaking to someone: "give being a real woman a go, and see how you like it. Try being a virgin and a mother down here, and see how good you are at it. You try period pain!" (27). It is evident that Ophelia in speaking with an invisible Mary and it is during these speeches that Ophelia does much of her 'thinking'. I use this device, first inspired by Brecht, of having my central character break the fourth wall to address an invisible character – the psychiatrist. As in *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, it is clear that Tasmin is speaking to an invisible psychiatrist:

Is this relevant? Of course I've got a boyfriend. I can't see what it has to do with anything. Have *you* got a boy friend? Eh? Okay. He's a good-looking guy. I like him. I like him a lot. So what? What does it matter how long we've been going out? I don't see how any of this is relevant. (*Pause*) Miss my mother? Only like you miss the sun in winter (58).

Like Ophelia in Betts' play, the character of Tasmin does much of her development through these monologues and by using this device.

The Bacchae has been central to my thinking in the creation of *Trans Tasmin* from the outset. I want to have aspects of *The Bacchae* in *Trans Tasmin* because *The Bacchae* explores themes of crossing gender and, more importantly, explores ideas about tolerance and acceptance. Dionysus is androgynous and he displays masculine and feminine attributes. Also, Dionysus convinces Pentheus to wear women's clothing so that he can spy on the cavorting maenads. That a play written in 450BC explored themes not dissimilar to the ones I wanted to explore in my own contemporary work could not be overlooked. I always wanted *The Bacchae* to serve as a metaphor for acceptance and enlightenment. Oberlin College's Professor Kirk Orland, whose research includes the construction of sexuality in the ancient world, posits:

Pentheus' feminization is the primary vehicle and onstage expression of his downfall. Having started the play as the fully masculine ruler of Thebes, he is dressed as a woman, concerned with his appearance, rendered passively powerless before the god, and the object of a derisive gaze from the Theban public (13).

Betts' 'mise en abyme' focuses on gender relationships and begins with a dumb show where a female housewife enters with groceries, before breastfeeding a baby, cooking, ironing etc. Her husband enters wearing overalls and hardhat. He "orders her about" and then "fucks her absentmindedly while she's stirring the soup" (48). In Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the 'play-within-a-play' is called *The Mousetrap*, and is a "theatrical test Hamlet devises to authenticate the Ghost's accusation" (Greenblatt, 1687). By the end of it Hamlet believes he has seen enough guilt in Claudius' reaction to the play and he exults: "I'll take the Ghost's word for a thousand pound" (3.2, 263-

64) after Claudius has stormed out. This moment of enlightenment is expressed in Betts' *Ophelia Thinks Harder* when during the dumb show Hamlet "does something particularly gross to Ophelia" (48). Afterwards, Ophelia decides that she can no longer trust men, and Rosencrantz and Guildenstern reveal themselves to be women. As actor and academic specialising in Shakespeare, Abigail Rokison, observed: "Betts' play is an intricate comic exposure of patriarchy, the cult of the virgin and female stereotypes, and one which encourages young people to think afresh about the characters and themes of Shakespeare's play, as well as being a witty, intelligent and entertaining play in its own right" (794).

In *Trans Tasmin*, *The Bacchae* is being enacted at 'The University Little Theatre'. The re-enactments happen across two scenes – Act One Scene Four, and Act Two Scene Three – and they involve Simon rehearsing the role of Dionysus under Hilary's direction. Both of *The Bacchae* scenes in *Trans Tasmin* offer moments of enlightenment and, as in Jean Betts' play, 'mise en abyme' is the device that allows this to happen. In the first of the two scenes the moment of enlightenment happens when, after instruction from Hilary, Simon discovers a feminine side to himself that allows him to connect with the character of Dionysus. Hilary finds this quality attractive and they kiss. Afterwards, Hilary says to Simon: "You will be great as Dionysus. Stay in touch with your feminine side. It's much more attractive. You've made a breakthrough tonight" (62). In the second act, after Simon delivers a speech as Dionysus, he realises that he has a passion and skill for acting and through his experience with *The Bacchae* has learnt that there is more to life than just rugby: "It's a buzz, though. I love it. I don't want it to end" (83). A moment of enlightenment happens for the characters of Hilary and Todd also. Hilary realises that her relationship with Todd is not what she needs: "There are times, when all somebody wants is someone to wrap their arms around them and tell them 'you're okay'" (84). Todd realises that he might lose Hilary and shows some vulnerability for the first time: "Hilary, I can't believe you'd do this? (*Beginning to cry*) I ... I don't want to lose you. I know I've been a prick sometimes ... Oh Hilary ... please ..." (85).

By exploring the texts of Brecht, Churchill, and Betts, I have been able to select and apply those fundamental dynamics that, in my view, make for rich theatre. I have avoided mimicking any or all of these practitioners, but rather taken inspiration from

those dynamics that best serve my play and attempted to synthesise and develop a foundation for my own writing. This process has been especially exciting, as I endeavoured to uncover what those dynamics might be in these three outstanding examples of socio-political theatre. Through this academic pursuit it is my hope that I have been able to direct my gleanings into my own play, and that *Trans Tasmin* might go beyond the realm of mere entertainment but rather broaden the wider discourse around transgender issues in a socio-political context.

CHAPTER 4 – THE PLAY

Trans Tasmin

By Robert Gilbert

TRANS TASMIN
by Robert Gilbert

Characters

TASMIN MAHIKA – 23. A Māori transgender woman of Ngāi Tahu descent. She is a confident artist, is astute, and politically and culturally ‘in touch’. She works part-time as a bartender at the Wests rugby clubrooms.

SIMON CLARKE-GREENWOOD – 22. A university student. He also plays premier-grade club rugby.

STANLEY GREENWOOD – 52. Simon’s stepfather (since Simon was very young) and ‘male role-model’. Stan works as a building consultant and is the coach of Simon’s rugby team. Stan is a secret cross-dresser.

KATRINA GREENWOOD – 49. Simon’s mother, former healthcare worker, now a supermarket checkout operator. She is an alcoholic.

TODD MATTHEWS – 45. Carpenter. Stan’s assistant coach and best friend.

HILARY MORRIS – 28. Theatre Director. Todd’s girlfriend.

Warning: this play has adult themes and contains language that may offend.

Special thanks to:



ACT ONE

ACT ONE Scene 1.

Tasmin is an attractive 23-year-old part Māori, dressed in smart skirt and low-cut blouse. She is speaking to her psychiatrist. She is in a solo spotlight. Her introduction is in Ngāi Tahu (Kāi Tahu) dialect.

TASMIN: Tēnā koe. Ko te Ūpoko o Tahumatā te mauka; Ko Ōkana te awa; Ko Wairewa te roto; Ko Uruao te waka; Ko Makō te whare tupuna; Ko Te Rōpūake te whare kai; Ko Kāti Irakehu, Kāti Makō kā hapū; Ko Kāti Pākeha, Kāi Tahu kā iwi; *(Pause)* Ko Hōri Mahika tōku Matua; Ko Sheryl Mahika tōku Whaea; *(Pause)* Ko Tasmin Mahika tōku ikoa. Tēnā koe, Kia ora, Tēnā koe.

So that's me. Tasmin Mahika. You asked. If you must know, I'm Māori. Not that that should make any difference but I'm Kāi Tahu, through my old man. His people are from Wairewa, on Banks Peninsula. Wairewa. Near Little River. They say his ancestor, *our* ancestor, was a hero. Apparently, he stood alone and fought off Te Rauparaha back in the day. There's a monument to him up on our marae. I guess that's what makes me a fighter. No, Dad and I aren't talking. Does that matter? Who cares? I don't know. Maybe it was something I said at the tangi. *(Pause)* Why should I tell you about that? Is that even important? My relationship with my dad? It was crap. So what? A lot of people's relationships are crap.

Stanley is a stocky 52 year-old. He is giving a victory speech at the rugby clubrooms. He holds a large glass of beer and stands in a solo spot light.

STANLEY: What a game! It would be fair to say that, today, history has been made. History, for this once great Rugby Football Club. Who can recall the last time that the mighty Wests made it through to the final? Twenty years is a bloody long time between drinks. But what a team that was. Me on the blind-side. My best mate, Todd Matthews, on the open-side. Everyone said we made a great pair of flankers! 'K'noath we were. None better. Those were the days, boys. Playing in the pouring rain, the leather rugby ball weighing like a bucket of cement. Your back all covered in sprig marks 'cos the opposition spent more time rucking the man instead of trying to get the friggin' ball out.

TASMIN: My mother? What do you mean? Mum and I always got on fine. No, we never fought. She's not a fighter. She's Pākeha. Was Pākeha. She's dead now, thanks for asking. Once they found a tumour in her stomach, she just gave up. At least it was quick, I suppose. Yes, of course I miss her. She's buried up at the urupā, with Dad's tupuna, overlooking Te Roto o Wairewa. Beautiful place. The view of the lake from up there is to ... I was going to say 'to die for'. But life goes on, eh? Can't be letting the dead upset the living. I must be strong. Kia kaha, kia toa, kia manawanui.

STANLEY: Today's match was as good a semi as you can get. I'd like to thank the opposition coaching staff for their efforts. Your boys played well, but as usual it was a game of two halves, eh? And my mob had the better of you in the second half and that was the difference between the two teams. Commiserations, mate, have a beer on me, and good luck for next season. To my lot, well done boys! You got the basics right. You built the platform up

front and swung it out wide at crucial moments. There is one last person I'd like to thank. They say behind every good man is a great woman – I can't tell you if I'm a good man but I can tell you that my wife, Katrina, is a great woman. Come up here love.

The lights come up to reveal the next scene.

ACT ONE Scene 2. *Wests Rugby Clubrooms.*

Tasmin is working behind the bar. Simon is at the bar. Todd and his girlfriend, Hilary, are seated at a table with Katrina. They all applaud as Katrina reluctantly gets up from the table to join Stanley.

TODD: Yeah! Nice one Kat. G'on, get up there.

HILARY: Good on you Katrina.

SIMON: *(Whistling using his fingers)* Go Mum!

KATRINA: Really, Stan is this necessary?

STANLEY: Here she is - the woman behind the man.

TODD: Hear, hear.

STANLEY: *(Kissing her on the cheek)* This is a special occasion, Kat. You remember the last time the Wests made the finals.

KATRINA: How could I forget?

STANLEY: Ladies and gentlemen ... and Todd, I really just want to, ah ... to acknowledge my beautiful wife, Katrina. Any woman, who can put up with me for as long as she has, deserves a bloody medal. It'd be fair to say that we wouldn't have got this far in the comp' if I didn't have her complete support. And I just wanted everyone to know how much you mean to me.

KATRINA: *(Affectionately)* Oh stop it, Stanley.

STANLEY: No, I mean it. I know we've had our ups and downs over the years, one or two 'issues' – but what married couple hasn't. I'm sure any other woman would have given up on me by now, and the truth is, we ... *I*, owe you a lot.

TODD: Yeah. Who else would have washed the team jerseys?!

STANLEY: Not to mention giving birth to one of the finest loose forwards this competition has ever seen.

TODD: Too bloody right! We want Si-mon, we want Si-mon. Speech!

STANLEY: All right, all right. We'll give the victorious captain a chance to wet his whistle first, eh? *(Stan's phone rings)* Bugger. Sorry. *(He takes his phone out, looks at the screen and turns it off)* Aah, if anyone deserves a pint of the proverbial, he does. Why don't you all get yourself a drink before we hear

from the man of the moment? I'm sure Tasmin will be only too pleased to serve you.

Stanley's phone rings again. This time he answers it and moves to a secluded part of the bar. There, he engages in silent conversation.

TODD: Fwoar! She can serve me anytime.

HILARY: Todd!

TODD: It's all right, I'm only kidding. She loves it, *(to Tasmin)* don't you, sweetheart?

TASMIN: Yeah, right.

TODD: See? She's virtually gagging for it.

HILARY: Stop it, Todd.

TODD: *(To Tasmin)* Come on gorgeous. Give me another one will yah? Er ... another pint, that is.

He laughs at his own joke. Tasmin rolls her eyes and pours him a pint of beer.

SIMON: *(Putting a ten dollar note on the bar)* And a pint for me too, please.

