

# THE HAM FUNERAL



PATRICK WHITE

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**Malthouse Theatre presents:**

# *THE HAM FUNERAL*

*BY PATRICK WHITE*

## **EDUCATION NOTES**



Photography Lou Hansen

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# The Ham Funeral

By Patrick white

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## EDUCATION NOTES

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Malthouse Education has pleasure in presenting these Education Notes as a guide for Drama students. While the notes may be seen as a valuable resource for students and teachers, we at Malthouse Education do not present them as a definitive study. Instead we offer them as a springboard to a broader exploration of the play. We hope that students approach *The Ham Funeral* with their own awareness in order to experience the play as an evocative and engaging piece of theatre. We encourage students to interpret the play for themselves, to explore its innate theatricality, its relevance to their own and others' lives, and to place it in a contemporary Australian theatre context.

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## List of Characters

Actor	Character
Marta Dusseldorp	Second Lady Third Relative
Julie Forsyth	Mrs Lusty the Landlady
Robert Menzies	First Relative
Dan Spielman	Young Man
Lucy Taylor	Anima/Girl First Lady
Matthew Whittet	Second Relative
Ross Williams	Mr Lusty the Landlord

## Notes on 'The Ham Funeral'

### An act of Indecent Exposure

*And I saw, and behold, a pale horse:  
and he that sat upon him, his name was Death;  
(Revelations 6:8)*

Written in 1947, *The Ham Funeral* was not performed until 1961. In what was to be a historical moment in Australian theatre, a controversial production was staged by the Adelaide University Theatre Guild in response to the play's rejection by a minority of the selection committee for the 1962 Adelaide Festival. David Marr writes, 'Among Australians the controversy had dragged in many who were hardly interested in the theatre'.

*The Ham Funeral* had become a rallying point for those who were unhappy with the boring, official culture of Australia in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and hated the philistine power of the Establishment who had the power, especially, to determine what was written and read in a country where books, films and plays continued to be censored and banned. Certainly this was one reason why thousands rallied around the play, yet beyond the politics of culture, it was a demonstration by one of our most distinguished novelists of the link between linguistic vigor and freedom which anti-naturalism conferred [It] was exciting because like White's novels and the best of modern Australian painting, it liberated the imagination.

*The Ham Funeral* was inspired by William Dobell's story of his painting 'The Dead Landlord'. The anecdote which Dobell shared with White, centered on the death of his landlord and the suggestion by the landlady that during the funeral she would make a lavish show by feeding the mourners ham.

In the Theatre Guild's program of 1961, White wrote: 'Out of those original facts and my own self-searching and experience as a Young Man, *The Ham Funeral* developed. The chief problem was how to project a highly introspective character on the stage without impeding dramatic progress. I have tried to overcome this, partly through the conflict between the Young Man and those human symbols Mr and Mrs Lusty, the figures in the basement with whom he wrestles and partly through the dialogues between the Young Man and his *anima*, the Girl in the room opposite'.

### CARL JUNG ON THE SELF

The *Anima* and *Animus* are two archetypal figures of the human consciousness presented by the psychoanalyst C.G Jung in his 1926 publication of *Psychological Types*. They are interior complexes that exist to offset the outer personality, that is, to manifest those tendencies that are lacking in the dominant conscious personality. In a man these take the form of feminine characteristics (the *Anima*), in a woman, the masculine (*Animus*).

According to Jung, one function of the male's counterpart, the *Anima*, is to be a looking glass for man; a point of reflection for his thoughts, desires and emotions. This occurs

regardless of whether the Anima is an inner figure, or its projection onto a real woman. In this case fantasy and reality are interchangeable.

While this reflective experience of the Anima may lead to greater consciousness or self-realisation, Jung saw that a danger existed for a self-mirroring that pandered to vanity, or even to sentimental self-pity.

## Patrick White

'I was born on 28 May 1912 in Knightsbridge, London, to Australian parents. Almost all the Whites remained wedded to the land, and there was something peculiar, even shocking, about any member of the family who left it. To become any kind of artist would have been unthinkable. Like everybody else I was intended for the land, though vaguely I knew that this was not to be' - Patrick White.

A sickly child, White started reading and writing from a young age before being sent to school in Cheltenham, England. It was here and in Europe that he became exposed to new literature, theatre and, importantly, new artistic movements such as expressionism. 'I had discovered Ibsen and Strindberg in my early teens a taste my English housemaster deplored: you have a morbid kink I mean to stamp out' and he then proceeded to stamp it deeper in.

White was living the life of a young colonial artist, replete with all of the artistic and personal crises that would manifest later in the character of the Young Man in *The Ham Funeral*.

'I wrote fitfully, bad plays, worse poetry. Then, after taking my degree, the decision had to be made: what to do?'

White chose to stay in London. Writing profusely, he visited the theatre three or four nights a week, and remained unpublished. Then, early in 1939, his first novel, *Happy Valley*, was published in London the exhilaration of this occasion somewhat spoilt by the outbreak of war.

'The part I played in the War was a pretty insignificant one. Perhaps the most important moments of my war were when, in the Western Desert of Egypt, I conceived the idea of one day writing a novel about a megalomaniac German, probably an explorer in Nineteenth Century Australia'.

This would become his 1956 novel, *Voss*. In the meantime he would write *The Aunt's Story* (1946), *The Ham Funeral* (1947) and *The Tree of Man* (1952), and move back to Australia where his novels were receiving a critical reception.

At the time, most of the Australian public failed to grasp White's works, viewing them mostly as mystical, ambiguous and obscure, with one newspaper running its review under the headline 'Australia's Most Unreadable Novelist'.

Nevertheless, there was some interest, including from the world of theatre. Over time White's reputation grew, nationally and internationally, and public opinion shifted in his favour. In 1972 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

White lived the remainder of his life in Australia. He continued to write, speak publicly on social issues, and host famously argumentative dinner parties.

Patrick White died in 1990 at his home in Centennial Park, Sydney.



**MALTHOUSE EDUCATION INTERVIEW WITH MICHAEL  
KANTOR, DIRECTOR OF 'THE HAM FUNERAL'  
[and 'Journal of the Plague Year']**

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***Michael, why did you choose these two particular texts?***

I was looking for work that could, across two different productions, expose the extraordinary talents of an ensemble of actors. Explicitly, I searched out texts, that would offer different types of experiences, both to those actors and to audiences, but that are still held together thematically. There is a relationship on the surface but they are extremely different experiences.

I felt that with *The Ham Funeral* there was an opportunity for some fantastic classic character acting, that only a long rehearsal period could expose. Similarly, with *Journal of the Plague*, I thought there was a theatrical experiment at work inside that text that only a long rehearsal period, with an ensemble that could work closely together, could ever get close to. So, the choice was about both the variety of challenges in the texts and the links between them as well.

***When you were addressing the Malthouse company at the design presentation you suggested that the two pieces were linked by the themes of sex and death. Can you expand on these ideas?***

I think underneath most great theatre, there are two lurking deep human obsessions and they are sex and death, in particular the whole gamut of sexual attraction and repulsion. This is across gender and across the types of sexuality that really drive us through our lives and are a core part of our humanity that we often camouflage in a whole variety of ways. These plays try and strip back the camouflages and relate to us as sexual beings, however confronting that can be. Death also is something that lurks behind nearly all theatre and behind humanity, as we grapple constantly with the simple fact that we will die and what that means?. It's embedded in Shakespeare, it's embedded in the Greeks, it's embedded in Brecht and it's embedded in both these plays.

***Could you speak about those themes more specifically in relation to the two plays?***

In *The Ham Funeral* the theme of sex is explored through the character of the Young Man as he comes to terms with what happens in the basement with Mrs Lusty. On the other side there is a figure who lurks behind him and haunts him, who is simultaneously a fantasy figure, an elder sister and a *Jungian anima figure*. These two female characters provide dilemmas for him. Is his sexuality driven by lust and desire in the flesh or is it a poetic sexual yearning for a kind of mystic sexuality, as represented through the anima?

In *Journal of the Plague Year* the central character of Defoe is also haunted by a figure of sexuality in the figure of Nell Gwynn who seduces him on several occasions and finally he succumbs. Sexuality and Plague have a particular relationship through history, both as a major form of spreading disease through sexuality, and also as the opposite to a world of cleanliness and purity and godliness. Tom [Tom Wright, the playwright] has exposed that relationship in subtle ways in his text.



In *The Ham Funeral* death haunts the Young Man as well. He has to contend with the Landlord's death; it's the first thing that ever happened to him, as he says. Dealing with the dead body of the Landlord actually galvanises him into a type of realisation of what life is about. I think what Patrick White saying is that by dealing with death we deal with life.

Similarly, Tom Wright, with *Plague Year* has created a piece that is about death. A mass death, a death which goes beyond just physical bodies in a grave to the death of a rational and civilised world, a godly world, and what that means. It's a very contemporary theme as we deal particularly with the range of hideous mass genocides of the 20th century which are continuing into the 21st century. There is the threat of plague and disease beyond AIDs and other types of well known infections, even to the extent of moral disease. How do we in the Western World deal live with the after effects of the events of 1945 – World War II and the holocaust.

***With 'Journal of the Plague Year', we have a contemporary play about an historical period, while 'The Ham Funeral' was written in the 1940s. How do you think these two plays speak to contemporary audiences?***

My approach to these two texts, takes the basic assumption that a contemporary world on a stage does not necessarily mean a direct reflection of contemporary life in terms of architecture and costume and set. We can see into our own world by looking into others, others which can be very extreme and theatrically expressive and in the case of *The Plague Year*, completely set in the 17th century. I find the best way of responding to the contemporary is often by excavating history and uncovering the lurking historical drives of humanity, how they rebound through history, and how we continue to grapple with them. Nothing's really changed which is very frightening. The creative team have made some efforts to make sure that we highlight those contemporary resonances and accordingly, *The Ham Funeral*, while written in the 40s and actually set in 1919, we have placed into a contemporary world and into contemporary dress. There's really nothing about 1919 that White specifically refers to and the play works completely within our own world. There are necessary leaps of imagination such as the notion that there are still boarding houses in which people exist like this which there may not be, but I'm not that interested in historical or contemporary accuracy. When I make theatre I'm much more interested in the resonances and the deep well of collective thoughts that we somehow share as a group of human beings, which are our only way of grappling with the future.

