SEEING IN UNORDINARY WAYS: MAGICAL REALISM IN AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on examples from the Australian context, this thesis proposes that the artistic mode of magical realism can be validly applied to the form of theatre. It is comprised of creative work (50%) in the form of two full-length playscripts and a dissertation (50%). The latter elucidates and contextualises the creative work and the theoretical implications of magical realism in theatre through an analysis of selected plays by three contemporary Australian writers, Ben Ellis, Lally Katz and Kit Lazaroo.

Magical realism is ‘writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism’ (Chamberlain 1986:17). This thesis argues that the anti-realist use of space and time, subject and object, language and character in magical realism is heightened and actualised through the form of theatre, which both literalises and subverts these elements. The potential of theatre to exploit magical realism is elaborated through both the six plays analysed and the creative work presented. This thesis draws on the theories of Wendy Faris, Anne Hegerfeldt, Richard Schechner and Helen Gilbert, amongst others, to articulate the new form of magical realist theatre. The two play scripts are my response to the idea of an Australian magical realist theatre, including research into Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo. These scripts are embedded within the thesis, and intended to be read in conjunction with the dissertation as part of the critical application of magical realism to theatre, while also demonstrating research through practice.

The plays of Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo engage with the cultural mediation of binaries, self and other, margin and centre, life and death, western and non-western, pragmatic and spiritual, particularly with relation to notions of Australian nationhood and identity. They offer a critical response, which is apolitical and utopian to the cultural, political and social climate in Australia. These works can be characterised as magical realist theatre. The thesis demonstrates that the application of magical realism to theatre lends formidability to the presentation of the political debate on decolonisation, which is at the heart of the texts under consideration.
DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

1. the thesis comprises only my original work towards the PhD except where indicated in the Preface.
2. due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
3. the thesis is less than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Ricci-Jane Evangeline Adams
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INTRODUCTION: SEEING IN UNORDINARY WAYS

Magical realism is characterized by its visualizing capacity, that is, by its capacity to create (magical) meaning by seeing ordinary things in extraordinary ways (Zamora 2002:22).

This thesis introduces the work of three emerging Australian playwrights, Ben Ellis, Lally Katz and Kit Lazaroo. In particular, it examines the way in which their plays interrogate the politics of culture, identity and gender through the use of magical realist techniques in the theatrical form. Magical realism is ‘writing that works both within and against the aesthetics of realism’ (Chamberlain 1986:17), wherein the magical is naturalised generating a seamless coexistence of the mundane and the extraordinary. This thesis contends that magical realist theatre offers a public site for a political discourse of decolonisation and the cultural mediation of binaries: self and other, margin and centre, life and death, Western and non-Western, pragmatic and spiritual. Australia, because of its history, geographical location and cultural positioning provides a fascinating case study. Anne Hegerfeldt states, magical realism is capable of, ‘Functioning almost as a fictional counterpart to anthropological studies’ (2005:7). The intention of this thesis is to demonstrate that magical realist theatre frames new ways of seeing and knowing the world, to present the previously inadmissible and to expand the bounds of what is accepted as real (and valuable) at the level of cultural representation. I argue for magical realism as an analytical and creative tool. The expansive force and celebratory impulse of magical realist theatre, I suggest, allows for a multiplicity of paradigms of meaning making, and for the decolonisation of marginalised identities.

Combining theories that inform magical realism drawn from literary criticism, theatre theory, and analysis of the plays of these three playwrights and my own writing, this thesis demonstrates original research in a number of ways. It is the first comparative study of six plays by these three emerging Australian playwrights. It applies the mode, and the theory informing magical realism, to theatre. It investigates the employment of magical realism in Australian theatre. The research identifies, defines and elaborates on the four key elements of magical realist theatre. These are: the co-existence of the
abstract and the concrete registers, subversion of space and time, the meta-theatrical and the enactment of language, and the reinscription of the marginal. Finally, I generate two original plays, included within the body of this thesis, to explore and examine my contention. The intended outcome of this thesis is an extension of the theoretical implications and creative applications of magical realism, as a new tool for the discussion and creation of theatre.