TODD: No bloody fear.

SIMON: Eh?

TODD: This one's on me.

SIMON: She's right, Todd. I can get my own.

TODD: Put your money away. Your not bloody paying for a drink tonight, mate. Not after the scorcher you've just played. *(To Tasmin)* I hope you don't mind doin' two at once, love.

Tasmin smiles awkwardly at Simon as she pours the drinks. Todd turns his back on Tasmin and leans against the bar as talks quietly to Simon, loudly enough for Tasmin to hear, but not Hilary.

Faaaark. I think I'm in, there, mate. I reckon that one would go right off. Play my cards right and I'll be getting' my knob nibbled by midnight.

SIMON: Jesus, Todd. What about Hilary?

TODD: Hilary? She's got a drink. Nah, she loves it. Probably want to join us ... or at least watch. I know I would if I was her.

SIMON: You're incredible.

TODD: Ain't I though?

TASMIN: Fourteen dollars.

TODD: Fuck me, is that all? How much for the beer?! (*He laughs at his own joke*).

TASMIN: Fourteen dollars.

TODD: (*Paying her*) There you go, darlin'. Cheap at half the price.

SIMON: Cheers.

Stanley ends his phone call and returns to the table at the same time as Todd.

TODD: Cheers, mate. (*Re-joining the table with Hilary, Stan and Katrina*) Stan-the-man! Bloody good speech mate. You've got your work cut out to top that one when we win the final.

STANLEY: *If* we win the final. Let's not get ahead of ourselves.

TODD: A mere formality. Especially if Simon has another ripper like today.

KATRINA: Who was that on the phone, this time?

STANLEY: Oh, bloody work. I've told them today was the semi and not to bother me.

Simon is still at the bar. He speaks to Tasmin.

SIMON: Sorry about Todd. I think he's a bit pissed.

TASMIN: I think he's a bit of a pig.

SIMON: Yeah, I guess so. He doesn't mean anything though. Just ignore him.

TASMIN: That's easy for you to say.

SIMON: He's harmless, really.

TASMIN: Really?

SIMON: C'mon. Don't get touchy about it. Surely you're used to it.

TASMIN: What's that supposed to mean?

SIMON: Working here, at the rugby club. You know, boys will be boys and all that.

TASMIN: Oh, boys will be boys. Yes, I see what you mean. It stands to reason. And when you grow up to be coach you can be a pig, a bully, *and* a sexual predator!

SIMON: Woah, steady on. I'm sure he didn't mean ...

TASMIN: Forget it. I've dealt with worse than Todd, 'I-could-have-been-an-All-Black,' Matthews. Don't worry yourself. I can handle him. Enjoy your drink.

TODD: (*Calling*) Simon! Get one for your mother, will you?

KATRINA: No it's all right, really.

TODD: Nonsense, it's my shout.

SIMON: Mum?

KATRINA: No thanks.

TODD: C'mon. How about a nice Kahlua and milk?

HILARY: Todd, she said she doesn't want a drink.

TODD: What's it got to do with you?

KATRINA: No really. Thank you but ...

TODD: C'mon, Kat. We're celebrating.

STANLEY: Todd?!

TODD: Yeah?

STANLEY: *(Pause)* Aren't you going to say a few words for Simon?

TODD: Ahh ... yeah, yeah ... of course. No worries. *(He taps the side of his glass with his car keys)* Right-o boys ... and girls ... quiet please. It has fallen upon my good self to say a few words about our team captain, Simon Clarke-Greenwood. Simon, your leadership on the field and ball control at the breakdown is second to none. And I just happen to know that the scout that was here today ... is from the NZRU. Just between you and me, I wouldn't be surprised if young Simon here is snapped up with the professional contract before you can say 'Bob's your Aunty'. So, ladies and gentlemen, without further ado, would you please put your hands together for Captain Courageous ... Simon Clarke *hyphen* Greenwood!!

They all cheer.

SIMON: You didn't have to lay it on so thick.

TODD: Every word true, lad. Speech! Speech!!

SIMON: Thanks for that, Todd.

TODD: Any time, Si-man!

SIMON: Ah ... um ... oh ... it was good to put that one away, eh boys? Ah ... to the opposition ... ah ... too bad for the loss, but, ah ... you played hard ... and you earned our full respect. To the Wests ... well done ... we played well on the wing ... ah ... it was a good game ... ah ... to the ladies in the kitchen ... thanks for putting on a good spread ... ahhh ... full credit for that, eh? Anyway ... to our head coach – he may be Stan to you, but he's 'Dad' to me – thanks for inspiring me not only to be a better rugby player, Dad, but also to be a better man.

TODD: Stan-the-man!

SIMON: So until we meet Marist in the final next week, let's enjoy the moment. Will you raise your glasses and drink a toast to the Wests ...

ALL: *(Led by Todd, all shout faster and faster)* Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests, Wests!!!!!!

All cheer.

STANLEY: Good on you, Si.

SIMON: Thanks, Dad.

STANLEY: Todd's right, you know. You played brilliantly today.

HILARY: Oh, yes Simon. You were wonderful. Wasn't he, Kat?

KATRINA: I'm very proud of you, Son.

SIMON: Just doing the business.

STANLEY: Your speech making could do with a bit of work.

SIMON: I'd rather do my talking on the field.

TODD: You'll have to get used to it if you're going pro, Simon.

STANLEY: Todd's right. There'll be media and stuff to deal with.

TODD: You should get Hilary to give you a hand. She does all that theatre stuff, don't you babe?

HILARY: You hate it when I'm doing plays.

TODD: You've got to admit, you do get involved in some terrible shit. What's that one you're working on at the moment?

HILARY: The Bacchae.

TODD: Back-eye?

HILARY: Mm.

TODD: Who's even heard of a bloody Back-eye? I can tell you about the front-eye. You got to watch out for those theatre types, though. All they want to do is stick their one-eye up your brown-eye!

HILARY: Says you. And you won't come see it anyway.

TODD: It's all bloody Greek to me.

SIMON: The Bacchae *is* a Greek play.

TODD: I rest my ... how the bloody hell do you know?

SIMON: Ah, Uni'. We're ... we're kind of studying it.

TODD: Haha. University of Life, me. You studying for a BA?

SIMON: Well, yes.

TODD: ‘Course you know what BA stands for, don’t yah? Bugger-all!

Todd laughs at his own joke.

KATRINA: I’d rather die than have to speak in public. I can’t even make an announcement on the PA at work. The thought of being in a play though ... do you have a big part Hilary?

HILARY: I’m directing it.

TODD: Yeah, she’s the head honcho. Aren’t yah, love?

KATRINA: Sounds interesting. When’s it on?

HILARY: *(Looks at Simon)* Ahh, it opens next Saturday actually.

TODD: Bugger. I’ll have to miss it. Sorry babe. Got the after-match and all that. I would’ve loved to have been there.

HILARY: *(Feigning disappointment)* Oh, Todd ... you will miss mingling with all my theatre friends.

Stan’s phone rings. He answers it.

TODD: Yeah, yeah. There is that. Never mind. Tonight, we celebrate. Drinks all round, eh?

KATRINA: *(Noticing Stan)* Not for me, thanks Todd.

TODD: Fuck a duck, Kat. When did you become such a misery guts? You used to be the life of the party.

STANLEY: *(Cupping his hand over the phone)* Give it a rest, Todd. Katrina’s happy with a juice, aren’t you love?

Stan moves to another part of the clubrooms to talk on the phone.

KATRINA: A juice will be fine. Someone’s got to drive you drunken bums home.

TODD: Fair doos, fair doos. What about you, Hils?

HILARY: Another white wine please.

TODD: Another white wine? Geez, I don’t know how you can drink that stuff. Still, each to their own, eh? Now you stay there and look pretty, while I go get you a white wine.

HILARY: Thanks, Todd.

TODD: *(He kisses her)* No, no. Thank *you*. Châteaux le Cardboard okay for you, my sweet?

HILARY: Chardonnay, please.

TODD: Oh. Chardon, eh? I'll see what we've got.

Todd heads towards the bar.

KATRINA: That's cute. You two were obviously made for each other.

HILARY: Yeah. He's one of a kind, that's for sure.

KATRINA: Sounds serious.

HILARY: Must be. Last week he told me that he loves me.

KATRINA: Well that is serious.

HILARY: I know. I'm so lucky.

SIMON: Ah ... Hilary?

HILARY: Mmm?

SIMON: Can I have a word?

HILARY: Of course.

KATRINA: Don't mind me. I was just going to the Ladies.

Katrina walks over to Stanley and impatiently watches him on the phone. Hilary and Simon talk in hushed tones.

HILARY: Your mother doesn't know?

SIMON: Ah ...

HILARY: Your dad doesn't even know?

SIMON: I didn't think we'd get this far. We *never* make it to the finals. Christ, what a mess.

HILARY: Look I'm sure it will be fine. The game will be, what, about two in the afternoon? There'd still plenty of time to make it to the theatre.

SIMON: If I know Dad, he'll call training every bloody night this week. I'm still struggling with my lines. This wasn't supposed to happen.

Hilary moves closer to Simon.

HILARY: We'll work something out. I'll tell you what. I'll clear my schedule for the afternoons this week, and you and I can work one on one. How does that sound? Mmm?

Todd is at the bar ogling at Tasmin, who is replacing bottles in the fridge.

TODD: Can I give you a hand?

TASMIN: Sorry?

TODD: Don't be sorry, sweetheart. I was enjoying the view.

TASMIN: Did you want something?

TODD: Why don't you come down this end of the bar and find out? Or if you'd rather, I could come up your end!

TASMIN: Good luck trying.

TODD: What's the matter with you? You a lezzo or something?

TASMIN: A pint, is it?

TODD: Thought so. Yeah, three pints, a medium white wine and an O-J.

Stanley has finished on the phone.

KATRINA: Work again?

STANLEY: Eh?

KATRINA: Stan, this is the fifth time that phone has gone off tonight. What is the matter with you?

STANLEY: Yeah, sorry love.

KATRINA: So, what's the story?

STANLEY: Bloody work.

KATRINA: Really?

STANLEY: Really. I told them not to call but ... you know how it is.

KATRINA: You could turn the your phone off for one night.

STANLEY: Kat, I know what you're thinking. But it's strictly business this time, okay.

KATRINA: No, not okay, Stanley. Not okay at all.

STANLEY: Katrina, just ... just leave it alone will yah?

SIMON: *(To Hilary, laughing)* I know. She's always doing that, or breaking a bulb or knocking scenery over. The cast call her WDA.

HILARY: *(Laughing)* WDA?

SIMON: Walking Disaster Area!

Both laugh as Todd returns to the table with a tray of drinks.

TODD: There we go my precious, one white wine – medium rare ... What's going on?

SIMON: Nothing

HILARY: Nothing.

TODD: Could've fooled me. Come on. What are you plotting, eh?

HILARY: Nothing, Todd.

TODD: You two have got very friendly all of a sudden.

HILARY: Don't be ridiculous. I was just congratulating the man of the match.

TODD: Right. Too bloody right. *(Passing Simon a beer)* Here's a cold one for you, champ. Freshly squeezed.

Katrina returns to the table, followed by Stan.

Ah, there we go Kat. A double O-J on the rocks, just the way you like it ...

STANLEY: *(To Katrina)* That's all there is to it.

KATRINA: *(Annoyed)* Great.

STANLEY: I know, I know ...

TODD: ... a beer for you and a beer for me ...

HILARY: Everything okay, Katrina?

KATRINA: Yeah. Yeah everything's fine.

STANLEY: It's nothing.

KATRINA: I wouldn't say, 'nothing'.

STANLEY: I've been called away on an overnighter, that's all.

SIMON: Oh, so will there be any training tomorrow?

STANLEY: Of course there will. Every night.

SIMON: Oh.

STANLEY: That a problem?

SIMON: No, no ...

STANLEY: Good.

SIMON: Yeah. Good.

STANLEY: Don't get too friggin' excited.

SIMON: Nah, nah. It's ... it's fine.

STANLEY: (*Sarcastically*) You sure now? I wouldn't want to be putting you out. I mean if you've got something more important to do ...

SIMON: I said it's fine.