Patrick White opens the play with the character of the Young Man who comes on stage and says this play could happen anywhere. We've set it in an *Australian anywhere* with Australian accents. The basic point is that this young man is alive and now he must enter a play, a play that could happen anywhere. In the play he must deal with a dead landlord and very sexual woman and those are the issues and those issues are relevant in any timeframe.

***Could you talk about your collaboration with the designer and your role in that collaboration, given that the design is intended to work for both plays.***

It was very specific task that I handed to the set and costume designers; they had to grapple with one small budget, two very complex and quite specifically different plays that operate as pieces of theatre on one set. I thought this was a great challenge and they found it to be a very exciting challenge. It has been a collaboration that continues

right through the rehearsal process. One of the great things about rehearsing over a long period of time is you have time to try it on the floor, make sense of it and then you design it. So design is still happening all the way through, unlike the usual process where the design is handed in, the design gets built and then actors come in and rehearse. We get to rehearse the play and imagine the design at the same time.

We're currently in week three of rehearsal and we're only now beginning to lock down the design, which is a great luxury. The design process is very collaborative and it extends past the designers to include the actors. The actors are making a major contribution particularly in terms of costume because costumes need to work within the vision of the piece and make coherent sense, but ultimately they are tools for the actors. The way it hangs on a body and the effect it has on the body is really specific to every actor. The more involvement they have, the more they own their costume, and the more they can use it as a theatrical device.

***The only element of the set that is really essential is the staircase in 'The Ham Funeral' because that play takes place on two levels. Has the staircase been incorporated into the set design for both plays?***

In fact we don't have a staircase. No, cut the stairs! There was a staircase in the original design and we've cut it. We've moved into another imaginative world. We started three weeks ago absolutely convinced that we needed a staircase. Three weeks later we've decided we don't need a staircase, we need in fact a liminal space and it's about the liminality of what that staircase represents; a zone of transition between the basement and his bedroom. That is what is most important and we have all the *stagecraft elements* of theatre to do that. We don't need to be literal; we have light, we have smoke, we have cracks in floors and we have ways of *transforming space* in what we believe is a more imaginative way than simply using a literal staircase. What I say as a mantra every day in rehearsal is that we must keep our imaginations open the whole time. It is our job as artists to be open with our imaginations in order to open the imaginations of the audience.

***Can you talk about directing two plays simultaneously. The audience might not realise that you haven't directed one play and then the other, you've actually alternated between directing the two plays throughout the rehearsal period.***

It works haphazardly to some degree but with some kind of rationale behind it. By swapping between plays, in fact, performers build a residue of ideas and memory of text. So the actors, while we're working on one text, in the back of our mind the thoughts and ideas and the impressions that we're gathering for the other play are still germinating. So actually you move faster than you would. Both of the plays are far more developed in one and a half weeks of rehearsal than they would have been otherwise. The pressures and the economy of theatre mean that you are usually given a four week rehearsal period for a new text: three weeks of it are spent developing the text and one week is spent trying to work out how to perform it. This allows for a much more generous journey which hopefully will resonate on the stage.

***Would you talk about the style of 'The Ham Funeral'?***

*The Ham Funeral* really is a *proto expressionist melodrama*, that was written at the time of the German Expressionists and also at the time that absurdist writers such as Beckett

and Ionesco were writing. Patrick White was living in London and was very aware of what was going on in the London and European literary scene. The play is extraordinarily resonant with *Theatre of the Absurd* as well as a twisted, tortured, Germanic expressionism. On top of this, White layers a world of *symbolism*. The symbolist writers were writing in the early part of the 20th century, including Maeterlink and several others. Stringburg was one of the most prominent of the symbolist writers. White was well educated and very aware of these genres and he fused all these styles into this '*mad muddy mess of eels*' of a play.

To unpick all of that and make it playable, we have had to take a quite *naturalistic* approach initially. We're still in that world at the moment after three weeks of rehearsal. I imagine and anticipate, however, quite an extreme expressionist production as the rehearsal process moves closer to the end. We are also referencing *schlock horror* and *farce*, so it's a melange of theatrical styles. Quite importantly, the central image of the play is a mirror; it's about how you look at yourself, look through yourself and into yourself. The heart of the design for *The Ham Funeral*, at this point, is a huge piece of glass, which acts sometimes as a mirror and sometimes as a window you look through. In some ways it's *Alice Through The Looking Glass*. In this regard the symbolism is made quite explicit for us.

***How do you direct symbolism in a text so the audience are aware of that symbolic layer as well as the narrative?***

It's about great actors who can do that, who can play a scene and yet allow a director to subtly manipulate the scene in order to expose the symbolism through *the action of the scene*.

***Would you say that the language has a poetic quality to it?***

Every line has a literal meaning and a connection to poetic subtext. Patrick White was very influenced by Carl Jung and this was his way of tapping into a collective unconscious. When he talks about a *mad mess of eels*, they are the eels of our own mind; in the first instance of the Young Man's mind and through him all of our minds. The Prologue establishes quite importantly that we are in a theatre, and that by being in a theatre we are going to watch a play which is a piece of make believe. The Young Man too knows he's going to enter a piece of make believe. Within this belief, however, he knows he is going to have to struggle with some huge dilemmas that seem to indicate something much bigger than he can really anticipate at the start of a play. My understanding of the prologue is that the Young Man knows he has to play this role and face these dilemmas anew each time the play is performed. We're not quite sure yet about this interpretation but that is the purpose of rehearsal and we'll make a decision soon.

I have heard that Patrick White wrote the prologue some years after he wrote the play and I believe this might have been because he felt the audience needed to know the level of disconnection that the Young Man will have with the play. The play is structured in such a way that there is some semblance of a rational narrative around the characters of the Landlord and the Landlady but the Young Man can enter their world but also inhabit the irrational world of the mind.

***Do you believe the play needs that prologue?***

I think it does, from an audience's perspective. The prologue serves a simple story telling function. We don't want to make a piece of theatre that is impenetrable but, rather, I think our task with *The Ham Funeral* is to make it penetrable.

***The Landlord says, 'This 'ouse is life'. What do you think he means by this?***

The house is a reflection of the Young Man's mind. The basement represents the world of desire, death and life while his bedroom represents his head or the cerebral part of his world. These two worlds are connected by the liminal staircase space where he accesses the deep recesses of his mind through the *anima*. The Landlord has a wonderful line where he says '*This table is love, if you could get to know it.*' The *anima* says '*It's in the walls, it's in the floor, it's in the air.*' Patrick White is suggesting that life itself is beyond the animate, that it resides in the inanimate and it is through coming to terms with simply 'being' that illumination is found. It's quite Buddhist in the idea that if you just slow down and listen to the world and partake in it, then that is what living is. There is nothing else. It is through that process that mysticism can enter you. The more you struggle, and the more you try and intellectualize and poeticize everything, the more distant you become from just living. It's very complex and every actor has a different sort of interpretation, and we want that. We want an audience to make of it what they can.

***Could you tell us about how you see the role of contemporary theatre in the 21st century?***

I think contemporary theatre needs to be doing many things. There is no *one* type of theatre; it's about diversity. We should be trying to produce work that's not just diverse in terms of its content and subject matter, but diverse in its form. It needs to explore and discover itself for the 21st century. The type of work that I'm proposing in *Journal of the Plague Year* and *The Ham Funeral* is saying, 'Well theatre isn't necessarily logical, and isn't necessarily politically driven'. In fact, the point in some ways of the four pieces that have come together to form the Autumn Season is to say that theatre's a whole lot of different things. It is sometimes about political satire and it is about making direct connections with our contemporary world. Poking fun at our leaders is a really important function of theatre because it doesn't necessarily happen anywhere else anymore. It has been stripped out of the newspapers and it's been stripped out of the public discussion. So, we need great performers like Eddie Perfect and Max Gillies to 'poke shit' really. The ensemble productions are about saying that theatre is also about experimentation, about pushing form and about exploring new territory.

The role of contemporary theatre is all about what can we do in a theatre that can't happen anywhere else. As a collective, we can't access these kinds of impulsive and irrational worlds because we've shut them down and we're so darn logical and politically correct that we need a space that we can be naughty in, and be naughty in a sort of deeply psychological way. With *Black Medea*, part of the logic of programming it against the other three pieces is that it is using the history of theatre, in the form of a classic text, to find really strong contemporary resonance in a very specific zone. I think contemporary theatre can do that as well. Then there are other things that we haven't even got to yet; things that are about performance and extravagance, and about joy and entertainment.

## **MALTHOUSE EDUCATION INTERVIEW WITH MARYANNE LYNCH, Dramaturg for 'The Ham Funeral'**

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**Maryanne, would you please describe the role of a dramaturg:**

- a. In general
- b. In relation to this particular play

A *dramaturg* (a German word) is a role that encompasses many responsibilities but, in a nutshell, it means *artistic adviser* and in this instance it falls within the context of making theatre.

Not that everyone would come up with the exact term as I do, but I think that we'd all agree that the dramaturg is connected to the *art* of making the work (as opposed, say, to the stage manager who is managing the *logistics* of making the work such as schedules, time management). Another way of putting it is that the dramaturg assists in the realisation of the artistic vision of the work, whether this vision is one developed by a director, a team of theatre-makers or some other creative configuration.

Within this broad definition a dramaturg might do research towards the work, write or deliver a detailed critical response to the work, have a series of meetings with the writer or director and/or other principal artist where the aim is to talk through the conceptual and stylistic issues of the work, devise and/or run some aspects of the creative process, discern patterns and gaps and interesting connections between the different materials being gathered, and hold everybody else's hand - figuratively speaking - when things get tough and panic sets in!

And of course then there are the singular features of each theatre project.

*The Ham Funeral*, for example, is a play written by a writer who is now deceased. This means that it's an existing work, but there are no means of discussing it with the writer. The play has also had several productions. This means that it has a certain history already and any new productions are responding to the previous ones as much as to the text itself. To add to this, the director of the current production, the composer and the female lead, Julie Forsyth, have all been involved in a production of this work before. My role has been defined by this, as well as by a new team of creative and technical people with new working relationships, and by the nature of the play itself.