Resistance to Realism

The exemplary element of magical realist theatre connecting the plays under consideration is the employment of non-naturalistic, anti-illusionistic techniques in form, content, character and *mise en scène*. Realism is co-opted by non-naturalistic techniques to defamiliarise the.normalisation of dominant ideologies. Yet, I contend that these techniques are employed with the intention of providing a more real representation of lived experience, to expand upon the possibilities of representation. Magical realist theatre seeks to investigate through the magification of the everyday. Reading theatre through magical realism produces a politicised reading that reinvigorates the play texts considered here. Rather than identify a single theoretical approach through which I read these plays, I employ the theory informing magical realism as an encompassing term that houses within it a number of theoretical potentials including postcolonialism and feminism. This thesis demonstrates the powerful political possibilities of magical realism, and continues the argument put forward by theorist Anne Hegerfeldt, amongst others, that magical realism is now an important international language capable of being mobilised

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1 As will be expanded upon throughout the thesis, I reference magical realist theatre as a form. In regards to magical realism in literature, I use the term mode (following Hegerfeldt 2005. See footnote #39). I also discuss magical realism as a theory, which I apply to the analysis of both literature and theatre throughout my argument. Magical realism is a multi-faceted tool, both of creation and analysis. The problematisation and reflexivity of the term is something I attempt to engage with and expound, whilst attempting to frame my argument as clearly and precisely as possible throughout.

2 I follow Chanady’s description of defamiliarisation in my argument: ‘Magical realism belongs neither entirely to the domain of fantasy, by which we mean the creation of a world totally different from ours, nor to that of reality, which is our conventional everyday world…it is a type of defamiliarisation…since it destroys our conventional view of reality’ (1985:27).

3 I use this term to suggest the negative capability of magical realist techniques, and how these function to defamiliarise the invisible hegemonic forces at work in culture and society. Magification suggests a subversion and disorientation of theme, form and content, but it is also in keeping with my suggestion that these plays are engaging with something different to a purely political discourse.
against dominant hegemonies and ideologies (2005). Viewed through the frame of theatre, the seemingly paradoxical nature of magical realism is heightened, extended and exemplified.

Magical realism is a critical term used by academics to define certain tendencies across a range of cultural products – from art to literature to theatre, but it is identified predominantly as a literary genre. The spirit of magical realism resides in the argument that, ‘Reality is too subtle for realism to catch it…It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come’ (Simpkins 1999:149). In addition to this, ‘Magical realism raises fundamental questions. How do we know ourselves and our society? How do we deal with that knowledge in our bones?’ (Hancock 1986:37). I contend that the potential of exploring theatre from a magical realist context lies, in part, in the fact that magical realist theatre can enact the questioning of space and time. This is what theatre can do for all stories, but it is of particular concern to magical realism to occupy paradoxical double time and space as a way of refuting realism’s claim to represent reality in its totality. In a manner which cannot be realised in a literary form, the spatial concerns of magical realism are powerfully actualised in the mode of theatre. I claim that a key influence of magical realist theatre’s preoccupation with space and time is its location as a postcolonial discourse.

This thesis suggests that Australia is a postcolonial country. Australians live with the postcolonial condition of being Other to the dominant centre. This is not to suggest that all Australians live with the same degree of marginalisation. Rather I suggest that as a geopolitical space, Australia is postcolonial, and the work of this study is, in part, to identify decolonising strategies in the plays under consideration. As Helen Gilbert states:

> Identifying an “authentic” native, migrant, feminist, or any other voice in Australian theatre is much less important than examining how the many languages of the larger culture overlap and intersect with each other, how they are hybridized and contaminated in the counterdiscursive process (1999:24).
All the texts considered here are involved with mediating cultural boundaries and representing and reframing marginalised subjects, and as a result I contend that they contribute to a project of decolonisation.