STANLEY: I don't know what's got into you Simon. The NZRU were sniffing around for you today. Think about that, eh? (*Stan checks his phone*) As it turns out, I reckon we should give the lads a spell tomorrow anyway.

TODD: (*Miffed*) Oh, okay. No, that's okay. We normally consult about that sort of stuff. But no, never mind.

STANLEY: Don't *you* start. The boys need a day off to recover.

Stan goes to leave.

TODD: So, what? We'll see you at training on Monday?

STANLEY: Sure.

TODD: You don't want to consult before then?

STANLEY: No.

TODD: No discussion about strategies ... player management the opposition?

STANLEY: Todd, I've got to go.

TODD: Go. Go. Don't let me hold you up.

Exit Stanley.

KATRINA: I'm sorry, Simon. I'll talk to him.

SIMON: Just ... forget it, Mum.

STANLEY: Katrina!

KATRINA: I better go.

SIMON: Yeah. His lordship bellows.

Exit Katrina.

TODD: What the fuck just happened?

SIMON: Bugged if I know.

TODD: Brilliant!

Todd has a drink of his beer.

Nah. It just doesn't taste the same somehow. Get your coat, Hilary. I can't see the point in staying.

Exit Todd.

HILARY: See you tomorrow, Simon?

She leans across the table and gives Simon a kiss on the cheek.

SIMON: Yeah, yeah. Sure.

Exit Hilary. Simon watches her go. He sits at the table and takes a long drink. Tasmin, who has been watching, comes over to the table and begins clearing glasses etc. Eventually, she speaks to Simon.

TASMIN: Um, you okay?

SIMON: Eh?

TASMIN: Is everything all right?

SIMON: Yeah. Nah, sweet as.

Pause.

TASMIN: Great game today.

SIMON: Cheers.

Pause.

TASMIN: I'll, ah ... I'll leave you to your thoughts.

SIMON: Sorry, Tasmin. There's a lot going on, eh?

TASMIN: Yeah. I kind of gathered.

SIMON: It seems whatever I do I end up disappointing someone.

TASMIN: I totally get that.

SIMON: You do?

TASMIN: Uh huh. There's something about a disappointed father, eh?

SIMON: You're not wrong there.

TASMIN: Your mother will always, I don't know, be your mother. But not living up to your father's expectations *(pause)* What's the story with *your* father?

SIMON: Stepfather.

TASMIN: Ah.

SIMON: Mum remarried when I was young. My real father was Brian Clarke. He was first five for Wests back in the day. That's his photo up there on the wall. It's

the Clarke Memorial Cup is that we play for. He died when I was only two. Car crash.

TASMIN: I'm sorry.

SIMON: Nah it's okay. I don't remember him. I was too young. Dad ... er ... my stepdad, Stanley ... is the only Dad I've known.

TASMIN: I wish we didn't need our dad's approval all the time. I mean I wish it didn't matter so much.

SIMON: Yeah.

There is an awkward silence.

TASMIN: Um ... we still on for Thursday night?

SIMON: Ah ... yeah, yeah of course.

TASMIN: Okay then.

SIMON: Okay.

Simon and Tasmin go to give each other a friendly kiss. They both aim for the same cheek, then the other. In the end neither kisses the other.

TASMIN: *(Laughing)* See you.

SIMON: Yeah. See yah, Tasmin.

Tasmin watches Simon exit. She stacks the barstools upside down on the bar and picks up her handbag.

ACT ONE Scene 3. *Tasmin is speaking to her psychiatrist. She is in a solo spotlight*

TASMIN: Is this relevant? Of course I've got a boyfriend. I can't see what it has to do with anything. Have *you* got a boy friend? Eh? Okay. He's a good-looking guy. I like him. I like him a lot. So what? What does it matter how long we've been going out? I don't see how any of this is relevant. *(Pause)* Miss my mother? Only like you miss the sun in winter. *(She sighs)* There are times when I think she's going to come through the door like she's just been out shopping or something. Sometimes I'm worried that I might ... I might forget her face. So I spend ages trying to remember tiny details; her eyes, the wrinkles around her mouth, her toothy smile. Huh. I suppose now you're going to tell me I have 'unresolved grief issues' or something. If wishing your mother were still alive to ... to listen to you, to hold you and tell you that she loves you ... if missing her so much it cripples your senses ...if that means I have unresolved grief issues, then yeah. I have unresolved grief issues.

ACT ONE Scene 4. *University Little Theatre.*

Simon and Hilary each hold a script and are working on The Bacchae by Euripides.

SIMON: *(As Dionysus)* Pentheus. Will you not take notice of what I say?

I have suffered at your hands,
But I give you fair warning.
Do not bear arms ... (*Breaking character*) ... it's no use. I just can't get into it.
God knows why you cast me.

HILARY: Well, he's not really your macho kind of guy.

SIMON: If I'm honest, that's the bit I'm struggling with.

HILARY: You mean the feminine side of Dionysus?

SIMON: Ah, yeah ... the feminine side.

HILARY: Look, I get that when you're playing rugby it's smash 'em up and tough and all that. But away from there, you are one of the gentlest, sweetest guys I know.

Pause.

SIMON: Yeah I ... I just don't want to let you down ...

HILARY: You won't.

SIMON: ... and I don't want to let Stan down.

HILARY: You really admire him, don't you?

SIMON: Yeah. Well, he's my dad, and my coach. My mentor, I suppose. If I thought about it, he's the person I most look up to. The person I'd most want to be like.

HILARY: That says a lot about you - about your softer side. And that's the quality that's missing for Dionysus right now.

SIMON: I just wish I knew what to do. If I go to training I miss a rehearsal and if I'm at rehearsal I miss training. I can't win.

HILARY: I'll do my best to work around you this week, but it's tricky. We have to open on Saturday.

SIMON: I know, I know.

HILARY: Maybe if I spoke to Stan ...

SIMON: Ahh ... no. He won't get it. I'll figure something out.

Pause.

HILARY: All right then, Let's do it. I'll read in Pentheus.

SIMON: Okay.

HILARY: Pick it up at "Do not bear arms ..."

Simon holds the script but only refers to it occasionally. Hilary glances at her script from time to time. Simon reads Dionysus and Hilary reads Pentheus.

SIMON: Do not bear arms against your god.

HILARY: Don't tell me what I can and cannot do!
You are free. Is that not enough?

SIMON: My friend, you must listen to me.

HILARY: I have had enough of you.
Will nothing I do or say shut you up?!

SIMON: Pentheus. We may still turn all of this to your advantage.

HILARY: *(As herself)* That's good Simon. You are playing the masculine side really well.
You get that. But he's androgynous. Let me see the other side ...

SIMON: *(As himself)* The ... feminine side. Okay. *(Pause)*. Jeez, Hilary. I don't know.

HILARY: You're a fine actor, Simon. Don't be afraid to express that part of you, too.

SIMON: Um, okay. I'll try.

HILARY: *(As Pentheus)* What can I possibly do?
I cannot be seen to have women overrule me.
They leave me no choice.

SIMON: *(As Dionysus)* I can bring all the women back, unharmed.

HILARY: You are plotting something.

SIMON: Why should I plot anything against you.
Surely, you would like to watch them?

HILARY: Watch them?

SIMON: Yes.

HILARY: Why, yes. I'd love to ... I mean,
It is my moral duty to observe them. If I can.

SIMON: Are you sure? There will be drunkenness.
There will be nakedness. There will be debauchery.

Hilary breaks character and addresses Simon as herself.

HILARY: Simon, you need to flirt with Pentheus more, okay? Entice me. Make me want you.

SIMON: Okay, okay.

HILARY: Good.

SIMON: Okay. *(From the script, suggestively)* There will be drunkenness. There will be nakedness. There will be debauchery.

HILARY: That's much better.

Pause. Simon looks up from his script he sees Hilary staring at him. There is an awkward pause.

SIMON: You're just saying that.

HILARY: No, I meant it. You have a knack for it. You came across as really feminine then. I really got that. You do need a bit more abdominal support though. Here. *(She places the flat of here hand on his abdomen)* Your diaphragm supports your breath. Breathe in and try and push my hand with you tummy.

SIMON: Ah ... I don't think I can.

HILARY: Of course you can. Just breathe through your stomach.

SIMON: Breathe through my ... ?

HILARY: Just try.

Pause.

SIMON: It's no good. I can't do it.

HILARY: You need to relax a bit.

SIMON: I am relaxed.

HILARY: No you're not. You're all tense.

SIMON: Really? I guess I'm still a bit sore from yesterday.

HILARY: I can feel that you're tensed up. Here let me ...

She begins massaging his neck and shoulders.

... I knew it. Most people carry tension right there.

SIMON: Ahh ... yeah that's really tight.

HILARY: You're full of knots.

She continues to massage his neck, shoulders and back.

SIMON: Oh that's great. You sure know how to find the sore spots.

HILARY: Shh. Just relax. Try to breathe through your tummy, here.

She reaches around and places her hand on his abdomen. He turns to her. They kiss. They part and look at each other. They kiss again.

SIMON: Jesus, Hilary.

HILARY: I'm sorry.

SIMON: Don't be sorry.

Pause.

HILARY: Simon ... I ... You will be great as Dionysus. Stay in touch with your feminine side. It's much more attractive. You've made a breakthrough tonight.

SIMON: Thanks.

Silence.

HILARY: Right. That's enough for now.

SIMON: Right.

HILARY: See you at the party?

SIMON: Yeah. Yeah, see yah there.

HILARY: Good night, Simon.

SIMON: Yeah. Night, Hilary.

Exit Simon.

ACT ONE Scene 5. Tasmin is speaking to her psychiatrist. She is in a solo spotlight

TASMIN: These days Dad lives out near the marae in his clapped out caravan and ... and I just stay out of his way. Because we don't get along. Why? Why not? *(Pause)* Sometimes he wouldn't bother me for weeks. But eventually ... I would lie in bed facing the wall, pretending to be asleep. He would slip himself under the covers. He reeked of booze and cigarettes. He would always start gently ... and always end violently. What hurt most was keeping the secret. "Don't you go telling your mother or she'll leave us both." I cannot begin to tell you what shame a child feels keeping their daddy's secret. So ... when Mum did finally leave us, when she died, I told him. I told him at the tangi. *(Without emotion)* I told him if he ever so much as looks at another child, I'd sneak up on him in the middle of the night, cut his cock off and stuff it down his throat. So, no. Me and Dad don't get along these days. Okay?

ACT ONE Scene 6. Wests Rugby Clubrooms.

Tasmin takes down the barstools and begins setting up the bar. Enter Todd. He is wearing track pants and jacket and is carrying a sports bag and rugby ball.

TODD: What a fucking shambles!

TASMIN: Tough day at the office?

TODD: No flow, no structure, no discipline. They were all over the paddock like a mad woman's poo.

TASMIN: Charming.

TODD: Give us a pint will you, love?

TASMIN: Sure.

TODD: At this rate we'll be bloody lucky to come second.

Enter Simon. He's wearing rugby gear. Boots tied together, hanging over his shoulder.

SIMON: Sorry, Todd. Not the best training-run of the season.

TODD: Master of the flaming understatement.

SIMON: We're doing our best, Todd.

TODD: If that's your best sunshine, we are in a deep pile of pickled poo.

SIMON: I'll, ah ... I'll hit the showers.

TODD: While you're at it, tell that pathetic front row that if they're gonna play like poofs they might as well go sign up at the soccer club! I've seen a hooker get more balls on Manchester Street, than that useless prick.

Exit Simon. Tasmin has poured Todd's beer.

TASMIN: Simon's not the hooker, is he?

TODD: What?

TASMIN: I thought Simon was a flanker.

TODD: Who fucking asked you?

TASMIN: Seven dollars, please.

TODD: Stick to what you know best, darlin'. Leave the men's work to the men, eh?

He puts \$10 on the bar. Tasmin takes it and gets his change. Todd takes a long drink.

Aaaah. Nectar of the gods. That one is well earned.

Enter Stan.

Well, fuck me sideways and call me a letterbox. The prodigal coach returns.

Todd turns his back to Stan and takes another drink.

STANLEY: Todd, I'm sorry okay. You have no idea the pressure I've been under at work. It's just bad timing, that's all. I meant to get be here by four, but then something else came up at the office. Todd? Come on, mate. I know I should have been there for you ... but I ...