So what I've found myself doing is research about Patrick White, *The Ham Funeral*, other White plays and writings, images, music and written material that is of possible use in creating the work. My role has also been helping the team find the 'meaning' of each line of the text, and of the whole play, or at least something that makes sense. In the initial days of rehearsal my role was assisting the director to make his choices regarding how the show looks, what it feels like - the overall *aesthetic* - and giving feedback on how scenes, acts, or the whole play *reads* to me as an audience. I've also been getting to know everyone, how they work and how they are progressing. Here you could call me something of an (intentionally) 'calming' presence as well as an information-gatherer on everyone's state of mental well-being!

I've also been laughing at the humour of the show as we've run through scenes or sections. This makes most actors *get more into* what they're doing as theatre is ultimately about having an audience. By *getting into* I mean taking more risks, making new discoveries and not getting too wired.

***Would you talk about where this play is situated in terms of Australian play writing - historically, comparatively, controversially?***

Patrick White wrote *The Ham Funeral* in 1947 while he was living in London. It wasn't produced in Australia until 1961, a good fourteen years later. No one wanted to know about it here before then, or not enough. I seem to recall that White himself got despondent about his playwriting even as he started to write some of his most famous novels in the 1950s. With his growing fame, however, Australians began to pay more attention to him.

In fact, while the premiere Australian production of *The Ham Funeral* was done by an amateur company in Adelaide the original production was going to be produced for the 1961/1962 Adelaide Festival. Its organisers then got cold feet and called the season off, and the amateur production was a defiant response to this cancellation.

Why would *The Ham Funeral* get such a reaction, especially in the light of White's enhanced status as a 'man of letters'?

At the time Australian theatre was going through a rebirth after a long period where the repertoire was basically works from the UK. *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, by Ray Lawler, written in the mid-to-late 1950s is often cited as the beginning of this 'new wave'. Later came the Nimrod Theatre in Sydney and the Pram Factory/La Mama in Melbourne. These were a younger population of theatre-makers but basically working with the same principles.

This new wave emphasised *realism*. Real people in real situations using real language, 'real' here meaning identifiably Australian. Instead of some sort of 'posh' English accent, it was the Australian vernacular. Instead of a parlour it was a boxing ring. Instead of a verbal drama it was a knockabout comedy.

*The Ham Funeral* didn't fit into this camp. It is an *expressionist* drama, which means a work where emotions and thoughts are given physical expression, a play where characters represent different parts of the *human psyche*. It's not that no one else was writing such works but the works were few and far between and did not carry the same weight of reputation in terms of their writers that White had begun to invite. And besides, *The Ham Funeral* was seen as so dark, so cutting, revelling in the shadowy places within ourselves, and it does. In fact, White himself called it 'an act of indecent exposure'.

Despite these travails the show went on and Patrick White began to be talked about as a playwright as well as a writer of fiction. *The Ham Funeral* itself is now viewed as a landmark in Australian theatre in terms of offering an alternative dramatic style -realised brilliantly in the play - to the new realism.

***The play is set in England. What do you think makes it Australian or gives it an Australian voice?***

In many ways this has been one of the biggest creative challenges in making this production of *The Ham Funeral*. There's many things in the play that refer to English society and culture—the grubby boarding house, the literal references to English places (think of the sweet-shop at Croaker's Pond), the style of language used by almost everyone except the Young Man and the Girl, the class differences between the Young Man and Mrs Lusty, and on I could go. What the director and the team have been deciding upon as in the rehearsal room is how to retain the truth of the play, for example, the rhythms of its language, but not fall into some *My Fair Lady*-style mock-Cockney or other overtly English mannerism. Tricky!

If there is anything particularly Australian about the work, you could say it's the voice of Patrick White. Sharp, snide, fierce, hilarious, grotesque. There's also autobiographical traces: the memory under the lilac bushes; the youthful idealism; the sense of the Young Man being wet behind the ears but thinking he's the ants pants. Perhaps there's also something of that suburban satire that Barry Humphries' Dame Edna Everage represents too, although it's a style that the English do as well, albeit not always as viciously.

For me, what gives *The Ham Funeral* an Australian voice is the way an Australian production inhabits the work. That is to say, when Australian theatre-makers produce this work they bring with them their Australianness. Just as Patrick White was carrying his Australianness with him in writing the script. What this actually means is harder to name; it depends on a specific production.

This particular production might be characterised by its borrowing from European as well as English traditions, a certain *larrikin sensibility*, a willingness to push aside the class prejudices within the play (and probably within White himself) and instead examine the more universal 'business' of the work. All of this strikes me as in a way 'Australian'.

***Would you talk about how the play is structured?***

The central image of the play might be understood as a *ham* but its structure, it seems to me, is related to the idea of a *house*. A house in a literal way but also as a place in which there are many nooks and crannies, entrance points and exits, and secrets hidden in the walls, under the floorboards and between the rooms. As we have closely worked on the text I have increasingly seen the ways in which house/room/stairs/windows/furniture and the imaginary object of desire on the other side of the top landing - the anima - all feature in the Young Man's journey from ineffectual wannabe poet to someone prepared to take action, however ambiguous this action might be.

Certainly, the whole piece takes place *in, outside or going to* a house. In the first act it's the interior life of the Lusty household, with the postscript of the Young Man's journey out into the world but without any intention of leaving. In the second act it's the Lusty household but with the outside world rudely present in the form of the nasty relatives. This time when the Young Man departs it is a clear and steadfast choice.

Of course this is only my take on the play's structure. There are many ways in which it could be discussed. Another useful starting point, for instance, is looking at the



conventions of *vaudeville*, a form of live entertainment that has mostly died out in Australia, although you could say that TV variety shows like *Dancing with the Stars* are its offspring.

***How would you describe the style of The Ham Funeral?***

I've talked about this above but in short: *expressionism*. This is a movement in art-making i.e., dance, visual art, music, writing as well theatre, that had its origins in early twentieth-century Europe. It reflected artists' growing interest in *the psychology of experience* and how this might be expressed in *external symbols*.

If expressionism is the general style, *The Ham Funeral* could be said to be garnished with a hefty dose of the *vaudeville*, some Jungian ideas (Carl Jung, a contemporary of Freud, developed a philosophy of the individual consciousness that linked it to what he called a universal consciousness), wickedly black humour, and a touch of the tragic.

***Does this play explore any universal themes or ideas?***

Where do I start? *The Ham Funeral* is investigating who and what we are as human beings. The Young Man is the obvious protagonist of the story but in fact all the other characters could be said to be aspects of himself—the lustiness of Mrs Lusty, the inarticulate wisdom of Mr Lusty, the penetrating truth of the Girl, the social ruthlessness of the Relatives and the frank honesty of the Bag Ladies. The Young Man must learn that he is not simply a noble soul fed by poetry and dreams of greatness; he is a mix of passions, and desires, and fears, and shortcomings and to act is to attain a kind of greatness in and of itself.

Again, there are many other dimensions of this very profound play that could be discussed. One useful area of study is the Jungian psychological theory I've already mentioned.

## **MALTHOUSE EDUCATION INTERVIEW WITH ANNA TREGLOAN, Set Designer for 'The Ham Funeral'**

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***Anna, your brief was originally to create a design that would work simultaneously for two productions: 'Journal of the Plague Year' and 'The Ham Funeral'. Can you tell us about a bit about your design process under these circumstances?***

It has made for a very complicated design process because I have had to respond to each play individually, but also to try and see how the two fit together and how the larger elements can be shared between the two productions. I've then had to work with the shapes and the textures of those larger elements to see how they can be used in different configurations for the two different shows. I have had to create a space that is trying to squeeze twice as much action onto it than I would have if it was for a single production.

One of the initial things that the director, Michael Kantor, said to me was that he wanted the two shows to look entirely different. We initially started looking at them and talking about them as quite separate shows. As part of that discussion we'd say, "Maybe this bit from this show could move over here for the other show, and then that bit could move over there", and we were still thinking about them as separate shows. As the process developed, however, that shifted a bit and I found that a much easier way to discuss things and an easier way to work was to concentrate on one of the shows for a day or two, and then to come back and work on the other show, gradually fitting them together. If I tried to work on both shows at once, I just felt overloaded.

***What elements have ended up being common to the two shows and what elements have been more specific?***

This has shifted over the rehearsal period, largely due to practical and budgetary constraints, but where we are up to now is: there is a forestage section in *The Ham Funeral*, which is a very long narrow stage and part of that is used as a kind of floating island in *Journal of the Plague Year*. It is redressed, but only minimally, between the two shows. Behind that, there is another big truck [moveable set piece] which again is coming from a really long thin stage. On top of that there is a room which has an acrylic front to it, and white slatted walls within it and an acrylic back wall. That room is used in both shows but you see much less of it in *Plague Year*. There are a few other basic elements used in both shows, such as the basic shape of the actual theatre with a big hole in the pit. Up until the beginning of rehearsals, we actually had two different pit structures, but we rebuilt it and changed things so that it could work for both shows. On a practical level, we sometimes had to say, "Will the same element work for both plays? Yes, it probably will", and so that element has remained the same. There has been quite a bit of compromise in the design compared to working on a single show, which is fine. It has been nice in a way to pare things back, in fact a lot of paring back has gone on!

In terms of the really distinctive elements of the two productions, I think that the most distinctive thing is the use of the space. *The Ham Funeral* is quite cramped in an area down stage, which is to do with the play being about people who are quite cramped and architecture which is cramped as well. It is also a very text driven piece of theatre, so it

works better being played quite close to the audience. *Journal of the Plague Year*, on the other hand, is utilising the whole theatre as a playing space.

***Will this include the use of the auditorium?***

They will be using the balconies a little bit, but it is more about the difference in the visual and the conceptual elements of the two productions. *The Ham Funeral* is like a little stage within a larger stage, whereas *Plague Year* treats the theatre as a whole; it is about small scenes and groups of characters and nice, small performance moments which I've placed within this quite vast, very black space.

***What was your initial response as a designer to Patrick White's script of 'The Ham Funeral'?***

My response was quite different to that of *Journal of the Plague Year* because, from a design point of view, Patrick White's text lists design elements within it in quite specific detail. Sometimes when I'm reading a play with those sorts of descriptions, I just don't read them; I skip over them. But for some reason I did read them in this script and they stuck in my head. Plays with lots of set descriptions are not the sort of theatre which Michael usually directs or the sort of design which I prefer to do. So it was interesting to have that picture mapped out in the text and then to chop away at it again. It is a fantastic script; the complexity of the ideas within it, the currents and undercurrents, are quite amazing. When talking with the director, Michael Kantor, about the play, he was very interested in it being very much about the subconscious *anima* and *animus* and the Jungian theory behind it all. So gradually I started to see the visual potential of the play, but it took a lot longer than *Plague Year* to get to that visual potential, because there is so much literal representation in *The Ham Funeral* that comes first.