In the introduction of the 1999 book *Dis/Orientations Cultural Praxis in Theatre: Asia, Pacific, Australia*, Fensham and Eckersall propose a theory for engaging with theatre and performance in our region. They delineate a hybrid theatre, replacing an outmoded and unworkable notion of intercultural theatre. This theatre employs the metaphor of disorientation as a means of repoliticising theatre as a productive tool of cultural critique in a region that is always Other to the dominant modes of cultural production (the Euro-American West). Theatre employed in this way functions:

…to turn actions into a disorientation… [to] enable us to deviate from implied meanings into other possible narratives or sequences of events. It will allow us to see actions in conflict with those of the dominant state or ideology (Fensham and Eckersall 1999:10).

Theatre reacts to the culture from which it emerges, whilst also being produced by that culture. An inside/outside critique is always taking place. As Turner states, ‘Neither mutual mirroring, life by art, art by life is exact, for each is not a planar mirror but matricial mirror; at each exchange something new is added and something old is lost and discarded’ (1990:17). A disorientation of cultural hegemony and identity politics through engagement with the theatrical can result in the productive task set out by Bhabha, the ‘…turning of boundaries and limits into the *in-between* spaces through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated’ (1990:4).

In staging alternative representations of Australia, I contend that Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo delineate and reinscribe the many variable elements that co-exist in that space. Brennan states, ‘The idea that nations are invented has become more widely recognized’ and, importantly in this discussion, ‘Nations, then, are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions’ (1990:49). Unleashing a counterdiscourse of nationhood functions to undermine the fictionality, and confused (and confusing) parentage of representations of Australian identity. Australia is a country adrift from the systems of representation with which it has historically been aligned,
battling against its own geography, and as such, ‘We are acutely aware of being outside this circuit of cultural formation, between Europe and Asia in a postcolonial nation still inhabited by the oldest indigenous peoples in the world’ (Fensham and Eckersall 1999:6).

As part of magical realist theatre’s decolonising strategy, I suggest that all the writers, both literary and theatrical, engage a metaphor of space and time unfettered by the contemporary culture, society and politics. In other words, the playtexts occupy a spatio-temporal axis outside of the present day reality. Jill Dolan describes this as an aspect of the utopian performative, which constitutes:

…small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention to the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense (2005:5).

This is not to suggest that utopia is a perfect manifestation of reality, finished and fully realised, for certainly none of the plays considered here project any such possibility. Rather, Dolan describes utopia as ‘…always in process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us…’ (2005:6). In this way the utopian performative aligns with Turner’s theory of the liminal in that, ‘…utopian performatives let audiences experience a processual, momentary feeling of affinity…’ (ibid). Indeed, all the plays under consideration resist resolution, and are written as moments of often incomplete metamorphosis.

The play worlds of Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo (and my own) engage with the possibility of something ‘beyond this “now” of material oppression and unequal power relations…’ (Dolan 2005:7), inhabiting a ‘no place’, which as Dolan explains is the real meaning of the term ‘utopia’ (ibid). In this way, they resist a fascistic impulse to replace an outmoded hegemony with another and instead present lives, places, ideas, and worlds in a process of becoming and falling away. More radically, I argue that these writers actualise Dolan’s argument and, ‘…accommodate the Left’s fear of prescription, while at the same time engaging languages of emotion and images, of passion and fervor as part of a necessary, crucial, representational counterdiscourse’ (Dolan 2005:23).
In the most significant aspect of my argument for a magical realist theatre, I implicate Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo’s writing in the counterdiscourse articulated by Dolan, particularly in response to the question ‘How does Australia represent itself?’ Or, to use Bhabha’s line of questioning, ‘How are subjects formed “in-between”, or in excess of, the sum of the “parts” of difference (usually intoned as race/class/gender, etc)?’ (1994:2). What vision does Australia have of itself and how is this represented in our cultural practice, specifically theatre? Unlike the disparate playwrighting of the recent Australian theatre (as attested to by Glow 2007), I maintain that the similarity in energy, theme and form of the plays discussed in this study, and in the wider Australian theatre scene, suggests a more coherent movement. The connections between these writer’s works include a subversive and apolitical approach to social, historical and cultural critique. Engaging with the liminal rather than the concrete in both form and content, the case studies subvert dominant ideology and hegemony by moving outside of recognisable time and space into, to use Dolan’s terminology, the utopian. The theatrical worlds imitate and echo Australian culture through a frame distanced by a unique and heightened operation of space and temporality, narrative, character and mise en scène.