TODD: Do I smell perfume?

STANLEY: What?

TODD: Perfume. Ladies' perfume. I can smell it on you. You stink of it.

STANLEY: I ... I hardly think ...

TODD: Oh ho. So ... you've missed the training sessions for a sheila.

STANLEY: Todd, it's not like that ...

TODD: *(Turning to Stan)* A sheila! You haven't been away on business. You've been out rooting!

STANLEY: Todd, I can explain ...

TODD: Nothing to explain, mate. You've been out shagging yourself senseless ... and I'm proud of yah. Have a beer on me, you dirty dog. *(To Tasmin)* Give my old shag here a pint will you, gorgeous? *(To Stan)* It's just like back in the day.

STANLEY: What is?

TODD: You were shagging Katrina behind Brian's back.

STANLEY: Eh? How ...

TODD: How did I know? You forget. There is nothing about you I don't know. It's all right. Your secret's safe with me.

STANLEY: There are other things from twenty years ago I'd rather remember.

TODD: Ha ha. Good times, mate. Good times.

He looks to see there's no one else around – ignoring Tasmin he pretends to be a commentator.

The two big packs face-off mid field inside the Wests' twenty-two. Three minutes on the clock and it's Marist's put-in.

STANLEY: *(Also a commentator)* Greenwood on the blindside of the defending scrum and Todd Matthews crouches down on the open-side.

TODD: Wests' number ten, Brian Clarke, 15 metres back centre field, with the rest of the defending backs spread evenly across the Wests' goal line.

STANLEY: The ball goes in. It's a tight head! It's a tight head!!

TODD: The ball flies back to Clarkey. Marist are a man down, but they race up quickly.

STANLEY: Clarke dummies, he sidesteps and he fends off another. Clarke to Greenwood,

TODD: Greenwood to Mathews.

STANLEY: Mathews to Greenwood.

TODD: Greenwood to Clarke. Brian Clarke has broken through! He's away. There'll be no stopping him. Brian Clarke ... Brian Clarke ... Brian Clarke ... Try!!!

Try to Clarkey! Right on full time, Brian Clarke has won the championship for Wests Rugby Football Club.

They both cheer and laugh.

TASMIN: *(Placing a beer on the bar)* It must have been quite a match.

TODD: The best. Cheers, sweetheart. *(To Stan)* Here champ. Wrap your laughing gear around that.

STANLEY: Cheers, Todd.

TODD: Cheers, Stan.

BOTH: *(Looking up at the photo)* Cheers, Clarkey.

Pause.

TODD: I hope she was fucking worth it, mate because your team is falling apart at the seams.

STANLEY: Yeah, I'm sorry.

TODD: Not another word. We need you now, though. The forwards are playing like a bunch of blouses and they could do with some of your famous inspiration.

STANLEY: I'll think of something.

TODD: I mean you gotta ask yourself, is the screwing you're getting worth the screwing you're getting?

STANLEY: I hear yah.

TODD: It's good to have you back on deck. Let's focus on the game, eh?

STANLEY: No worries, mate.

Enter Simon.

TODD: *(Raising his glass)* Here's to you and here's to me ...

STANLEY: *(Laughing)* Best of friends we'll always be ...

TODD: But if one day we disagree ...

BOTH: Fuck you then, and here's to me!

They both laugh.

STANLEY: Cheers, mate.

TODD: Cheers.

STANLEY: Simon.

SIMON: Dad.

STANLEY: How's training?

SIMON: A bit of a mess to be fair. Where've you been?

STANLEY: Bloody work. You know how it is.

SIMON: I know how it is ... these days.

STANLEY: What's that supposed to mean?

SIMON: We haven't seen you since you left on Saturday night.

STANLEY: Yeah. About that. There's a lot of pressure on at work. They keep sending me out all over the place. Still, you're in good hands with me old mate here, right?

TODD: Look, ah ... time I made myself scarce, eh? Gotta pick Hills up from the bloody theatre.

STANLEY: The theatre?

TODD: Yeah, I know. Christ knows what she's doin' down there with a bunch of wanky actors and faggoty-anns.

STANLEY: Each to their own, eh?

TODD: Yeah. Catch yah, tomorrow?

STANLEY: Too right.

TODD: See you 'round, like a squashed titty.

Exit Todd.

STANLEY: Give us a couple will yah, Tas'?

TASMIN: Two pints coming up. Hey, Simon.

SIMON: Hi yah, Tasmin.

STANLEY: So ... how's your study going?

SIMON: Okay, I suppose. Fitting everything in at the moment is a bit of a stress.

STANLEY: I know what you mean. You just have to have your priorities sorted, eh? Keep your eye on the ball. Good things are coming your way, my boy.

SIMON: Yeah.

STANLEY: (*Checking his phone*) Yeah. And you don't want to get yourself distracted.

Tasmin places the drinks on the bar.

TASMIN: There you go, fellahs.

STANLEY: Cheers.
SIMON: Thanks, Tasmin.

SIMON: I had a phone call today.

STANLEY: And?

SIMON: And it was the NZRU. The guy said they were interested in seeing me play this weekend.

STANLEY: Brilliant! I knew it!

SIMON: He asked about my training schedule.

STANLEY: Oh yeah?

SIMON: I told him I was training most nights.

STANLEY: Good, good.

SIMON: Then I told him ... that I wasn't sure if I wanted to be a professional rugby player.

STANLEY: You what?

SIMON: I told him ... I was considering other options.

STANLEY: You have got to be fucking kidding.

SIMON: I don't expect you to understand.

STANLEY: Too right I don't understand.

SIMON: Anyway, he said that he and a couple of other fellahs would come down on Saturday to watch the final. He also said they'd want to talk with me next week, if I was interested.

STANLEY: Well ... congratulations.

SIMON: Yeah, ta.

STANLEY: Look, Si. I'm sure you'll be brilliant on Saturday and they'll sign you up to one of the franchises. Let's face it, it's what you've always wanted.

SIMON: No Dad. It's what you've always wanted. I'm not sure what I want.

STANLEY: Don't be stupid, Simon. It'll be the ABs next, you mark my words.

SIMON: I've got to go. *(To Tasmin)* See you tomorrow night, Tasmin.

TASMIN: Looking forward to it.

SIMON: Great. See you, Dad. What should I tell Mum?

STANLEY: Ahh ... tell her ... tell her I'll be home soon.

SIMON: No worries.

Exit Simon.

TASMIN: Another one?

STANLEY: Nah, she's right.

TASMIN: You going on Saturday night?

STANLEY: Eh?

TASMIN: To the opening night.

STANLEY: Opening night?

TASMIN: Simon's play. The Bacchae. I think he'll be brilliant.

STANLEY: Simon's play ... yeah, yeah right. Of course.

Exit Stan.

ACT ONE Scene 7. Tasmin is speaking to her psychiatrist. She is in a solo spotlight

TASMIN: Everyone is quick to judge, eh? Based on what? What you look like? What you wear? Your accent? The colour of your skin? Most people don't even know I'm Māori. Unless I tell them. It doesn't come up in conversation much. Oh hi I'm Tasmin. I'm a Māori. And what race are you? Most people assume I'm Spanish or Italian or something. It's funny how people make assumptions. It's funny how people change when they find out too, eh? *(Pause)* Yeah, it's funny how people change when they find out.

ACT ONE Scene 8. Stanley and Katrina's Bedroom.

Katrina is angry. She is laying out some of her dresses on the bed. Simon is unseen in the adjoining ensuite. She passes him various outfits to try, as he gets ready to go to the party.

KATRINA: Have you seen Stan? Has he been in touch? I can't even reach him on his cell phone.

SIMON: He said he'd be home soon.

KATRINA: Why isn't he answering his phone? He never goes anywhere without it. I mean the bloody thing might as well be surgically attached to the end of his arm.

We see Simon's arm reach out from the ensuite, holding a dress.

SIMON: This is too small. Have you got another one?

KATRINA: Two days he's been gone. Out of town work commitments? That's bullshit.

She passes Simon another dress.

SIMON: Don't stress about it, Mum.

KATRINA: Don't stress about it? He's got bloody clients arriving any minute and he's nowhere to be seen. What am I supposed to do? Play charades with them until he gets here. *If* he gets here!

SIMON: Mum. He'll be here.

KATRINA: But he promised me.

SIMON: Mum. He'll be here. You are supposed to be helping me get ready.

Simon enters. He is wearing stockings, and women's underwear and holding the dress.

I can't even get into this one. I feel like a complete idiot. Maybe I should flag going.

KATRINA: He's done it before you know. Shit. I cannot believe he'd break his promise again.

SIMON: Mum!

KATRINA: What?

SIMON: Look at me. I can't go out like this. You said you'd help.

KATRINA: Yes, yes. Sorry darling.

She gets another dress from the wardrobe and passes it to Simon.

Here give this one a go. I'm sure you'll look good in it.

SIMON: *(Stepping into the dress)* Thanks Mum. I wish I'd never agreed to go this bloody party.

KATRINA: So, everyone's going dressed up like this?

SIMON: Yep. Hilary's idea to have a vice versa thing for the cast and crew. I feel ridiculous.

KATRINA: You look great. Stan bought it. It was that time we went to Aussie. I don't even know why we've hung onto it for so long. *(Pause)* You would have been twelve.

SIMON: I turned thirteen remember?

KATRINA: Really?

SIMON: Yes. You were away for my thirteenth birthday!

KATRINA: Oh, crumbs, that's right.

SIMON: Not that I'm carrying a grudge or anything.

KATRINA: Here let me zip you up.

SIMON: Thanks.

KATRINA: I am sorry I missed your birthday. We did make it up to you though.

SIMON: Oh yes, the t-shirt with "I did it down on The Rocks" was brilliant.

KATRINA: And the felt pens ...

SIMON: (*Laughing*) And the felt pens. Twelve colours. Bloody marvellous, Mum. What about shoes?

KATRINA: I don't think we got you shoes?

SIMON: Shoes for tonight. What do you reckon? Yours will be too small. I could just wear sneakers.

KATRINA: Hold on, I have just the thing. I'm sure there's a pair that will do the job.

SIMON: Thanks, Mum. I don't know what I'd do without you.

KATRINA: Here try these.

She passes Simon a shoebox containing a pair of large, women's, shoes. He takes them out.

SIMON: I'm pretty sure they won't fit me. I'm, like, a nine and a half or a ten ...

KATRINA: Just try them.

SIMON: (*Putting on one of the shoes*) Okay. Now I'm starting to feel like Cinderella.

KATRINA: (*Laughing*) You look more like one of the ugly sisters. Here.

She hands him one of two wigs that she has retrieved from the back of the wardrobe.

SIMON: Jeez, where did you get this stuff? It's hardly you?

KATRINA: Just some stuff we've kept from over the years. You know, for parties and that. Where the hell is he? Are you going to wear makeup?

SIMON: Why? Do you think I need to?

KATRINA: Yes!

SIMON: Oh charming. What are you saying?

KATRINA: Nothing. Just that a little lippy makes a lady last longer. Here try this one.

Katrina passes Simon a lipstick taken from her handbag.

SIMON: (*Reading the label*) Mmm Charismatic Coral. Are you serious!?

KATRINA: *(Laughing)* Go on. Get in there and give it a try.

SIMON: *(Heading to the ensuite)* I have to wear makeup for The Bacchae, so ... I can do this.

Katrina takes her phone out and calls Stanley.

KATRINA: Help yourself to my other stuff in there if you like. Second drawer down.

SIMON: Cheers.

KATRINA: Come on pick up. I don't get why he won't answer?

SIMON: He'll be driving home. You know he won't use the phone when he's driving.

KATRINA: Yeah, I suppose so.

She puts the phone in her handbag and begins putting the dresses away. She catches a glimpse of herself in the mirror.

KATRINA: God I look a fright.

Stanley enters, carrying an overnight bag.

STANLEY: What a day.

Katrina goes to hug him but hits him instead. Conscious of Simon in the ensuite, she whispers.

KATRINA: Where the hell have you been? I've been waiting for you ...

STANLEY: *(Sarcastically)* Hello, Kat. How are you? I'm fine Stanley, thank you. Did you have a nice day?