***Have you included any of those literal set descriptions such as the kitchen, where the characters need to do practical things such as peel potatoes and so on?***

Interestingly, those literal elements are creeping back a little bit; they have swung in and out of the design as it has gone along. It has never been a wholly literal representation. I would never put in the kitchen sink for example, but there has always been a table and chairs. There is a potato peeler and potatoes. We have shifted through a number of ideas, starting with that of using literal objects but not in a literal way, such as old, dirty blinds to represent a wall. From there we moved on to the idea of using plasterboard for the wall which again has literal connotations, but we were going to use it to cover a big acrylic box, so it was not being used in a literal way. The next idea was to move into a quite neutral world, with a white curtain at the back and a fairly plain stage in front, again with tables and chairs and mattress. Now we've finally moved back to a more literal space, with potentially real carpet on the floor! So if you look at the whole picture, it doesn't look like a literal representation of a house, but if you look at a smaller section, such as characters sitting at the kitchen table, that might seem to have a more literal feel about it.

***Have you worked on a particular concept of theme for your design for this production?***

The concept would probably be that idea of *the subconscious*; things moving behind the reality of the world. That came to me fairly early in the process. My feeling was that the

anima - the girl whom the Young Man talks to constantly - has the ability to move through the walls of the rooms. She was constantly there in the sense that she was always just behind the wall, listening. That shifted from the idea of having false walls, so she would be able to get into the side walls and underneath the stage. She'd have that ability. The overriding theme is the idea of the Jungian subconscious and that those subconscious "friends" are always there, listening and watching.

***Would you talk about the elements of the set for the Ham Funeral?***

I can describe in a bit more detail the "box", which is directly behind the main playing area. The main playing area itself is a long thin stage area with literal elements in it. Behind that is an acrylic wall with quite a dirty curtain, which leads to the box. *The box is the kind of "subconscious space"*; you can see flitting images within it through the translucent curtains. It is also a theatre space. There is a point where a red velvet curtain comes in and becomes a backdrop for the relatives, so it doubles as a little proscenium arch theatre.

*The pit area is another area where everything that happens is about the theatre.* We divided the stage so that the down stage area closest to the audience, is the "theatre world", complete with a red curtain. In that area we are very conscious of the fact they are performers on stage; the two bag ladies for example, are being portrayed as show girls, and it is the big theatrics that happen there.

*The main part of the stage is what we refer to as the "narrative space"* and that is where much more "real" activity goes on. People go about their business, arguing it out amongst themselves. Behind the narrative space is this box, which is the subconscious space, and also a bit of a theatrical world at the same time. So there is this idea of stripping back through the curtains to each of these layers. We go through a series of layers: theatre, to reality, then to a subconscious level. Winding its way through all of these is the element of *death*.

***Have you felt restricted as a designer by the historical and social context of the text?***

I have certainly felt more restricted in many ways than I did with *Journal of the Plague Year*. As a text, *The Ham Funeral* is more based in the reality of the characters. The director and I did make the decision early on that we weren't going to set the play where Patrick White set it, which was 1919 England; we would set it in contemporary Australia. Again, that is mostly realised in the costuming and while the set also refers to the contemporary, it is not restricted by it; it is still more of *an interpretation* of a contemporary setting. I know the sorts of things people have in their lounge rooms so I didn't need to go out and research those, but I have used some photographs and interpreted broadly from them.

***How would you describe the style of this set for 'The Ham Funeral'?***

Representational, quite dowdy in some ways, quite pared back. The design uses blocks of quite simple, muted colours within it. In many ways it is stripped back so that it refers to a domestic environment while still being quite a blank playing space for the performers.

You could also say that the style is bit *modernist* I suppose, but not overtly so. It is essentially made up of a series of stripped back playing spaces that feed into each other.

***Could you talk about your collaboration with the other creative artists in your design process.***

This had been a good collaborative process. Tom Wright and Michael Kantor met a couple of times early on with all of the designers - set, costume and lighting - so that the foundation of the whole team was laid very early. Fiona Crombie [the Costume Designer] and I have been sharing the office over the road which has been great . We have been able to feed off each other and to respond to each other's ideas very immediately. With Paul Jackson [the Lighting Designer] I've been adjusting the set so that he can get what he wants lighting-wise out of it as well. Certainly with Michael, it is very much a two way process, where it is hard to remember who came up with what idea, which I think is a sign of good collaborative process.

***I believe the performers have been quite heavily involved in the process as well?***

Yes, they have been, which is not unusual. I have often done design work where the performers are quite heavily involved. In this case where I have been able to design while rehearsals are actually in progress, it has meant that the performers feed directly into the design process, which has been good.

***What role do you think that design plays in the theatre?***

In brief, I think that design for theatre is in essence about *creating useful playing spaces that can be flexible to the needs of the performers throughout a production*. To ensure that flexibility, I work in such a way that the design is not "set" before rehearsals start.

I believe design is also about *creating a dynamic atmosphere*, both through the use of levels and spaces within other spaces, in combination with colour and texture. I believe in the "tactility" of design. I don't really believe in pretty pictures - that old school of design which you don't see that much of any more, with painted flats to represent different scenes. I believe that an audience knows when you've painted something to look like metal or wood, and if you can afford it you should build out of the actual materials. In many contemporary theatres, the audience is very close to the performance. It is not like the State Theatre or the Opera Theatres of the past where that kind of design (with painted flats) had its place. Now the audience is often in the space with the design, so it is about their close relationship to each other.

Design is also about *embracing a particular theatre space*, and sometimes with a play like *The Ham Funeral*, that means that you are building a smaller space within a larger one. More often however, it means working with the space that exists to get the dynamic that you want, rather than trying to disguise it. Ultimately, a design will vary depending on the show, as it responds to the needs of that particular production.

**MALTHOUSE EDUCATION – INTERVIEW WITH MAX LYANDVERT,  
Composer and Sound Designer for 'The Ham Funeral'**

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***How did you respond initially to Patrick White's script for 'The Ham Funeral'?***

I didn't like it at first to be honest. Michael and I have done a production of *The Ham Funeral* and oddly enough I was the live musician. There was a lot of sound which was pre-recorded but I played this kind of funny musician character. We did the play in a much more vaudevillian style and there was old burnt out decrepit London style 60s wallpaper. It was insipid, the whole show. My background and my taste tend not to be drawn towards a mid-20th century Anglo-Saxon aesthetic. In the script of *The Ham Funeral*, the way Patrick White uses the language, the structure, the setting, the situation, is coming from that period. An interesting point about the play and one that I particularly respond to is the wonderful monologue at the beginning which also acts as a prologue to the play. In fact Patrick White wrote this prologue a good twenty years, I believe, after he originally wrote *The Ham Funeral*. When you read the Young Man's opening speech it becomes clear that in that prologue/monologue, White has started to explore form, ideas and concepts in a way that the rest of the play doesn't.

***'The Ham Funeral' is considered a classic text, so has this had any influence on the musical and sound choices? Do you feel bound to represent the text in a particular way?***

No. There is a question we are discussing in the rehearsal room at the moment whether the one song, the one verse that exists in the body of the play, is an original vaudeville song and whether it should be performed in a certain way, or if it's just some lyrics that Patrick White wrote that I've already set to music. I mean I could imagine a production that would clearly stick to a situation where we're in London in the 1950s or in the late 1940s and so the music of the period at that time in London is seeping through. But I don't think Michael and I would ever think that way or are bound in that way. I think Michael is one of the people that I really don't put in that category of deadly English theatre because he thinks of theatre as an exciting game that we can use as an art form. We never for a moment actually ever thought that we must stick to the reality of the time or the music.

I understand why it's called a classic text. I think *The Ham Funeral* may be a classic text but I think we need to be careful of using the word *classic* too broadly. We tend to apply it to a very broad period of time. In this instance *The Ham Funeral* is a classic text in Australia because it's an Australian writer. It's a most important Australian novelist writing a play, and it's become an Australian classic.

***What has been your own creative and collaborative approach to this particular play?***

Working with Michael Kantor and collaborating on this project has been wonderful. He has a childlike playful eagerness to experiment and fool around with the possibilities of what *The Ham Funeral* could be. We are taking it towards *Vaudeville* at times. Although I was brought up in Australia, my background is eastern European in that I'm of Russian and Jewish heritage. As a result, my sense of Vaudeville comes from a different form than that of English Vaudeville, and Michael also, because of his family background and

training, is drawn towards that more European style. So we have found it more interesting to take on the vaudeville that is inherent in *The Ham Funeral* and make it a little bit more sleazy, and Eastern European in style. It's a little bit run down and things don't quite work or don't play any more and it has a sense of an underground club or film, where everything's kind of falling apart. The set and the style of the original production was much more *expressionist*, more like German Expressionism. I think this production is allowing us to explore the text a bit more.

*The Ham Funeral* is very different to *Journal of the Plague Year*. While I don't believe it is naturalistic (and I don't really like that term very much) there is a lot more naturalism than in *Journal of the Plague Year* and it does have a situation and it does have a logic and it does have characters with specific relationships to each other. Therefore if you take that too much out of context, you'd lose all the sense of the play. So there is more of a road for the creative team to follow and of course it'll have clearer story telling and props. I sort of think it's a good off set to *Journal of the Plague Year*. *Journal of the Plague Year* is a performance text and *The Ham Funeral* is a play.

***How does the music and sound work within the play? Has it been inspired by any particular images, ideas or characters?***

There are metaphors upon metaphors in this play. On the one hand Patrick White writes quite naturalistically. He talks about beds and tables and upstairs and downstairs. But then he talks about lots of other things that are quite poetic, which have a solid literal meaning but are clearly metaphors. For example the character of the landlord is a central character or an important character in the whole play, but not so much because he is real character, more because of what he comes to represent. He dies about a third of the way through the play, but while he is alive his presence in the play and throughout the house itself is very strong. In the last two thirds of the play even though he is dead there is a sense he is there as part of the house and, in fact his death is a reason for the last two thirds of the play. In Patrick White's script the house speaks, so the voice of the landlord is the voice that we're going to use for The House. And so I have taken the whole idea of what this house is, the history of the house and the echo-like ghostly quality of the house, and I have mixed that in with vaudeville and expressionism and a weird sense of time and consciousness going forwards and backwards. In this way the house becomes more allegorical, more figurative.