**The Emergence of the Form of Magical Realist Theatre**

In arguing for a contemporary magical realist theatre therein is an implicit suggestion of an historical contextualisation leading to the present time. Historically, literary magical realism emerges from the artistic movement of Surrealism. As Faris states, ‘In terms of literary history, magical realism in the West develops from a combination of realism and surrealism, often with an infusion of pre-Enlightenment or indigenous cultures’ (2004:30). However, magical realism can be readily differentiated from Surrealism in that the events depicted are to be taken literally in the first instance, with symbolic interpretation as a secondary consideration. Faris avers, ‘…the magic may be attributed to a mysterious sense of collected relatedness rather than to individual memories or dreams or visions’ (1995:183). The fact that the magic of magical realism cannot be explained away, and is read literally (as opposed to a metaphoric or psychological reading) means that a psychoanalytical critique of the magical has only secondary place in magical
realism. These events are not hallucinations or inventions of the psyche; they are literal events within the context of the narrative.

Surrealism emerged from Dadaism⁴, but with a different approach to the act of creating art in that whilst, ‘Dada was purely negative, Surrealism believed in the great, positive healing force of the subconscious mind’ (Esslin 1967:368). Surrealism yielded great works in literature and in most art forms, but failed to do so in the theatre. Esslin states, ‘The stage is far too deliberate an art form to allow complete automatism in the composition of plays’ (1967:369). This automatism was how André Breton, in the Surrealist manifesto of 1924 described the generation of Surrealist work. Paralleling Surrealism for a brief time, magical realism was employed initially as a term of art criticism. Franz Roh, a German art critic, coined the term in 1925, in relation to certain works by the Neue Sachlichkeit artists, specifically Alexander Kanoldt and Adolf Ziegler (Bullock, Stallybrass and Trombley 1988:493). In the Oxford Dictionary of Art, magical realism is described as ‘…various types of painting in which objects are depicted with photographic naturalism but which because of paradoxical elements or strange juxtapositions convey a feeling of unreality, infusing the ordinary with a sense of mystery’ (qtd in D’Haen 1995:191). As Baker states of these artists, ‘While their aim was to shake habitual perceptions of their surroundings, they did this not by introducing elements of the fantastic into their work, but rather by showing that there were different ways of perceiving everyday objects’ (1993:82). However, theorist Anne Hegerfeldt argues that the artistic origins of magical realism have almost no bearing on its contemporary usage:

One crucial difference, for example, lies in the meaning of the term “magic”. Roh intends it to refer to the sense of newness with which quotidian reality is endowed through painterly emphasis on clarity and clinical details, whereas in current literary usage, “magic” designates first and foremost the opposite of “realistic” (2005:13).