KATRINA: You could have called. I've been trying to reach you.

STANLEY: Give it a rest will yah?

KATRINA: You promised!

STANLEY: For fuck sake. Can't I have a life of my own? Do I really need to check in with you before I go anywhere or do anything? You know work called me away. It was business, okay? Business!

KATRINA: Tell me where you've been. Who have you been with?

STANLEY: Katrina, you're being paranoid.

KATRINA: Paranoid? Paranoid? You've been gone for days. You knew full well your clients were coming to dinner tonight and you've left everything up to me. I'm sick of it. Sick of you not being here. I'm sick of having to put up with ...

STANLEY: Put up with what? Let's get something straight here. Whatever you think you have had to put up with is nothing ... nothing compared to the shit you've put me through over the years!!

Simon enters from the ensuite. He is fully made up and wearing wig, dress and heels.

SIMON: Hi there. So ... what do you think?

Silence.

STANLEY: *(Slowly)* What the fuck do you think you are doing?

SIMON: Eh?

KATRINA: Stanley.

STANLEY: What are you doing in that dress?

SIMON: Um ... I'm wearing it to a party tonight.

STANLEY: Party.

SIMON: Um, yeah. It's ... look I was going to tell you about this play I'm in and ...

STANLEY: *(Shaking his head)* No you don't.

SIMON: What?

STANLEY: No you fucking don't!

KATRINA: Stan!

SIMON: C'mon, Dad.

STANLEY: Huh. Dad.

SIMON: Look, Dad, I've managed to ...

STANLEY: Don't you fucking call me 'Dad'.

SIMON: Eh?

STANLEY: No ... No son of mine would ...

SIMON: Would what?

STANLEY: ... would abandon his teammates when they need him most.

KATRINA: Stan. There's no need to ...

STANLEY: No, Kat. I've thought about this. I've thought about bugger-all else since I found out that *Sir Laurence Olivier* here decided he'd rather be an actor than be there for his rugby team.

SIMON: That's the pot calling the kettle black. Where the fuck have *you* been, Dad?

STANLEY: I am not your Dad.

SIMON: So, what, you're disowning me?

STANLEY: (*Mockingly*) I don't know if I want to be a rugby player. I'm weighing up my options. In my book, that is not how a son treats his dad. Your fucking choice, mate, not mine.

KATRINA: That's enough, Stan!

STANLEY: Shut up, Kat. If you and Brian weren't such pissheads, none of us would be here now would we?

Silence.

KATRINA: How dare you?

SIMON: Um, I think I should go.

STANLEY: Yeah go on. Off you fuck. Go play with your theatre friends.

Simon stares at Stan in disbelief before exiting. Katrina watches them go. Eventually she turns to Stan.

KATRINA: Stan, you promised ...

STANLEY: I promised to stand by you while you overcame your addiction. But let's face it ... you don't ever overcome being an alcoholic do you, Katrina?

KATRINA: That is not fair!

STANLEY: I'm sick of it too. I'm sick of fixing your messes. I've held the bucket for you, lied to your boss for you ... I'm always cleaning up after you, Katrina. Fuck, I even got you this new job at the supermarket after ... after you were sacked by the hospital. Sacked. Fuck knows how many patients you neglected over the years. You're a disgrace.

KATRINA: You're right, Stan. I am an alcoholic. And I'm trying to do something about it. I promised I'd give up the drink and I have. I can't promise any more than that.

STANLEY: Ah, forget it Kat.

The doorbell rings.

KATRINA: Oh God.

STANLEY: Great. The clients are here. Thanks, Kat. Thank you very fucking much.

Stanley exits and slams the door. Katrina sits on the edge of the bed and weeps. After a while, she stands up and attempts to compose herself in front of the mirror. She sees Stanley's bag on the bed. She reluctantly opens the bag and pulls out a pair of women's knickers.

Lights fade.

ACT ONE Scene 9. Tasmin's apartment.

Tasmin and Simon are happy and a little tipsy and can be heard from off. They are returning from the vice versa party.

TASMIN: *(Laughing, from off)* Sshhhhhh! Hang on, hang on. I know I put the keys somewhere.

SIMON: *(Laughing, from off)* Try your handbag.

TASMIN: Sshhhh! I haven't got a handbag, silly.

SIMON: Maybe you left it in the taxi.

TASMIN: What?

SIMON: Your handbag.

TASMIN: *(Laughing)* Silly girl. I haven't got a handbag.

SIMON: *(Laughing)* Maybe they're in *my* handbag.

TASMIN: Hang on. Got them. Jacket pocket. Dunno why guys have so many pockets.

SIMON: Because we don't have handbags!

Enter Tasmin dressed in a man's suit, and Simon wearing a dress and wig.

TASMIN: Here we are.

Tasmin switches a lamp on. Her apartment is a compact bedroom and kitchenette. Her walls are adorned with contemporary Māori artworks.

SIMON: Nice, place.

TASMIN: Thanks.

SIMON: No, really. I love it. *(Removing his wig and looking around)* Wow. Very cool.

TASMIN: Thank you.

Pause.

SIMON: Did *you* do these?

TASMIN: Those? Yes. A friend did that one, but the rest are mine. Drink?

SIMON: Um, yeah, sure. Thanks. These are amazing.

TASMIN: I've got a Smirnoff, or Bourbon and Dry. That one's called 'Hinetahi'.

SIMON: Ah ... Bourbon, thanks. He-neh-tar-he? What's that?

TASMIN: Who?

SIMON: Eh?

TASMIN: Hinetahi is a who, not a what.

SIMON: Oh, right. Yeah. Sorry.

TASMIN: Hinetahi was an amazing person, especially for Māoridom and especially for time that she lived – the mid eighteen hundreds.

SIMON: Really? How's that?

TASMIN: *(Passing him his drink)* Cheers.

SIMON: Cheers.

TASMIN: What I've tried to represent is that Hinetahi was both man and woman.

SIMON: Okaay.

TASMIN: *(Laughing)* Okay, it is a bit abstract, but Hinetahi was born a female but by the time she was an adult, she had the most remarkable tā moko that challenged how people viewed her. One side of her face had the kauwae, or chin tattoo, the other side of her face was tattooed like a man.

SIMON: *(Looking at the painting and tipping his head to one side)* Oh, yeah ... I think I can see that now.

TASMIN: So that part there *(indicating the painting)* that represents the feminine side – kauwae, lips, chin, and there is the masculine side and tā moko of a high-ranking chief.

SIMON: I love it. I didn't know you were an artist.

Pause

TASMIN: There's a lot you don't know about me.

SIMON: There's a lot I'd like to find out.

Pause

TASMIN: So, the vice versa party was fun ...

SIMON: I like this other painting ...

TASMIN: Oh, uh this one? ...

SIMON: Yeah, heaps of ...

SIMON: *(Laughing)* Sorry.

TASMIN: It's okay. Go ahead.

SIMON: No, no. You were saying the vice versa party was fun.

TASMIN: Yeah. Plenty of characters anyway.

SIMON: What a laugh. I definitely saw the cast in a different light. And trying to figure out who were men or women was ... a challenge.

TASMIN: Some were easier than others.

SIMON: I reckon you could tell the men easier than the women.

TASMIN: Really?

SIMON: Mmm. Big hands.

TASMIN: Pardon?

SIMON: Most men have bigger hands.

TASMIN: That's a bit of a generalisation, isn't it?

SIMON: Or big feet.

TASMIN: Is that so?

SIMON: You know what they say. Big feet big ...

TASMIN: Simon!

SIMON: Heart! I was going to say 'heart'.

TASMIN: You have big feet. Have you got a big ... heart?

SIMON: You're right. It was a generalisation. Sorry.

TASMIN: It's okay. I think I get what you mean. For me, figuring out who were men and who were women wasn't as fascinating as seeing a whole bunch of people simply discovering another side to themselves. Yourself included.

SIMON: Hey, hold on. What are you saying?

TASMIN: Well ... here you are, a budding rugby star, the bastion of all things male. But look at yourself. Be honest. You've enjoyed wearing a dress.

SIMON: For fun. For fun.

TASMIN: You're loving it, aren't you? Eh? Just a little?

SIMON: Maybe.

TASMIN: It's okay. Your secret is safe with me. Anyway, I think it's kind of cute.

SIMON: Cute?

TASMIN: Hilary thinks you're cute too.

SIMON: Hilary?

TASMSN: Mmm. She couldn't take her eyes off you all night.

SIMON: She's the director. She would have been seeing if I found the feminine side of myself ... for the character ... Dionysus. He's a bit ... you know ... AC-DC.

TASMIN: AC-DC?

SIMON: Androgynous.

TASMIN: I think she's succeeded. Nothing like a manly man in a girly dress.

SIMON: *(Laughing)* That's enough. Next you'll be wanting me in one of your paintings.

TASMIN: Now you're talking.

SIMON: Not bloody likely.

Pause. Simon looks around the room.

TASMIN: Another drink?

SIMON: Ah, oh ... go on then.

Tasmin goes to the fridge for more drinks. Simon takes an interest in another painting.

What's this one about?

TASMIN: Oh that. That's Te Roto o Wairewa.

SIMON: Oh, yeah?

TASMIN: Lake Forsythe. Out on the peninsula.

SIMON: What's the snake all about?

TASMIN: It's an eel.

She passes him his drink.

SIMON: An eel. Cheers.

TASMIN: Mmm. That part there *(indicating the painting)* is supposed to represent a spawning eel.

SIMON: Awesome. Sounds dangerous.

TASMIN: And this part here represents the lake ...

Simon moves closer to Tasmin and the painting.

SIMON: Uh-hu ...

TASMIN: ... and here's the marae

Simon moves closer.

SIMON: I see ...

TASMIN: ... this is the moana ... (*She notices his closeness*) ... the ocean ...

Simon leans across her.

SIMON: What's this part here?

She turns to him.

TASMIN: ... that's ... that's ...

They kiss.

TASMIN: Oh.

SIMON: Oh, ah ... shit, sorry.

TASMIN: No, don't be. I enjoyed it.

SIMON: You did? Oh ... great.

Pause.

TASMIN: Simon, there's something I ...

SIMON: Tasmin, I'm not very good at this ...

Pause. They kiss, again. The kissing becomes more passionate. Tasmin reaches for the lamp and switches it off. Black out. We hear the sound of their kissing and fondling etc. Pause.

SIMON: What the ?... Jesus fucking Christ! What the fuck!

Simon has switched on the light.

Oh God, oh God, oh God! Oh, fuck ... fuck ... fuck!

TASMIN: What? What?

SIMON: Fuck!!!

TASMIN: I thought you knew.

SIMON: Knew? No, no ... no. Not that ... I mean ... oh no.

TASMIN: Fuck you!

SIMON: I cannot believe I ...

TASMIN: I thought you knew. The Bacchae ... the vice-versa party ... the interest in my painting ... you said you knew!

SIMON: I didn't know you were queer ... or ... I didn't know you had a cock. How can you have tits and a cock?

TASMIN: Get out.

SIMON: You're a freak.

TASMIN: Get out!

SIMON: Don't worry, Lady ... Man ... whatever you are... I'm out. I'm out. I am gone. Fucking freak!

Exit Simon. Tasmin slams the door closed. Fade to black.

– End of Act One –

ACT TWO

ACT TWO Scene 1.

A light comes up on Tasmin. She is speaking to her psychiatrist.

TASMIN: Mum adored me. Spoiled me really. But I think Dad resented that. Mum would take me shopping for new clothes and she'd spend the rest of the day dressing me up, undressing me, and dressing me up again. I suppose that's why I love clothes so much. Anyway, Dad would come home from the pub and catch us. All hell would break loose. He'd eff and blind and smash the place up. Once, he tore up all the new clothes Mum bought for me. He hit Mum too. Prick. We never really talked about it. Poor Mum. I didn't know how to stop Dad being so angry all the time. I tried. Anyway it got to the point where Mum and I would do the dressing up in secret. It was our secret. We never told Dad. And Dad wouldn't get angry quite so often. No wonder Mum was so keen to go to her grave. Can't blame her.

Light up on Stanley. He sits slumped in a chair. He has a grey woollen blanket wrapped around him and covering his head. He has a bruised and bloodied face. He is at the police station, talking on his phone.