The aim of the sound design is that the audience is not sure if they are more on the side of the subconscious or a dream or actually in a very literal conscious state, and so I have created a lot of sounds that evoke time passing or imagination mixing with reality. Like things going backwards or fizzing electricity and, in a way, it's like a ghost house. It's funny that in *Journal of the Plague Year* there's a ghost town, and here there's a ghost house; there are spaces of consciousness, various planes or levels of reality which is what the soundtrack will attempt to represent.

Very few sounds that we're thinking of using in *The Ham Funeral* will actually relate to or represent or justify what is, what has and what is about to happen. They serve a practical purpose in the production when we need to do a scene change and there needs to be sound, but what that sound is doesn't necessarily relate to anything at that point. Music, I believe, must serve a broader less rational purpose



**Could you describe the style of 'The Ham Funeral'?**

I would say the style of this production is probably a little bit more definitive than *Journal of the Plague Year* with some of the physical work that's already starting to evolve with Lisa Shelton, which is to do with *stylistic refinement*, not *behavioural naturalism*. But generally speaking, during the opening scenes, especially in the first half of the play until the relatives come in and it starts becoming more obviously stylised, I think it will be construed as being more normal. I'm trying to avoid the word *naturalistic* but it will be more naturalistic in terms of people's physical behaviour and vocal qualities. There are scenes written and there are conversations that take place and there are certain things that are assumed. There will be little tweaks and details and colours and aesthetics that are never naturalistic even in those scenes but I think the actors will be playing a character a lot more than wearing masks and telling stories as they do in *Journal of the Plague Year*. The characters have certain relationships in *The Ham Funeral* and therefore the behavioural quality of the performance will seem, compared to *Journal of the Plague Year*, a lot more naturalistic.

**'Journal of the Plague Year' and 'The Ham Funeral' are being created for an ensemble cast. How has this process of theatre making influenced your creative approach?**

We're learning about how this works as we're going. That's the main thing I can tell you. It's fascinating. None of us have done this before. Hardly anyone in Australia has ever done this before - Ballet or Opera perhaps - but it's a standard almost everywhere else in the northern hemisphere. Time is an issue. Normally five weeks is barely enough to rehearse a production. When you're doing two, you kind of calculate ten weeks and that makes sense mathematically. But everyone's feeling is that because it's the same ensemble of actors and creatives rehearsing both shows and going back and forth every few days from one play to the other, the gains you make, and the progress you make is a little faster and then you have the time to try other versions to delay final decisions. Michael's the kind of director that likes seeing the bigger picture first and then knowing where the pitfalls in the whole landscape are. So while it is very busy I think it's special and we get to know each other really, really well. It becomes a family atmosphere. Working becomes fun.

In terms of how this process affects me artistically, I'm just discovering this as we're going. I mean this is an interesting question to ask me in about three weeks time as well, to see how different my answers are then, because we've only had two weeks now and it's fascinating but it is early days.

I think the idea of an ensemble cast and a repertory of work is particularly beneficial for the actors and the director. I think it's what directors and actors dream of. Directors love to work with a cast that's consistent, where the communication and the language is already known, where certain formalities can be dropped, where you know each other's work and you know each others' brains really well, where you can actually get to the crux of the work in the actual making and refining the work itself rather than wasting time on the politeness or formality. It is fascinating but I am drawing no conclusions as yet.

**Do you see the ensemble company and repertory performance as being a model for other theatre companies in contemporary Australia?**

I'm glad to be here from Sydney working on this. There are other companies rehearsing as we speak, except it's just the same thing that was going on last year and the year before that. Thinking artistically and speaking for Melbourne audiences, this is a great event to experience for the first time and the nature of the work itself is such that it's not safe. I don't think it's alienating, I don't think it's so abstract that it's going to alienate a lot of people, it's not. But it isn't safe, and it's not naturalistic, and it's not conventional. When it needs to get dirty, it will get dirty, when it needs to get offensive, it'll get offensive, but at the same time it's highly, highly theatrical. And I think that's the bottom line – theatricality.

The biggest potential gain for this company and this whole experiment of two shows in repertory is that the level and the sophistication and the refinement of its theatricality can go to another level. And this level of sophistication and refinement will come about because the cast is such a great cast, working so intensely together as the same cast on two shows, as a company, with a director like Michael who can make even the most uncompromising artistic references accessible, not necessarily digestible, but accessible because he is innately interested in theatricality. This is not about a performance piece that is put on stage which may explore highly experimental ideas with a weird or very particular aesthetic and you either get it or you don't. Michael doesn't work like this. Michael is always interested in *the theatrical soul* of anything. And if something has a clear theatrical soul, it doesn't matter if it's naturalistic or illogical or abstract, Michael will explore it. I think *theatricality* on many levels is the thing to look out for in both these shows. It's this potential level of theatricality, facilitated by this way of working which could set a new standard of refinement of productions compared with the existing model.

***As a musician and performer what role do you think theatre has in our contemporary society?***

I feel very, very strongly about a lot of Australian theatre taking what I think is the most conservative line of thinking from England. And England doesn't even prioritise that type of theatre any more because it is part of Europe and its theatre has evolved and adapted as a consequence. I suppose what I'm trying to say is, for too long too many theatre artists, not everyone of course, but too many theatre artists have thought of themselves as theatre makers and theatre industry people and not necessarily as *artists*. They haven't associated themselves with visual artists or musicians or architects or photographers or poets, whereas, all those other art forms associate with each other quite often. The problem here artistically is that we start thinking that we have these two really important things in theatre, one is the well made play created by the playwright and the other is the truthful character created by the actor. It is a pyramid-like structure that all other art forms are there to serve and support.

For the last few decades in many parts of the world, most art forms have been moving and changing and evolving and adapting because they haven't seen themselves as just themselves, but rather part of a bigger artistic collective. Theatre has not seen that it needs to be associated with this movement. It sees itself as a separate, elitist thing. And so occasionally, during a Melbourne Festival or a Sydney Festival or Adelaide Festival, once every year or every two years, these wonderful productions come and they're compelling to watch. Most of the people that really get off on such productions are not theatre people. A lot of actors and writers, who go to these shows don't see them as necessarily important to them or part of their industry, they see them as something else, as *arty*, because it's not the same line of theatre that they're doing. And yet these

productions are really affecting people, whereas, plays performed by actors are struggling to do so.

I believe that theatre as a form needs to actually affect society, and in order to do so I think it's got to take on the way society is changing; technologically, artistically, culturally. It's got to belong to the family of art forms, not just be exclusively theatrical. Therefore, the theatre needs to start becoming a form where music, where design, where other art forms can all evenly and equally collaborate to create innovative work. I think some of the productions that have been important over the last twenty or thirty years and have gained audiences for the theatre and have innovated theatre making have been non-naturalistic, non text based ie. Theatre as artform first, theatre as 'playhouse' second. Even great directors like Peter Brook had to leave England and go to another place with their own theatre to have the freedom, the free conditions with which to experiment and see what theatre is capable of.

I think with the development of television and film, the whole idea of *naturalism* has been ripped away from theatre and it can be done so much better on film. And because we've had the 20th century, we've had abstraction, we've had irrationality so therefore we have to embrace that it is not *avant-garde* anymore. We can't just think of that as colour and movement, and the really serious stuff is this truthful character. I feel quite strongly about that. Contemporary theatre makers like Romeo Castellucci (Italy) for example, who came to the Melbourne Festival a couple of years ago with a wonderful production of *Genesi* – he has produced eleven other shows in Europe since then, as part of an eleven episode cycle on which I've been his assistant director. He is now regarded as being a director who is changing people's lives. By this I mean changing people's lives in the sense that people who would never imagine themselves going to the theatre, are being interested in theatre and are going to his shows. They can't stop thinking, can't stop reading. His work has placed them in a whole new world and yet there's hardly a sentence being spoken. So I think contemporary theatre makers have to be more lateral and take off their blinkers in terms of what theatre is and be a bit more *irrational* and artistic.

**MALTHOUSE EDUCATION INTERVIEW WITH FIONA CROMBIE,  
Costume Designer for 'The Ham Funeral'**

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***Fiona, what was your initial response to Patrick White's play when you read it?***

It was about great writing and I also love something that has to have great investigation. I really enjoy the fact that in *The Ham Funeral* there are all these oblique lines spoken by the characters that you can sit and ponder over. It's just wonderfully written, but it is also very multi-layered and there are many dimensions in this text. One thing that I particularly responded to in the play is that you switch from what is essentially a domestic world, that of the Lusty's, to the completely different world of the bag ladies and then again to that of the relatives. And then there is the *anima* – the Young Man's imagined woman – who seems to live upstairs. There are many layers, but they are all threaded together really beautifully.

***Would you talk about your approach to the design of this production.***

The director, Michael Kantor, really wanted to keep this play and the design open for the actors to be involved in who the characters are and how they will be represented. We have quite a long rehearsal process, so we all thought, why not? That kind of process is really rare and it's great to be able to do it. So, in terms of design we didn't overly concern ourselves. By this I mean that we were concerned with having a sense of where we wanted the play to be, we knew that it was going to be set in Australia and we knew that it would be contemporary, but what we hadn't locked in was what the characters were like. I didn't draw anything. What I did was source some images, too many to start with, and these became somewhat redundant because we didn't want to pin too many things down without the actors. It was important to wait until the cast were all there. That is the point where we are now. I have had a few meetings with actors this week and have sought their feedback about what were my initial responses and ideas, and what are their initial responses.

***'The Ham Funeral' is considered somewhat of an Australian classic. Do you feel bound to represent the text in a particular way?***

That's interesting because some of the language really does lend itself to the period [1919] but we're just not going to worry about that. I think that if you can create a world where that language can still exist, then I think that's fine. We're not doing a snapshot of suburban Melbourne, but it's there and it's recognisable and it will have a feel that is contemporary, but it will feel like it's something else as well.

I think that the play itself is very much open to interpretation, it's like any of the great expressionist plays. It could be a thousand different things that you only discover when you start looking. I designed a production of *End Game* [Samuel Beckett] and the stage directions say that a character is wearing this, this and this. But, you make a real discovery when you ask, but is it *this*? You know it's a coat, but is it *this* kind of coat, or *that* kind of coat? There are a thousand different coats that you could use this makes it very complex. I think those complexities are very true of *The Ham Funeral* as well.