⁴ ‘The Dada movement, which began in Zürich during the war, among French, German and other European refugees and conscientious objectors, and which thus merged a Parisian with a Central European tradition, also mingled writers, painters and sculptors…The aim of the Dadaists was the destruction of art, or at least the conventional art of the bourgeois era that had produced the horrors of war’ (Esslin 1967:354).
Also emerging out of Surrealism was the theatrical movement of Absurdism. Critic Martin Esslin coined the term to describe a body of plays written in the 1950s and ‘60s. Esslin describes the Theatre of the Absurd’s stage lineage as in ‘the tradition of the iconoclasts: Jarry, Apollinaire, the Dadaists, some of the German Expressionists, the Surrealists, and the prophets of wild and ruthless theatre, like Artaud and Vitrac’ (1967:346). Absurdism and Surrealism occurred in the same geo-political site, both in response at least in part, to the horrors of war in Europe, within a few decades of each other. The Theatre of the Absurd, whose proponents include Eugene Ionesco, Harold Pinter, Jean Genet, Arthur Adamov and Samuel Beckett, has continued to effect and influence contemporary Western avant-garde theatre throughout the world. Absurd theatre subverts logic, is anti-dramatic, anti-realist and abstract. In its more positive aspect it is, ‘…facing up to a deeper layer of absurdity – the absurdity of the human condition itself in a world where the decline of religious belief has deprived man of certainties’ (1967:391).

I suggest that magical realist theatre emerges from these two separate historical movements of Surrealism and Absurdism. In briefly plotting this evolution my intention is not to provide a historical review. Instead, I suggest that magical realist theatre as I will theorise throughout this thesis, emerges from and, is often times paralleled with Surrealism. Further, I include this brief analysis here to contextualise the case studies in this discussion. Rather than assuming the perfect fit of these works to my magical realist theatre contention, I suggest that these plays are on a continuum. The lines between magical realism, Absurdism and Surrealism may appear to be very close, as the examples from the various plays attest. In analysing the texts from Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo I have been made aware that there are at all times multiple interpretations available of their

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5 ‘More important than most of the dramatic production within the Surrealist movement was the work some of its members produced after they had left or been expelled from it. Antonin Artaud (1899–1948), one of the finest of the Surrealist poets and also a professional actor and director who became the most powerful seminal influence on modern French Theatre, and Roger Vitrac (1899–1952), the ablest dramatist to emerge from Surrealism, were both banished from the circle by Breton because they had yielded to unworthy commercial instincts, to extent of wanting to produce Surrealist plays in the framework of the professional theatre’ (Esslin 1967:370). In fact, Esslin goes on to state that Artaud is the link between the pioneers of anti-realist theatre and the Theatre of the Absurd (375).

6 ‘From Apollinaire to the Surrealists and beyond, an extremely close link has always existed between the pioneers of painting and sculpture and the avant-garde of poets and dramatists’ (Esslin 1967:381).
writing. Ellis in particular, I would argue, is a writer whose work verges on the Absurd. This is because, in both Ellis’ writing and in Absurdist theatre more generally, there is the ‘…sense that the certitudes and unshakable basic assumptions of former ages have been swept away…that they have been discredited as cheap and somewhat childish illusions’ (Esslin 1967:23).

Ellis’ recent adaptation of Franz Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* for the Malthouse and the Sydney Theatre Company (2005) suggests his writing’s connection to Surrealism and Absurdism. The lack of concreteness in location and character in Ellis’s writing, especially evident in his play *These People* resembles Absurdism. Esslin describes the Theatre of the Absurd as equating to theme expressed through form, which necessitates a, ‘convention of the stage basically different from the “realistic” theatre of our time’ (1967:393). He goes on to argue that ‘it does not expound a thesis or debate ideological propositions’ (ibid). Ellis’ writing fits Esslin’s first point, but not his second. *These People* is overtly concerned with the situation of asylum seekers in Australia and demonstrates a very particular thesis, which is that the Australian government policy on the issue has failed to protect refugees and abuses human rights.