STANLEY: *(Clearing his throat)* Ah ... Todd? Is that you? -- Stan *(Pause)* Yeah mate I know it's four a.m. Sorry -- Yeah, yeah, I'm fine. Um, actually I'm not fine. I, ah ... I've got myself in a bit of bother, mate -- No, no it's nothing too serious. Just ... just a misunderstanding, that's all -- I, ah ... I was at this stag doo -- oh, you don't know him -- yeah, I know, sorry, I didn't tell you. Awkward, I know -- things got out of hand and -- no, I mean *really* out of hand -- mate, I'm at the central police station -- yeah. I've been arrested -- I dunno, I have a feeling they're going to drop the charges -- Yeah, if you could, mate, that would be great -- oh, and Todd? -- Would you bring me a pair of jeans and a jacket? -- I'll explain when you get here *(Pause)* Cheers, mate.

TASMIN: I got arrested. I would have been eighteen. I was charged with assaulting a police officer. Don't even think about trying to beat the system. If a cop wants to screw you over, you have no hope. It was about two o'clock on a Thursday afternoon. I was dressed ... not too differently as I am now. Only my tits weren't as big then. I pulled up beside a squad car at a set of lights. He was turning left, and I was going straight ahead. While I was at the lights, I could feel the police officer – a man – looking at me. Anyway, I pulled away when the lights turned green. Instead of turning left, the police car also went straight ahead and tucked in behind me. He must have followed me for about ten minutes before he finally blared his siren and put the flashing lights on. *(Pause)* I was the one with the broken jaw, yet I was charged with assaulting a police officer. Prick. At the station I was strip searched ... by a male officer. And I was put in a cell with three male offenders. Sometimes ... sometimes you just have no hope.

ACT TWO Scene 2. Police Station.

Stan is seated. Enter Todd. He is carrying a sports bag. He takes a moment.

TODD: Mate! That must have been one hell of a stag party.

STANLEY: Oh, hiya Todd. Thanks for coming, mate.

TODD: (*Chuckling*) What the hell happened?

STANLEY: A wild night, last night.

TODD: Must have been. The officer at the front desk said something about an indecent act. Bloody hell. Look at the state of you. What happened?

STANLEY: It's hard to explain. We're mates, right?

TODD: Mates? We're *best* mates. I know you better than anyone.

STANLEY: Pretty much.

Stanley removes the blanket. He is dressed as a woman. His dress is torn.

TODD: Stan ... as a mate, I gotta tell ya ... you better not let anyone down at the club see you dressed like this. Stag party or not, It's not a flash look, mate.

STANLEY: I know, I know. That's why I called you.

TODD: I have to say, we've been through a lot together over the years, but this ... this is ... I mean, you look like a bloody poof, mate. Whoever put you up to it needs their bloody head read.

STANLEY: No one put me up to it, Todd.

TODD: Oh for fuck sake. Tell me you're not a fucking fairy!

STANLEY: No, Todd. I'm not gay. I mean ... I thought I might be ... but I know I'm not.

TODD: You're pissed.

STANLEY: No, Todd. I'm not drunk, either. You say you know me. But you don't. I have been hiding this since before I even knew you. If I'm guilty of anything, it's of being dishonest with myself. I don't expect you to understand ...

TODD: Too bloody right I don't understand. What do you want to dress in women's clothes for? Is this the first time? 'Cos if it is, you better not do it again ... it's not normal!

STANLEY: Does it really matter?

TODD: It matters all right. It matters a whole lot. It's not every day someone comes along and tells you that the sky is green. *Pause.* It's not the first time, is it?

STANLEY: No.

TODD: Jesus. How many times?

STANLEY: Lots.

TODD: Lots? Five? Ten? What?

STANLEY: One or two ...

TODD: One or two?

STANLEY: ... times a week ...

TODD: A week?

STANLEY: ... for most of my adult life.

TODD: Un-fucking-believable. Shit. Shit. You think you know someone ... you know what I think?

STANLEY: No. What do you think, Todd?

TODD: I think ...

Pause. Todd takes a pair of jeans and a jacket out of the sports bag.

I know what you've got to do here, Stan. You're going to sort yourself out. What you've got to do is put all this behind you.

STANLEY: Todd, I ...

TODD: Here put these clothes on. You'll be right. Go back to the old days. I love yah, mate.

STANLEY: Even now?

TODD: Yeah. Of course. But you've got to put all this behind you now.

STANLEY: Can't you see, mate. This is who I am.

Todd slowly shakes his head. He put the clothes back in the bag.

TODD: Well ... well fuck you. You better not come near the rugby club again.

Todd exits, taking the bag with him.

ACT TWO Scene 3. Lights up on University Little Theatre.

Hilary is watching Simon. She is clearly attracted to him. Simon is rehearsing a speech from The Bacchae. Without a script, he plays Dionysus with gentle strength.

SIMON: Yes, I am Dionysus, son of Zeus.
You see me now before you as a god.
You Thebans learned about my powers too late.
Dishonouring me, you earn the penalty.
You refused my rites.
Now you must leave.
Abandon your city for barbarian lands.
Agave, too, that polluted creature, must go into perpetual banishment.
You all must endure your lot.

That's what I proclaim.
For I am Dionysus, born from no mortal father, but from Zeus.
If you had understood how to behave as you should have when you were
unwilling, you'd now be fortunate, with Zeus' child among your allies.

Hilary applauds.

HILARY: You are a fast learner. That was really good. How do you feel?

SIMON: I feel like I wish I had taken acting lessons.

HILARY: You already have a knack for it.

SIMON: Thanks.

HILARY: Maybe you should think about going to Drama School.

SIMON: What? No. Really?

HILARY: Really. How are feeling about your speech after tomorrow's game?

SIMON: All right, I suppose. If I can do that Dionysus speech ... the after-match one
should be a breeze.

HILARY: You'll be wonderful, I'm sure. But don't you dare get injured. We need you.

SIMON: It's a deal. God I'm nervous. More nervous than I've been for anything. It's a
buzz, though. I love it. I don't want it to end.

HILARY: Haha – bitten by the theatre bug and we haven't even opened.

SIMON: I don't feel like this before a game. Not even the final. I could really care less.
I wish I could ... I don't know ... it's just that ... everyone has expectations
of me. Todd, Dad... even you.

Hilary has moved close to Simon.

HILARY: It's your own expectations that you have to satisfy, Simon. You will never
please everybody.

SIMON: I'm pleasing nobody at the moment.

HILARY: Maybe. Maybe not ...

She kisses him. Simon responds.

Still think you're not pleasing anyone?

They kiss again.

SIMON: Hilary. Sorry ... um ... I do like you ...

HILARY: But?

SIMON: But ... well ... Todd for one thing.

HILARY: Todd. Mmm. I've always been attracted to the strong, masculine type. He works hard, plays hard and ...

Hilary begins kissing Simon. Simon gently pushes Hilary away.

SIMON: Hilary I ... ah ...

HILARY: Look, Simon, forget Todd. I'm just another one of his trophies.

SIMON: You're too young for him anyway.

HILARY: He likes his girlfriends young. He told me his previous girlfriend got too old for him.

SIMON: Hmm. And the one before that, and the one before that.

HILARY: He's already on the lookout for a new one.

SIMON: You'd be better off without him.

HILARY: I've seen him eyeing up Tasmin.

SIMON: Eh?

HILARY: She's younger than me, and Todd has been flirting with her. He thinks I haven't noticed. So you see, Simon ... what's good for the goose ... is good for ... *(Hilary kisses Simon).*

SIMON: *(Pulling away)* I'm sorry, Hilary. I ... I can't do this. This isn't about me ... it's about Todd. You need to sort yourself out. I can't do this for you.

Pause.

HILARY: I'm sorry Simon.

SIMON: Hilary ... you are really attractive ... but I just can't ...

HILARY: No, it's okay. Whoever she is, go to her.

SIMON: I didn't ...

HILARY: Tell her she's a lucky girl to have you. Because I know plenty who would love to get to know Simon Clarke-Greenwood. Plenty.

Hilary pecks Simon on the cheek.

There are times, when all somebody wants is someone to wrap their arms around them and tell them 'you're okay'.

SIMON: You're okay, Hilary Morris. You're okay.

They hug. Enter Todd.

TODD: What the fuck is going on here!

HILARY: Oh shit, Todd.
SIMON: Todd. It's not what you think.

TODD: You dirty little bitch.

SIMON: Now hang on, Todd.

TODD: And you, you little shit.

HILARY: That's enough, Todd.

TODD: Shut up you dirty slut.

HILARY: Todd, you don't understand ...

TODD: *(Getting upset)* Don't fucking tell me I don't understand. I understand perfectly well. Oh, Hilary, how could you?!

HILARY: Todd, we need to talk ...

TODD: Hilary, I can't believe you'd do this? *(Beginning to cry)* I ... I don't want to lose you. I know I've been a prick sometimes ... Oh Hilary ... please ...

SIMON: Look, Todd...

TODD: Shut up. You're as bad as your old man.

SIMON: I wasn't ...

Todd is on his knees and he grabs Hilary.

TODD: Hilary, I need you. Please don't leave me ... not for him. Please.

HILARY: Things have to change.

TODD: I'll change, I promise, I'll change! I ... I ... I love you Hilary.

SIMON: Todd ... nothing really happened ...

Todd punches Simon in the stomach. Simon doubles over and collapses to the ground

TODD: You come sniffing around my woman again and I'll knock your fucking block off. Understood? See you at training. And don't be late.

Exit Todd.

HILARY: Simon. Are you okay? Here, let me ...

SIMON: I'm ... I'm fine Hilary.

HILARY: Look, Simon, I'm sorry.

SIMON: Forget it. Really. Just ... forget it.

Exit Simon.

ACT TWO Scene 4.

A light comes up on Tasmin. She is speaking to her psychiatrist.

TASMIN: Tyler. Tyler Mahika. I said goodbye to Tyler about six years ago. It's not like Tyler is dead. It's like ... it's like saying goodbye to a part of yourself, I suppose. Although I've been called Tasmin for six years, I have been Tasmin all my life. When I was little I used to make puppets. I made puppets from cardboard, wood, wool, and bits of old plastic. I'd dress them up and put on imaginary shows. I had to keep them hidden, because Dad would smash them if he found them. In the end he smashed them all. That was just before he sent me to a CYFs home for boys. I was about thirteen. Can you imagine. Me in a boys' home. I don't know why they sent me there. I thought I had done something wrong. I always thought I had done something wrong. Dad said that CYFs would fix me. It was only supposed to be for a few weeks. I was there for two and a half years. Mum and Dad never visited. Not once.

ACT TWO Scene 5. Tasmin's apartment.

Tasmin is painting a new canvas. There is a knock at the door. Tasmin sighs.

TASMIN: It's open, Simon.

Enter Simon. He stops when he sees Tasmin.

SIMON: Hi, Tasmin.

TASMIN: What do you want?

SIMON: Like I said on the phone, I need to talk with you.

TASMIN: So. Go ahead and talk.

SIMON: Don't be like that, Tasmin.

TASMIN: Like what, Simon? What do you want from me?

SIMON: I ... I just want to say ... I'm sorry.

TASMIN: So am I.

SIMON: You're not who I thought you were.

TASMIN: And you're not who I thought you were.

SIMON: You should have told me ...

TASMIN: I tried to. *(Pause)* Don't worry, Simon. You're not the first person to treat me like this.

SIMON: Tasmin ...

TASMIN: What?

SIMON: Tasmin, please. This is new for me. I know I have feelings for you. Strong feelings. I'm just trying to make sense of it all that's all.

TASMIN: I'm not your therapist, Simon. Go find yourself somewhere else.

SIMON: Can't we be friends?

TASMIN: Friends?

SIMON: Yeah. I do like you Tasmin. I really like you ... a lot. It's just that ...

TASMIN: It's just that I'm a freak, right?

SIMON: It's just that ... I'm not into guys.

TASMIN: I am not a guy. Never have been.

SIMON: But ...

TASMIN: But I've got a penis?

SIMON: Yes.

TASMIN: Ah.

SIMON: Well, you have.