***Are you designing the costumes to define the characters in this play?***

Yes, definitely, that is very much the intention. We haven't really made much progress with some of the characters at this stage, but I am envisaging that the costumes will clearly reflect characters like the landlord and the landlady, the young man and bag ladies.

***The actors in 'The Ham Funeral' operate as an ensemble. What will be the challenges in relation to the actors changing characters? Are you seeing full costume changes or are you seeing representational change?***

No I think that they will change totally. There will be a couple of really quick changes and so we just have to work out how they happen, but I think that in this design for this play, they will need to completely change.

***Are you intending to highlight any particular period or themes or ideas with the costume design for 'The Ham Funeral'?***

Not really. The design is more about character and defining character. For example, what do we want to say about Mrs Lusty? Or, what do we want to convey about the Young Man through their costumes? It is the same with the bag ladies and the relatives. The design is about those things rather than a thematic thing. I think that the themes are really going to come through in the *playing* of it, and also through the use of and design of the space. Space is important in this play.

***Would you talk about the style of 'The Ham Funeral'.***

I need to get myself like a little handbook on style because I'm not good at defining it. Robert Menzies [cast member] came up with a really good definition the other day when he called it *suburban grotesque*. The other idea we were talking about was that the play is like the Czech Republic in that it is clearly contemporary, but there's something a little bit strange about its contemporary feel; it has shadows or echoes of something else. The characters are recognisable people, but there is something happening in the play to make you feel a bit uncomfortable I think.

***What overall role do you think the costume has in contemporary theatre?***

I think it depends on the show really. I've designed shows where the director has said to me, 'Just make them look gorgeous', and that's been my job. I really think that costume design is about supporting a character. It's about assisting the audience and assisting a performer and maybe telling a few things about the character that the script or performance doesn't tell. The designer can decide what those things are and they could be little things. There could be a choice that a character always has holes in their socks and therefore, without anyone saying it, it says something itself. I think that the key role I have is to try to find interesting ways of representing a character. Asking myself, what are these items that the characters are wearing and how are they going to just give a little bit more information to the audience rather than just being pretty or flattering? And costume design is a collaborative process, a total collaboration with the actors in the first instance.

***What are the challenges of working with one group of actors and yet two plays at the same time?***

I'm actually not having much trouble keeping the two plays separate at all. For me they are quite distinct. I think that it's more a case of knowing that I am sometimes holding onto information that I'm not passing on to people. I think it probably is much trickier for Anna because it is two worlds within one space. I think that's much more challenging and probably for Michael as well. For me, they are so different. *The Ham Funeral* is about finding articles and objects from shops or op shopping. Whereas with *Journal of the Plague Year* the process is much more about construction and making and it is much bigger. I feel like they are nicely separated in my head.

## Questions for Analysis & Discussion

### CONTENT & THEMES:

1. Director, Michael Kantor, says that there are two themes in all great theatre - *sex and death*.
  - How are each of these themes explored in *The Ham Funeral*?
  - Do you think that these themes have been central to other pieces of theatre you have seen? How? In what ways? Give examples?
2. Patrick White describes *The Ham Funeral* as: '...a mad, muddy mess of eels of a play'
  - What do you think he means by this?
  - What images does this description conjure up for you?
3. The director says that, 'in fact we can see our own world by looking into others'
  - What resonances of our world are there in the world of *The Ham Funeral*?
4. The Young Man opens the play by saying that the play 'could happen anywhere'?
  - Do you agree?
  - Are the themes of the play universal?
5. Dramaturg, Maryanne Lynch, states that one of the themes explored in the play is 'who we are as human beings' and that the Young Man learns that 'to act is to attain a kind of greatness in itself'.
  - What is the Young Man's journey in this play?
  - What does he learn about himself?
6. Michael Kantor believes that Patrick White is suggesting that 'life itself is beyond the animate, that it resides in the inanimate'
  - How do you respond to this comment?
  - How do the inanimate objects function in this play? What meaning do they have?
  - What is the role of the House within the play?
7. Both the director and the dramaturg discuss the Jungian theory of the *anima* and the *animas*.
  - Research Carl Jung's theories
  - How is the human *subconscious* explored in *The Ham Funeral*?
  - What do you think Patrick White saying about humans in this play?
8. The director, Michael Kantor, says: 'I think Patrick White is saying that by dealing with death, we deal with life'.
  - What does he mean by this?
  - How does the play explore the tension between life and death?



9. Director, Michael Kantor, says:  
 "The play is structured in such a way that there is some semblance of a rational narrative around the characters of the Landlord and the Landlady and the Young Man can enter their world but also inhabit the irrational world of the mind"
- How are *rationality* and *irrationality* explored in the play?

## STRUCTURE & NARRATIVE

1. *Ham Funeral* is essentially a narrative in terms of structure. Do you agree?
2. Dramaturg, Maryanne Lynch, talks about the work as:  
 '...the voice of Patrick White... sharp, snide, fierce, hilarious, grotesque'  
  - In what ways are these aspects explored in the play?
3. In talking about the Australianess of the work, the dramaturg says:  
 'I guess, for me, what gives *The Ham Funeral* an Australian voice is the way an Australian production inhabits the work' and that there is '...a certain larrikin sensibility and a willingness to push aside the class prejudices within the play'  
  - How do you respond to this description?
  - What for you makes this production an 'Australian' production?
4. The Prologue has an important function in the play. Director, Michael Kantor, says:  
 'The Prologue establishes quite importantly that we are in the theatre, and that by being in a theatre we are going to watch a play which is a piece of make believe'  
  - How did you respond to the Young Man's prologue?
  - In what ways did the prologue provide an access point to the performance?
5. Dramaturg, Maryanne Lynch, talks about the play being structured around the idea of a 'house'.  
 '...the whole piece takes place in, or outside or going to a house...'  
  - How is this explored in the play?
  - How was the house depicted in the play?

## STYLE:

1. Sound Designer, Max Lyandvert, speaks about the language of the play as being 'poetic' and it being about 'metaphor'.  
  - What aspects of the language are poetic or metaphoric?
2. The creative team have described this play in many ways:  
 '...**proto expressionist melodrama**...'  
 '...**schlock horror and farce**...'  
 '...**melange of theatrical styles**...'  
 '...**an expressionist drama**...'  
 '...**vaudeville**...'  
 '...**suburban grotesque**...'  
  - Find examples of each of these styles in the performance.
  - How did the stagecraft elements work to enhance these styles?
  - In what ways did the expressive skills of the actors illustrate these styles?

3. Sound designer, Max Lyandvert, says that *The Ham Funeral* is more naturalistic than *Journal of the Plague Year*.
  - What aspects of the play are naturalistic?
  - What aspects of the play render it non-naturalistic?

#### STAGECRAFT ELEMENTS:

1. Anna Tregloan, set designer, talks about the set as being 'cramped' because it is about people who are 'cramped'.
  - In what way are the characters cramped?
  - What aspects of the set design reflect this?
2. Read the opening description of the set in Patrick White's script.
  - How much of the original set description can you recognise in the set?
  - What is not there?
  - As a member of the audience do you believe those elements are missed or does the set work without them?
  - What this say about the nature of theatre design?
3. Costume Designer, Fiona Crombie, says that her aim for the costume design is: '...it will have a feel that is contemporary, but it will feel like something else as well...'
  - What aspects of the costumes are contemporary?
  - In what ways do the costumes feel like 'something else'?
4. The designer also says, '...the design is more about defining character...'
  - How do the costumes depict character?
  - Do they say anything beyond the literal?
5. Sound Designer, Max Lyandvert, says that the, '...aim of the sound design is that the audience is not sure if they are more on the side of the subconscious or in a dream or actually in a very literal conscious state'
  - What aspects of the sound seemed dreamlike to you?
  - Overall, were you aware of the sound design? How and when?
6. The sound designer has given a voice to the house, that of the dead landlord.
  - How do you respond to this idea?
  - What do you think the designer is saying about the link between the landlord and the house
7. How does the sound create a sense of time, place and mood?
8. Lighting Designer, Paul Jackson, has created a staircase with lights.
  - How do you to respond to this?
  - What other aspects of the lighting design struck you?
  - Overall, how does lighting work within the production in terms of creating time, place, and mood?

9. The production is set in contemporary Australia rather than 1991 England.
  - How does the design reflect this
  - Do you think that the production works in this setting?
10. Each of the creative artists speaks about **symbolism** and **representation** in terms of the play.
  - What aspects of the play did you find symbolic or representational?
  - How was this achieved?

#### CHARACTER:

1. Reflect upon each of the characters in this play and consider:
  - How the actors used their expressive skills to create character
  - How the set and costumes helped to create character.
2. Dramaturg, Maryanne Lynch, describes the character of the Young Man as 'a wannabe poet' and 'a mix of passions, and desires, and fears, and shortcomings'
  - How did you respond to the character of the Young Man?
3. Discuss the role of the Girl or anima in this production.
  - How do you respond to the 'real' woman behind the door?

#### THEATRE & AUDIENCE:

1. Michael Kantor, in discussing the play says that, 'theatre isn't necessarily logical and isn't necessarily politically driven'
  - What do you think he means by this?
  - Is *The Ham Funeral* in any way about logic?
2. Maryanne Lynch, the dramaturg, describes the play as being 'profound'.
  - How do you respond to this?
3. The role of the Young Man requires him to directly address the audience.
  - What role do you think the audience plays in this play?
  - How do you respond to the direct address by the Young Man?
4. Many of the creative team talk about the role of the theatre in contemporary society.
  - What do you think the role of theatre is in our society?
  - What place does a play such as *The Ham Funeral* have?

# Resources and Sources

## Websites:

1. [www.complete-review/authors/whitep.htm](http://www.complete-review/authors/whitep.htm)  
Explores the life and literary works of Patrick White
2. [www.kirjasto.sci.fi/pwhite.htm](http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/pwhite.htm)  
General biography and reference list
3. [www.adelaide.edu.au/theatreguild/history](http://www.adelaide.edu.au/theatreguild/history)  
Site that provides information about the first production of the play
4. [www.belvoir.com.au/340\\_whatson\\_archive.php?production\\_id=83](http://www.belvoir.com.au/340_whatson_archive.php?production_id=83)  
Information about Michael Kantor's previous production of this play
5. [www.bananasinpajamas.com/arts/white/info.html](http://www.bananasinpajamas.com/arts/white/info.html)  
Information on an audio work about Patrick White and contains a good reference list.

## Publications:

1. *Patrick White - a Life* by David Marr  
[Published by Random House Australia, Sydney 1991]\*
2. *Four Plays by Patrick White*; Introduction by HG Kippax  
[Published by Sun Books, Melbourne 1967]\*\*
3. *Patrick White: The Late Years* by William Yang (published by PanMacMillan Australia, 1995)

# ACTIVITIES

## **DESIGN:**

*Imagine The Ham Funeral is to be presented **NATURALISTICALLY***

- *Redesign the set for a proscenium arch theatre*
- *Construct a set model or create detailed sketches*
- *Make a list of properties*
- *Compare & contrast your design with the production you have seen*

## **PERFORMANCE:**

- Study and arrive at an interpretation of the character of the Young Man or the Girl in detail
- Prepare and perform as a monologue, the Prologue to the play OR a section of text by the Girl
- Write an analysis of your preparation, interpretation and performance and justify/explain your performance choices

## **DEBATE and DISCUSS**

In two groups debate one of the following:

- The role of playwrights in contemporary society
- What is an Australian voice in contemporary theatre?
- That naturalism is no longer part of contemporary theatre making

## **RESEARCH & PERFORMANCE**

Research one or all of the following:

- **Vaudeville, Expressionism and Jungian theory**
- Write a report and present it to the class outlining how your chosen topic was referenced in 'The Ham Funeral' **OR**
- Prepare and perform a scene from the play that you feel explores key elements of your selected topic

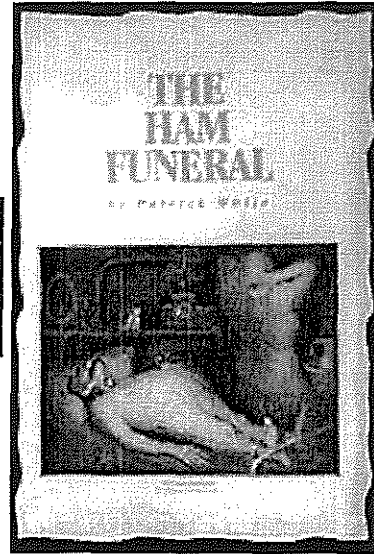


timeline  
 life  
 titles  
 novels  
 plays

*The Ham Funeral*  
*The Season at Sarsaparilla*  
*A Cheery Soul*  
*Night on Bald Mountain*  
*Big Toys*  
*Signal Driver*  
*Netherwood*  
*Shepherd on the Rocks*

other writing  
 excerpts  
 opinions

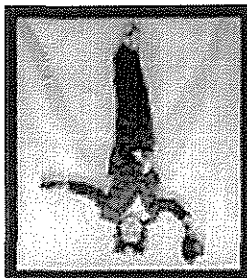
# The Ham Funeral



The Ham Funeral is a short story by Patrick White, first published in 1957. It is a dark and disturbing tale that explores themes of death, grief, and the human condition. The story is set in a rural, isolated area and follows the funeral of a young man named Ham. The funeral is a chaotic and macabre affair, with the body being placed in a casket and then buried in a shallow grave. The story is a powerful and unsettling work of fiction that has become a classic of Australian literature.



[Media Release](#) [Cast and Production Team](#) [Directors Note](#) [What the Critics Say](#)



#### **Media Release | TOP**

Patrick White's first published play, his great expressionist drama *The Ham Funeral* is one of the key works of Australian theatre. Company B presents this rarely-performed play at Belvoir St Theatre from August 2. In many ways the most personal of his plays, *The Ham Funeral* explores the moment when an artist leaves behind the past and moves into the future, abandoning adolescence for adulthood, security for the unknown. It

investigates the confused process of individualising a person, a process which director Michael Kantor says is "a grotesque, extreme experience for a human being".

Kantor has created an "intensely psychological and visually shocking" version of the play; an irreverent look at Patrick White which Kantor admits may offend some purists.

Written in 1947, *The Ham Funeral* has always been an incredibly contentious play. It was accused of being "unappetising fare" and banned in 1962 by the Adelaide Festival and for many years, no director dared touch it. Company B artistic director Neil Armfield presented his version of the play in 1989.

"If you look back at Australian playwriting it's one of the few plays that battled against the norms of naturalism," says Kantor. "It was experimental and extreme - the type of play which refuses to be a museum piece. This is one of the most famous but rarely performed plays because it's considered very difficult. This production unlocks some of the difficulties and makes it much more fun than one might expect."

Raucous and bizarre, profound and extremely funny, *The Ham Funeral* carries all of White's love of theatre and its magical possibilities.

Season Dates August 2 - September 17

Tuesday - Saturday at 8pm

Saturday 2pm, Sunday 5pm

Tickets \$41.50 full price and \$27 concession

Special Tuesday full price tickets \$32

All prices inclusive of GST

#### **Cast and Production Team | TOP**

directed by Michael Kantor

with Aaron Blabey, Ralph Cotterill, Russell Dykstra, Julie Forsyth, Claire Jones, Rostislav Orel, Ben Rogan

design Genevieve Blanchett

lighting design Damien Cooper

composer Max Lyandvert



**Directors Note | TOP**

The Ham Funeral is the richest play written by an Australian playwright. A labyrinth of innuendo and contradiction, it imparts its meaning obliquely or in shards of sudden illumination. The effect is profound.

The theatre that we enter is that of a young man's mind. It is unstable and unformed, grappling against the intellect, swamped in unconscious residue, where memory becomes an octopus and potato peelings are oracles for those who learn how to read them. Fragments of fantasies, archetypal figures, animal urges, and prophetic omens swirl around the young man pushing and cajoling him to the abyss. What was it the landlord said? It is in the air, it is in the wall. Life at last is wherever a man 'appens to be. The lessons of life hammer the young man, beating him raw.

And then he is ready. With the taste of life on his lips, our hero can transcend his own intellect and become complete. It is a squalid and perverse birth - but hopeful none the less.

Mother. Father. Sister. Lover. Twin. Memory. Desire. Fear. Sex. Symbol. Projection. Fantasy. Psychosis. Touch. Feel. Hear. Smell. See. Thought. Feeling. Sensation. Intuition. Suspension. Transcendence. Illumination. Integration. Completeness. Whole.

Our production charts White's 'everyman' alongside a Jungian process of individuation: the self-struggling towards identity, the psyche as it unifies its elements.

Michael Kantor.

**What the Critics Say | TOP**

*REVIEW: THE SUN-HERALD*

**For further information, contact**

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Company B Belvoir  
Ph (02) 8396 6224

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by **Patrick White**

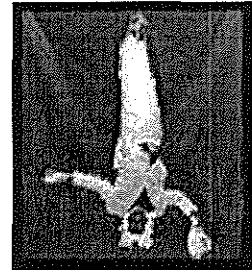
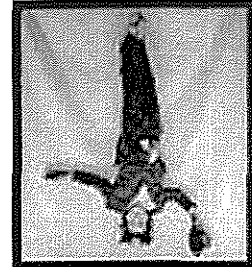
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## Season Ticket Dates

**August 2 - September 17**

Tuesday-Saturday at 8pm  
Saturday 2pm & Sunday 5pm  
Adult \$38 Concession \$25

*MEDIA RELEASE*

*CAST AND CREW*

*DIRECTORS NOTE*

*WHAT THE CRITICS SAY*

# THE HAM FUNERAL

*And I saw, and behold, a pale horse: and he that sat upon him, his name was Death; and Hades followed with him. And there was given unto them authority over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with famine, and with death, and by the wild beasts of the earth. (Revelations 6:8)*

## THE BODY AND DEATH

Any corpse that is neither destroyed nor frozen undergoes putrefaction and autolysis. As one scientist said of postmortem putrefaction:

The decomposition process is generally divided into five stages: fresh, bloat, active decay, post or advanced decay, and dry or skeletal remains. The overall process can be viewed as a two act play with an intermission between acts. The first act includes the first three stages of decomposition and is an accelerated performance in which maggots take top billing. The intermission is marked by a rapid decrease in corpse biomass resulting from loss of seepage fluids and dispersal of postfeeding maggots. The second act is comprised of the last two stages of decomposition and is prolonged in duration.

Ancients thought that a corpse's natural putrefaction was caused by the coffin 'eating' the corpse, hence the term 'sarcophagi' from the Greek *sarco* (flesh) and *phagus* (eaters). Yet the putrefaction process follows paths laid down by anatomic and physiologic changes.

### Death

Once the heart stops beating, the blood begins to settle in the parts of the body that are closest to the ground, usually the buttocks and back when the corpse is supine. The skin, normally pink-coloured by the oxygen laden blood in the capillaries, becomes pale as the blood drains into the larger veins. Shortly after death the skin is discoloured by *livor mortis*, or what embalmers call "postmortem stain," the purple-red discoloration from blood accumulating in the innermost blood vessels. The skin, no longer under muscular control, succumbs to gravity, forming new shapes and accentuating prominent bones still further. The body cools.

At the moment of death, the muscles relax completely – called primary flaccidity. The muscles then stiffen, perhaps due to coagulation of muscle proteins or a shift in the muscle's energy containers (ATP-ADP), into a condition known as *rigor mortis*. All the body's muscles are affected. *Rigor* begins within two to six hours of death, starting with the eyelids, neck and jaw. It then spreads to the other muscles, including the internal organs, such as the heart. After being in this rigid condition for 24 to 84 hours, the muscles relax and secondary laxity (flaccidity) develops. During this period the body also cools, in a process called *algor mortis*.

In the absence of embalming or rapid cremation, the body then putrifies.

The first sign of putrefaction is a greenish discoloration appearing on the right lower abdomen about two to three days after death. This spreads over the abdomen, chest and upper thighs and is usually accompanied by a putrid odour. Both colour and gas are produced by sulphur-containing intestinal gas and the breakdown product of red blood cells.

Bacteria residing in the colon play an important part in digestion of food during life. They also contribute mightily after death. The smell, rather than the sight, is the most distinctive thing about a putrefying body.