TASMIN: What I've got in my knickers is nobody's business but mine. But since you are sooo fucking curious ... yes I have got a penis. I was born with it. I don't want it. I've never wanted it. And up until now, I've had no choice but to put up with it. You would be surprised how many so-called straight guys are thrilled to learn there's a penis in my panties. A bonus boner. In fact, Simon, you are the first man to be revolted *before* anything actually happened.

SIMON: Tasmin I ...

TASMIN: Not that it is any of your business but it so happens that I've been on hormone treatment for well over a year now, and I have gender reassignment surgery booked for next month. It's taken years but I am finally about to get psychological clearance and I can tell you that I won't shed a tear for the loss of the offending appendage.

SIMON: I had no idea.

TASMIN: Of course not. Why would you? Why would you bother to find out about someone you profess to care for? Eh? He kakano ahau i ruia i Rangiatea. I am a seed sown in Rangiatea. Take me as you find me ... or just leave me alone.

SIMON: Are you just angry at me? Or are you angry at the whole world?

TASMIN: Get over yourself, Simon.

SIMON: You are not going to cut me any slack, are you?

TASMIN: Simon, I know where I'm going. Do you know where you're going?

SIMON: No. I don't know. I really love the acting. I think I'd like to have a crack at Drama School ... just to see if I'd be any good. But I'd have to give up the opportunity to play professional rugby.

TASMIN: Your first job is to figure out who Simon Clarke-Greenwood is.

SIMON: At least you know who you are.

TASMIN: I've always known. To deny it would be to live a lie. And I just can't do that.

SIMON: I hear you. What's the new painting?

TASMIN: Actually, it's called Rangiatea. It's about the birthplace of knowledge.

SIMON: Can I have a look?

TASMIN: No.

SIMON: Oh. Okay. I understand.

TASMIN: No, no. It's just that it's not finished yet.

SIMON: Oh.

TASMIN: (*Approaching Simon*) Look, Simon ... there's a lot not finished yet. Maybe ... maybe come back when it *is* finished, eh?

SIMON: Sure.

She kisses him on the cheek.

TASMIN: Good luck for tomorrow.

SIMON: Thanks. Can I see you again?

TASMIN: Maybe. Let's see, eh?

SIMON: Look after yourself, Tasmin.

TASMIN: Oh, I will. And you ... you be you, Simon.

Exit Simon.

ACT TWO Scene 6.

A light comes up on Tasmin. She is speaking to her psychiatrist.

TASMIN: The puppets? Sure. Why not? You know everything else about me. So I used put on puppet shows for the other boys. Great elaborate stories of knights and dragons and magic. It was the only way I could stop them beating me up. One

fellah, oh he was a nasty bugger. Conner was his name. Connor Fitzgerald. I was petrified of him. He started by flicking me with his wet towel in the bathroom. Every opportunity he had he'd thump me, touch me, hurt me. One day he set fire to my puppets. So I stuck a pair of scissors in his face. He got to leave. I got to stay for two and a half years. No one hurt me after that.

ACT TWO Scene 7. Stan and Katrina's Bedroom.

Stanley, still in the torn frock, sits on the edge of the bed. Enter Katrina. She has a bottle of gin and a glass. She can't look at Stanley. She pours some gin into the glass.

KATRINA: Nice dress.

Stanley looks down.

It was a nice dress.

She drinks her gin.

Ah, well. At least the dress can be mended. (Pause) I said, at least the dress can be mended! (Pause)

She slaps Stanley.

STANLEY: Katrina, this isn't easy for me either.

She turns away.

Do you have any idea how it feels like to be like this?

KATRINA: How could I?

STANLEY: I'm not a sexual pervert you know. It's just that I need to feel like a woman ... and I didn't know what to do with how I feel.

KATRINA: I stuck by you, Stan. Huh, I even gave up drinking for you.

STANLEY: The only way I thought I could feel like a woman was to discover what it felt like to be with a man.

KATRINA: Oh, my God.

STANLEY: It was the only way I could survive. *(Pause)* I love you, Katrina.

KATRINA: You've got a bloody funny way of showing it.

STANLEY: It's not about being a ... a predator ... or being unfaithful. It's about a sense of complete confusion about where I can find a place to be.

KATRINA: So you're prepared to throw it all away are you? Your place in the community? Your career? ... Me? You selfish, selfish bastard.

STANLEY: It's not like that.

KATRINA: Really?

STANLEY: I knew this. I knew this when I was fourteen. I've never been able to speak about it. It's not the dressing up. I just want to ... need to ... I am a woman.

KATRINA: What?

STANLEY: I didn't mean to betray you, Kat.

KATRINA: A woman. You're a woman? Where does that leave me? What am I supposed to do? Huh? What am I expected to do, Stanley?

Enter Simon.

Simon ... I ... oh, Simon ...

SIMON: Mum?

KATRINA: Simon ... I'm so sorry.

SIMON: What's going on? What the hell is going on?

Pause.

KATRINA: Say something, Stanley.

STANLEY: Shit. Simon. I ...

SIMON: Dad?

KATRINA: Your *Dad* has got something to tell you.

SIMON: Jeez, you look ... you look a wreck. Who did this to you? Mum?

KATRINA: Oh, Simon ...

SIMON: Why are you wearing a dress? You ... you want to dress like a woman, is that it?

Pause.

STANLEY: No.

KATRINA: Stan is no longer happy to be your father, Simon.

SIMON: About that, Dad ... Stan ...

KATRINA: He wants to be your mother. (*To Stan*) Tell him. Go on. Tell him how you want to be a woman, Stan.

STANLEY: I didn't mean for it to be like this.

SIMON: But ... but .. I want to be just like you. You're the man. Stan-the-man. You are who I want be.

STANLEY: You don't want to be like me, Simon. I wouldn't wish this on anyone. The Stan you know is a lie. And I'm sorry for lying to you, and your mother for all these years. The truth is I was lying to myself as well. I can't change that. But I can change me.

SIMON: I came to tell you that I was going to sign the rugby contract. To make you proud. Huh. It doesn't seem all that important now.

KATRINA: I'm so sorry Simon.

SIMON: Mum, I ...

Exit Simon.

STANLEY: Kat. I never wanted to ...

KATRINA: Shut up. Just shut up. You have said enough. Oh God. You're destroying this family.

STANLEY: Kat, I love you.

Katrina laughs hysterically.

KATRINA: Love? How can you say that?

STANLEY: I know now. It's not with a man that I need to feel like a woman – it's with you through love. Our love for each other. We can still be together.

KATRINA: What? As lesbians? Is that what you want, Stan? Is that what you fucking want? You want to be a lesbian? Mmm? You want me to become a lesbian too?

STANLEY: But I have loved you. I've loved everything about you. It's just that this has been going on. And I've kept it from you to protect you and to spare our relationship. But you know, as a man, I can't be me.

Pause.

KATRINA: You poor bastard.

Katrina gets a suitcase from the wardrobe.

ACT TWO Scene 8.

Simon has taken the framed photograph of Brian Clarke down off the wall.

SIMON: Hey. So ... the Brian Clarke Memorial Cup. I'd love to win it. For you. For .. for Dad – Stan, you know. I kind of feel like we have to win it. *I* have to. And if I don't ... I don't know ... if I don't ... everyone says 'if only the son of the great Clarkey could hold the cup high in victory and restore Wests as rugby champions'. Stan's wanted to win it since ... since you died I suppose. It'd be fair to say, Mum's been struggling with one thing and another. So has Stan. Huh, So have I. I wish I could talk to you about that. I wish I could talk to you about rugby ... acting ... and Tasmin. Why aren't you here? Why

couldn't you stay, Dad? You're this dead enigma. A remote, voiceless, ghost. Dad! I need you. I need you! I need you to tell me that you love me. I need you to tell me that you're proud of me. I need you to ... to put your arms around me and tell that I'm okay. You're a faded photo. Dad. Daddy. Where are you?

Stanley is sitting on his bed, while Katrina packs her bag. On another part of the stage, Hilary is also packing a bag. Tasmin is talking to her psychiatrist.

TASMIN: You can call me transgendered, or transsexual ... the labels don't really matter. Shit, you can call me trans-Tasmin, if you like. It's not a whim, you know. Give me some credit will you? What I don't get is why I have had to jump through so many hoops. Eh? I mean you need to give me psychological clearance before I can have genital surgery, right? So how come I have to be held to a higher account than people having kinds of medical care? If I want cosmetic plastic surgery, a vasectomy, tubal ligation, an abortion — all I need to provide is informed consent. Do you think the decision to have genital surgery is any less well-considered than that of a woman who wants an abortion or a man who wants a vasectomy?

Todd enters carrying the Brian Clarke Memorial Cup. Katrina and Hilary close their respective suitcases and slowly exit.

It's a double standard. Why do I have to demonstrate anything to you? That I'm sane? That I'm normal? For fuck's sake, I have to prove to you that I'm a woman before I can become a woman. How fucked up is that?

Stanley gets up and goes to the ensuite.

Changing your gender is changing your whole life. It isn't a decision made overnight, or taken lightly. And it isn't based on some sort of psychological imbalance. Some people simply aren't the gender they were born with.

Stanley returns with a large bottle of pills.

Ultimately, we are all alone, aren't we? We have our own thoughts, feelings. And we have to be able to live with ourselves. I can't wait to truly be who I know I am, in every way.

Todd holds the cup in both hands above his head in triumph.

I need to do it on my own, and for myself. After that, who knows?

Stanley sits on the edge of the bed. He has made a decision.

If I'm lucky enough to find someone who wants to share their life with me ... won't that be a blessing?

Blackout.

- End -

Should any of the themes or experiences associated with this play cause issues for the reader or viewer of this play, advice and support can be accessed from:

AgenderNZ - Claudia McKay - 04 566 2468 - agendernzinc@xtra.co.nz

OutLine - phone counsellors - nationwide - 0800 6885463

Rainbow Youth - Auckland based - 09 376 4155

CHAPTER 5 – CRITICAL REFLECTION

In a period of just over twelve months I have been on a creative journey. Robert Fritz discusses the creative journey by saying there is always an unknown quality, however, “when you are aware of the final result you want to create, you are able to focus on the process, rather than make the process a random one” (39). The final result I aspired to was, to create a full-length theatre play that broadens the debate around the issues of being transgendered person in New Zealand. I hoped that the play would give audiences a greater understanding of what life might be like for transgendered people and would advocate for greater acceptance.

The theatrical considerations included a quest for form, narrative and metaphor; and an examination of socio-political theatre models, from which I could select structures and devices to experiment within my own work. Some were more successful than others. The brutal and poetic language of Matheson’s *Pursuing Juliet*, for example, sat uneasily in a narrative where the goal was to draw the audience alongside the transgender characters and invite understanding and acceptance. The function of confrontation and rejection came via the antagonist, Todd, and the voice of opposition, as exemplified in *Top Girls* by Caryl Churchill.

The process

Aside from the academic and socio-political considerations already documented, there were very practical theatrical considerations to traverse. The quest involved conducting two in-depth interviews with different transgendered New Zealanders, take aspects of their stories, then theatricalising and poeticising them in a way that would be sensitive to them and the issues of being transgendered. The writing of the play included starting with a story outline and scene breakdown. It also meant multiple discussions with my project supervisor, Dr Angie Farrow, and a total of five drafts, each significantly different from the other. The various drafts were informed by understanding gleaned from models of political theatre; and deciding on form and narrative as exemplified by other New Zealand plays.

Most importantly there were two workshops of the script, each followed by a rehearsed reading before an audience. The first workshop was of the third draft. It took place at The Dark Room, an adjunct of Centrepoint Theatre, in Palmerston North in October 2013. Karla Crofts was engaged to direct the workshop. And *Trans Tasmin* was cast as follows:

Tasmin Mahika	Helena Pawson
Simon Clarke-Greenwood	Ryan Willoughby
Dan Greenwood	Dean O'Flaherty
Katrina Greenwood	Peri Chapelle
Todd Matthews	Phil White
Hilary Morris	Jena Ivamy



Figure 1 Director and cast - first workshop

The workshop began with a read-through of Draft Three. It was an astonishing and gratifying experience to hear voices for the characters that were other than my own for the first time. For the remainder of the workshop the director and actors worked on the scenes in preparation for a public reading in the afternoon of the following day.