KATHY

In Vung Tau, the army mechanics donated an old pink Citroen to the nurses. It had no reverse gear but you could drive it if you had a wide enough circle to turn in. That beautiful pink car was the best thing that happened to us. Because there wasn't anywhere to go if you had a boyfriend and wanted a bit of a cuddle. So you'd drive that Citroen to the beach, left hand drive, with your soldier boy beside you. But if you're asking did this convent bred girl sleep with them...no ma'mm! But when I think of romance, what instantly comes to mind is that old French pink car on a barbed wire beach in Vietnam.

EVE

I'd visit soldiers in the hospitals to see what I could do to help. I'd sit and listen and get their torment about their sexual problems. You know, how their wives were probably having it. And how they weren't, or if they were they were having it with a slope, not a round eye. I was torn between guilt at not being sympathetic and disgust at the attitudes of some of them. I was propositioned at least six times a day and this combined with seeing all these guys in their pajamas raving on about their sex life, or lack of it, nearly put me off men altogether.

RUTH

Is this a lasting treasure  
Or just a moment's pleasure  
Can I believe the magic of your sighs  
Will you still love me tomorrow

EVE

As much as I ever thought about men, about marriage, when I was there, I thought about marrying a Vietnamese man. I thought they were very attractive. But there was a barrier for them given my status, even a humble aid worker. Confucian thinking demanded that the woman's position be inferior to the man's. A particular attraction between myself and a Vietnamese man had to be sublimated, which I've always regretted.

RUTH

I was in love with this wonderful man. He was a Green Beret. Tall, strong, tanned and handsome. He'd told me we'd go to live in New York City. They went out on an operation and I waited, up on the Rex hotel roof, watching the war in the distance. And I waited for two days and then I knew he was dead. I insisted on seeing his body. He was swollen like a water buffalo, his skin was all black and cracked. They'd cut his penis off and sewn it into his mouth. They'd cut his testicles off and sewn them onto his ears. And I still wear the Star Of David that I cut from his neck.

MARGARET

He was on a raid and he'd come to get me, and he shot his rifle and it hit the plaster. My son was hiding in the next room. And he put the rifle under his jacket and we drove down to the beach. And his face was changing. His eyes were changing. And we went and sat by the water and he put the gun in his mouth. He said 'How would it be if I blew your brains out and then blew mine out too?' But then we drove back home. He said 'Don't worry, we're going to bed' I said 'I'm not going to bed with you' but he grabbed me, held

Under normal conditions, the intestinal bacteria in a corpse produce large amounts of foul-smelling gas that flows into the blood vessels and tissues. It is this gas that bloats the body, turns the skin from green to purple to black, makes the tongue and eyes protrude, and often pushes the intestines out through the vagina and rectum. The gas also causes large amounts of foul-smelling blood-stained fluid to exude from the nose, mouth and other body orifices.

By seven days after death, most of the body is discoloured and giant blood-tinged putrid blisters begin to appear. The skin loosens and any pressure causes the top layer to come off in large sheets (skin slip). By the second week, the abdomen, scrotum, breasts and tongue swell, the eyes bulge out. A bloody fluid seeps out of the nose and mouth. After three to four weeks the hair, nails and teeth loosen and the grossly swollen internal organs begin to rupture and eventually liquefy. It will take a further 10 – 12 years for all of the biomass to be redistributed by insect, microbial and fungal action, and for the body to truly return to ‘dust.’

## LAST WORDS

“Today is a good day to die, for all the things in my life are present.”	Crazy Horse, Sioux Indian Chief
“Welcome, Sister Death”	St. Francis of Assisi
“But, but Mr. Colonel...”	Benito Mussolini
“Let not poor Nelly starve”	Charles II
“I do not understand what I have to do”	Leo Tolstoy
“Applaud friends, the comedy is finished”	Ludwig Van Beethoven
“What is life? It is a flash, a firefly in the night. It is the breath of a buffalo in winter time. It is as the little shadow that runs across the grass and looses itself in the sunset”	Crowfoot, Blackwood Indian Chief
“Mankind, I love you. Be vigilant!”	Julius Fucik, Czechoslovakian Journalist executed by the Gestapo in World War II
“Damn you, Afghanistan.”	Soviet soldier’s letter to family, 1987.

*Men fear death as children fear to go in the dark*

- Francis Bacon

*We live in a time which has created the art of the absurd. It is our art... Do we have the art because the absurd is the patina of waste...? Or are we face to face with a desperate or most rational effort from the deepest resources of the unconscious of us all to rescue civilization from the pit and plague of its bedding?*

- Norman Mailer *Cannibals and Christians* (1966).

me at gunpoint and said 'Get undressed and get into bed'. And I did. He had the gun pointed at me. He pushed me against the wall and had sex with me. He blacked out after that. I'm laying there with him against me with the gun under my chin. And I heard a car pull up. My son had called the police. And he gave himself up to the police very calmly. I charged him with it all, including rape, but they just included that as assault, as I was his wife. He was sentenced to five years and it took me those five years til I could find a way out of it all.

RUTH & MARGARET  
Tonight with words unspoken  
You said that I'm the only one  
But will my heart be broken  
When the night

ALL  
When the night

RUTH  
Meets the morning

ALL  
Meets the morning sun

SANDY

I was wanted, admired, appreciated, adored! The dangers that were the trappings of this euphoria were really second to the wonderful times. That's why I stayed so long, we were like diamonds in the dirt.

*Sandy, Eve and Kathy become a slow motion Motown style girl group, with Sandy singing lead, as we hear 'And here they are boys, live in Danang tonight, the fabulous Velvetens!' Applause and whistles. As they sing, rockets explode, people scream and tracers shoot through the sky. Margaret and Ruth sit in their chairs, watching the show, locked in their memories.*

SANDY, EVE & KATHY  
Tonight with words unspoken  
You said that I'm the only one  
But will my heart be broken  
When the night (when the night)  
Meets the morning (meets the morning) sun  
I'd like to know that your love  
Is love I can be sure of  
So tell me know and I won't ask again  
Will you still love me tomorrow  
Will you still love me tomorrow  
Will you still love me tomorrow

*As well-spent day brings sleepfull rest, so life well lived brings happy death.*

- Leonardo da Vinci

The dying person encounters some lame shit in this culture. First, everybody knows you're dying. So what do they do? They come over and talk about Aunt Millie's new car and who won the World Cup. Like you're suddenly an idiot and need to be diverted. As you get worse, you're probably hospitalised. At the least you undergo painful and tiresome medical treatments that leave you too exhausted for interpersonal relations. The hospital treats you like a piece of meat. They test, they poke, they give you temporary fixes. Nobody talks to you about your upcoming trip into the unknown. Nobody reviews your quality of life with you. Nobody encourages you to plan from a wide range of death options, whether it be cryogenics or gentle euthanasia followed by cremation.

Then, as the great moment of graduation approaches, they put you in a low-security prison called 'critical' or 'intensive care.' *Now* Your friends can't come to see you at all. The warden will only allow card-carrying family members during something called 'visiting hours.' Listen. I did time in fourteen prisons. I know what "visiting hours" means. It means you don't have autonomy over your body or your interpersonal relations because you're in the joint!

Then, at the tender moment or ascendance, rather than letting you pass on harmoniously into blissful, transcendent illumination, they go into hysterics trying to keep you alive for a few more days of suffering. Imagine approaching a psychedelic experience powerful beyond your imagining, one that might last for eternity – or at the very least *seem* to – and there's a bunch of people around you shouting and somebody pounding on your chest! Talk about punk rock.

Finally, after bumming you out for all eternity, they understandably pass you on to a morbid fellow called an undertaker (your guide to the underworld?), who scams your family for the costly and pointless job of confining your deceased body inside of a tacky, Las Vegas-style wooden box.

- Timothy Leary *Designs for Dying*, Timothy Leary with R. U. Sirius, HarperCollins, N.Y. 1997

*Personally, I've been looking forward to dying all my life. Dying is the most fascinating experience in life. You've got to approach dying the way you live your life – with curiosity, hope, experimentation, and with the help of your friends.*

- Timothy Leary

## 6. WAR DOES BECOME NORMAL

### KATHY

The Vietnamese used to sit on the steps outside the surgical suite and chatter away. One day they were suddenly quiet. So I went outside and coming towards me were six gentlemen in black pajamas with bandoliers of bullets across their chests and one hand holding machine guns and the other holding a stretcher which they dropped in front of me. And there was a bloodied Viet Cong man. There were no rules about who could or who could not be treated. No one had 'I'm a friend' or 'I'm a foe' tattooed on their forehead. I never thought you could say 'We're not going to heal you because you are the enemy.' They were human beings, they were hurting. When the prisoners left the hospital, they would be taken away, and all the drips and plasters we'd used to help them live would be ripped out. Sometimes I would be depressed by the futility of it all. I once spent hours doing a complicated amputation on a Viet Cong guy and I trimmed it off really nicely. I was really pissed off a week later to hear that he was shot and hanged.

### EVE

I was on my way to a remote airstrip to see off a sergeant whose tour of duty was up. He was going home. He was a bit plastered after goodbye drinks with his mates. He saw something going on in a field and jumped out. He should have stayed in that fucking jeep. He had no right to do this. He ran in, there was a big explosion and I did the most stupid thing of my life. I ran in after him. His legs were blown off. His penis and testicles were gone. There was not a thing I could do but pray. I cradled what was left of his body. Torso and head. I cuddled him. He thought I was his wife who he was going home to be with. For the rest of his life. He spoke to me, told me how wonderful it was to be in my arms again. How much he loved me. I told him I loved him too and what we and the kids were going to do the next weekend. I played the role of his wife and it took fifteen minutes for him to die in my arms.

### RUTH

I went and watched an interrogation. They had a young girl who looked about 15. And they had one leg in a bucket of water and one in another. She was naked and they had a car battery. There were wires up her vagina, her rectum, up her nose, in her mouth, underneath her arms, around her nipples. And they'd ask her a question and whatever answer she gave they'd give her a jolt. She didn't know I was there. She was in such a state of shock, her eyes were closed. They said she was Viet Cong. And this was all conducted by Vietnamese, it wasn't the Yanks. I think they wanted to shock me, but I wasn't shocked. I went back to my hotel room and I started to shake and shake. I can still hear that girl screaming to this day. But I refused to be shocked in front of those bastards.

### SANDY

I think something that happens to you in a war zone which is completely different to the way you are at home having fish and chips. I loved it. I loved the fear and the action. The challenge. I enjoyed the people, the markets, even the stench. It's a game of survival. We were traveling one night from Qui Nhon on the coast to An Kae up in the hills. There