This was an especially enlightening experience. Most significantly, it showed me that I had overwritten the play. Its pace was very even and the characters' narrative seemed bland, un compelling and at times one-dimensional. Consequently, over 7,000 words

were cut in the creation of the fourth draft. Draft Four was subject to a four-day workshop, followed by a rehearsed reading and public forum at The Court Theatre, in Christchurch, in January 2014. Overseen by The Court Theatre’s Literary Manager, Elizabeth O’Connor, and directed by Daniel Pengelly, *Trans Tasmin* was cast as follows:

Tasmin Mahika	Kim Garrett
Simon Clarke-Greenwood	Patrick Carroll
Stanley Greenwood	Peter Marshall
Katrina Greenwood	Melissa Miles
Todd Matthews	Timothy Bartlett
Hilary Morris	Kathleen Burns



Figure 2 Cast of the second workshop

With more time to work on the script, the second workshop (Draft Four) offered insight into the characters of a more subtle nature. The process also highlighted some minor structural issues within the play. Having a longer workshop meant that I was able to address most of these issues and make script changes as the workshop progressed. Consequently the public reading of the play had all of the revisions that arose from the workshop. That script is Draft Five and is presented here in Chapter 4 – The Play. The most meaningful aspect was the forum, which followed the rehearsed

reading where the audience, of approximately thirty people, were invited to stay and discuss the play.

During the workshops, it became apparent that I had created a play that provided a new perspective on transgender issues. Having two transgender protagonists with very different experiences, allowed for a debate around what the definition of 'transgender' might be. Stanley and Tasmin each occupy different places on Girshick's 'Sex Continuums' (181). Stanley is biologically male, identifies as female, presents as both male and female, and is attracted to females. Tasmin is biologically male, identifies as female, presents as female, and is attracted to males. Their narratives express these complexities in a way that has not been previously seen in a New Zealand play. Consequently their fears, ambitions, inner thoughts and feelings emerge in a way the audiences can engage with. For those new to the transgender dynamic, the play offers insight and understanding. For transgendered audience members, *Trans Tasmin* is a validation of their identity, and recognition of the issues they have faced.

The other characters offer a variety of perspectives of the transgender issues, just as the audience will. The antagonist, Todd, is extremely prejudiced and transphobic:

What do you want to dress in women's clothes for? Is this the first time?
'Cos if it is, you better not do it again ... it's not normal! (81).

Katrina, on the other hand, knows about her husband's cross-dressing but keeps the secret. However, when Simon has to go to a 'vice versa' party, Katrina helps him dress and put on his make up. Both workshop audiences felt this was a touching scene and challenged the way we view a 'man-in-a-dress'.

Although Hilary's attitudes towards transgender issues might seem ambivalent, it is through her role as director of *The Bacchae* that we see the transgender issues explored in a wider theatrical context. Moreover, it is in these scenes where she coaches Simon to discovering the feminine side to his nature, so that he can better play the role of Dionysus.

Simon is the point-of-view character, and it is through his journey and his interactions with all of the other characters that we experience the varied attitudes towards transgenderism. He represents society's changing attitudes towards, what is sometimes termed 'the rainbow community' - i.e: gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender. As he becomes enlightened, so does the audience. Furthermore, Simon provides a kind of catalyst for the other characters' crises: Simon's commitment to being in a production of *The Bacchae* clashes with the expectations of his step-father and coach, Stanley; as captain of the rugby team Simon is conflicted over Stanley's disappearance as Stanley engages in liaisons in his search for sexual and gender identity. Simon clashes with Todd and he finds himself attracted to Todd's girlfriend, Hilary. And, of course, Simon initially rejects Tasmin when he discovers her gender status. The irony of this moment was not lost on the audiences as Simon, in women's clothes turns to Tasmin and calls her a 'freak' (78-79). One transgendered audience member spoke with me after the reading at The Court Theatre and said the use of the word 'freak' was an especially apt and powerful, as she had been called that many times herself.

The realistic tone and that I chose to set the play in New Zealand, with strong New Zealand identifiers were also appreciated by the audiences. The feedback confirmed that it deepened their sense of identification. The rugby club speeches, for example, were especially resonant with a number of audience members, and "I know someone just like Todd", was also a common comment.

What didn't work?

One of the choices I made was to take Caryl Churchill's model from *Top Girls* and highlight social injustice by expressing it through an oppositional voice. In my case it is the antagonist, Todd, who displays a boorish, homophobic, misogynistic, narrow view of the world. I realised that it was important to provide a contradictory quality to Todd. This was evident at the first rehearsed reading, and is also support by Brecht who pointed out: "[t]he coherence of the character is in fact shown by the way in which its individual qualities contradict one another" (in Willett, 196). So, I created two opportunities for Todd to show a contradictory side to his character. The first is in Act Two, Scene Two. Todd walks in on a rehearsal of *The Bacchae* and it appears that

he has caught Hilary and Simon kissing. Initially, Todd behaves as we might expect: “What the fuck is going on here!” (84). However as the scene progresses, Todd becomes upset and begins to cry:

TODD: What the fuck is going on here!

HILARY: Oh shit, Todd.

SIMON: Todd. It’s not what you think.

TODD: You dirty little bitch.

SIMON: Now hang on, Todd.

TODD: And you, you little shit.

HILARY: That’s enough, Todd.

TODD: Shut up you dirty slut.

HILARY: Todd, you don’t understand ...

TODD: (*Getting upset*) Don’t fucking tell me I don’t understand. I understand perfectly well. Oh, Hilary, how could you?!

HILARY: Todd, we need to talk ...

TODD: Hilary, I can’t believe you’d do this? (*Beginning to cry*) I ... I don’t want to lose you. I know I’ve been a prick sometimes ... Oh Hilary ... please ...

SIMON: Look, Todd...

TODD: (*Snivelling*) Shut up. You’re as bad as your old man.

SIMON: I wasn’t ...

Todd is on his knees and he grabs Hilary.

TODD: Hilary, I need you. Please don’t leave me ... not for him. Please.

HILARY: Things have to change.

TODD: I’ll change, I promise, I’ll change! (*Sobbing*) I ... I ... I love you Hilary.

HILARY: I’ll wait in the car.

TODD: (*Getting up*) Okay, okay. Thank you. I’m sorry. Thank you. (84-85).

Brecht further advised that, “[t]he actor must cultivate all varieties of temperament, for his characters to come to life by means of their own contradictoriness” (in Willett,

243). Therefore, in Act Two, Scene Four, when Todd is confronted by Stanley's cross-dressing he responds as we think he might at first:

I have to say, we've been through a lot together over the years, but this ... this is ... I mean, you look like a bloody poof, mate. Who put you up to it? Whoever it was needs their bloody head read. (81).

Yet, unexpectedly, he is able to demonstrate a contradictory position shortly afterwards:

TODD: ... you know what I think?

STANLEY: No. What do you think, Todd?

TODD: I think ...

Pause. Todd takes a pair of jeans and a jacket out of the sports bag.

I know what you've got to do here, Stan. You're going to sort yourself out. What you've got to do is put all this behind you.

STANLEY: Todd, I ...

TODD: Here put these clothes on. You'll be right. Go back to the old days. I love yah, mate.

STANLEY: Even now?

TODD: Yeah. Of course. But you've got to put all this behind you now.

It was only as a result of the first rehearsed reading that I discovered if I allow contradiction in my characters I add authenticity, sometimes weakness, and always a truthfulness. And by allowing characters to display contradictory positions I give them more depth, and my audience an insight into the human condition. As Brecht says, "Contradictions are our hope" (in Willett, 47).

What worked?

As previously discussed, I was conflicted about whether or not to include *The Bacchae* and if I did, how that might work. I went from having *The Bacchae* in

alternate scenes, to discarding it altogether. I decided to discard *The Bacchae* scenes because they jarred with the contemporary scenes. They seemed contrived and it was difficult see the point of them. Furthermore, *The Bacchae* scenes slowed the dramatic trajectory of the main story. When I decided to cut *The Bacchae* scenes, the play went from 20,279 words down to 15,083 words. Writing the second draft allowed me an opportunity to develop the contemporary characters further. Some of the old scenes were extended, new monologues were added and whole new scenes were completed. The second draft comprised 21,600 words. I still had a full-length play and I felt I had explored new and interesting areas with the characters.

What I had come to realise, however, was that by removing *The Bacchae* completely, I had, in effect, ‘thrown the baby out with the bathwater’. One of the central metaphors for the project was missing and had to be reinstated somehow. The decision to integrate *The Bacchae* scenes into the play’s narrative rather than to have them as a separate element that served solely as a metaphor was inspired by the model provided by Jean Betts’ play, *Ophelia Thinks Harder*, and the use of ‘mise en abyme’ as a theatrical device.

I followed Betts’ model of addressing an invisible character. Although I concede I didn’t have it quite right for the first reading. The audience were not aware that she was addressing her psychiatrist and it seemed as though she was merely addressing the audience directly in a Brechtian manner. To rectify this, I re-wrote her monologues, and by having her behave in a defensive manner I added tension and thereby made it clear that she was addressing the invisible character – her psychiatrist:

TASMIN: The puppets? Sure. Why not? You know everything else about me. (88).

My belief is that this new tone adds to the complexity of Tasmin’s character and creates interest for the audience about why she might be so defensive. I carried this idea through later in the play, so now it is very clear throughout the play that Tasmin is talking to someone other than the audience.

The feedback at the forum following the second rehearsed reading confirmed that this approach worked well. The audience was clear about whom Tasmin was addressing. Some audience members said they had a strong sense of the psychiatrist character. Moreover, the feedback strongly supported the choice to develop Tasmin's narrative using the device of these monologues.

Conclusion

What are the theatrical considerations in writing a theatre play which broadens the debate around transgender issues? They are an understanding of the historical background and, hitherto, low-status of transgender characters in theatre. The notion of shifting the location of transgender characters from 'theatre-of-ridicule' and placing them in 'theatre-of-acceptance' has meant careful and sensitised negotiation around the transgender issues. It was gratifying to note that at both rehearsed readings of the play, neither Stanley nor Tasmin drew derision or laughter from the audience. This was especially poignant at The Court Theatre reading, for among the 30-strong audience members, approximately half of them self-identified as transgender or had transgender family members. There was unanimous support for the way in which the two transgender characters were represented. It was also noted and appreciated by the audience, that both Stanley and Tasmin's experience of transgenderism is vastly different from each other, yet both were equally valid and true from the perspective of the transgendered people in the audience.

The debate around transgender issues was broadened largely by the consideration of countering the historical theatre representation of laughing at a man-in-a-dress, and by presenting the inner world of the characters: "those things that happen in the heart, the head and the soul. The thoughts, dreams, feelings, ambitions, fears ..." (Greig, 75). To do that, I needed to understand the transgender world. This was achieved by spending time with my subjects, and examining research into transgenderism.

By considering Euripides' *The Bacchae* as a metaphor for acceptance in *Trans Tasmin*, I broadened the debate around transgender issues by drawing thematic parallels between the ancient Greek play and the contemporary world presented in my play. Pentheus' cross-dressing is generally seen as deviant and evidence of

“suppressed homosexual identity” (Ormand, 10). Ormand posits, “Pentheus’ feminization is the primary vehicle and onstage expression of his downfall” (13). In *Trans Tasmin*, this is mirrored by the feminization of Stanley, which also brings about his downfall. The debate in the forum at The Court Theatre following the second reading surrounded the inevitability of Stanley’s downfall. Most audience members recognised that Stanley’s’ downfall is counterbalanced by Tasmin’s elevation.

Furthermore, in *Trans Tasmin*, Simon discovers another side to manhood, first by cross-dressing for the cast party; by rejecting then accepting Tasmin; and through his experience of playing Dionysus in *The Bacchae*. By seeing scenes of *The Baccahe* acted out, the audience were able to draw the connections just as the characters did. As Simon gained greater insight into the world of transgenderism, the audience did so as well.

There has been a void of transgender representations in the New Zealand theatre lexicon. It is my hope that *Trans Tasmin* goes some way to redressing the imbalance any in doing so furthers understanding and acceptance of transgendered people in our society.

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