Katz’s writing has been referred to as Absurdist by critic David Williams (2007). In reference to Katz’s play *The Eisteddfod*, Williams also states, ‘…the setting is laid out for us in such a charming way that it becomes impossible not to be taken in by it’ (2007). As such, I argue that whilst employing an at times absurdist tone, Katz’s total commitment to the theatrical reality suggests the play’s difference to Absurdism. Most often, critics refer to Katz’s writing as Surreal (Hopkins 2005, Croggon 2005). Whilst using dreams, make-believe and the unconscious in her writing, Katz’s plays are to be read literally in the first instance. She does not sign-post or distance the events through a suggestion of their dream like quality. Indeed, as is demonstrated in the quote from Williams, she portrays a detailed and specific reality, which adheres to its own laws of the universe. As Esslin has already argued, Surrealism, in its automatism does not lend itself to the production and organisation of the theatrical event. Instead, the use of the term Surrealism suggests the heightened tone present in Katz’s writing and as such I concur that this description of her
work is at times valid, whilst failing to fully apprehend all the elements present in the texts.

As this thesis attests, I offer evidence to suggest that Katz and Ellis’ work is both similar to and different enough from one another and the other writers, including myself, to able to add to and diversify the discussion of what constitutes magical realist theatre. Indeed, in suggesting the close relationship of the work of these writers’ to Absurdism and Surrealism, I also argue for magical realist theatre’s imbrication and emergence from those forms. Despite the marked differences in approach, both Absurdism and magical realist theatre share a thematic concern with ‘death, isolation and communication’ and ‘represents a return to the original, religious function of the theatre – the confrontation of man with the spheres of myth and religious reality’ (Esslin 1967:392). The most marked variant is that whilst Absurdism has done away with realism, the magical events in magical realism rely on the presence of a recognisable reality to contextualise the magic. That is, for the magic to defamiliarise it requires the context of the real, rather than the abandonment of the real. Esslin states of Absurdism that, ‘The endeavour to communicate a total sense of being is an attempt to present a truer picture of reality itself’ (1967:394), a desire shared with magical realist theatre. But in magical realist theatre, language as narrative is celebrated and expanded through a strange treatment of language, and defamiliarisation of the signified from the signifier through techniques such as making metaphor real. Absurdism on the other hand, whilst not necessarily relegating language, does not preference it in the creation of the theatrical event. In all of the plays considered as magical realist in this thesis, language is the dominant form of communication and a playful as opposed to destructive engagement with it is a hallmark of magical realist theatre. In other words, magical realism engages narrative and storytelling, whereas, for the most part, Absurdism has relegated or dismissed these elements. As I intend to demonstrate throughout the following chapters, magical realist theatre engages in a more celebratory delight of the theatrical, attempting a reconstructive project.

Ontological inquiry is what most clearly links the emergence of magical realist theatre from Absurdism. But I suggest that magical realist theatre more confidently makes a
return to narrative-based theatre, whilst still maintaining the anti-mimetic techniques and subversive engagement with language, and that most importantly an ideological project is at the heart of magical realist theatre’s creation of work. As has been demonstrated in the previous section, I locate magical realist theatre as a discourse of postcolonialism. This is because of its usage as a discourse of decolonisation. Unlike the Theatre of the Absurd, the agenda behind magical realist theatre’s creation is, I argue, to generate ideological change. The difference between magical realist theatre and absurdist theatre lies in that the critique offered by Absurdists is ‘largely instinctive and unintended’ (Esslin 1967:400). Magical realist playwrights intentionally reveal the unbalanced reality of society. Contemporaneously, this society is characterised by instant global communication and travel, disparate communities and cultural and social displacement. As Faris states, ‘…perhaps magical realism appeals to the atomic age as a narrative model for healing the social, political, environmental, and religious wounds caused by warring discourses that result from increased communication between diverse communities in the global village’ (2004:83).

Most recently, the theatre of the postdramatic, predominantly a European theatre form, shares magical realist theatre’s political intentions and has developed as part of the ‘response to the massive critique of Western models of subjectivity that we associate with terms such as poststructuralism and deconstruction’ (Balme 2004:1). Postdramatic is a term first coined by German theatre studies scholar, Hans-Thies Lehmann⁷. I suggest that magical realist theatre does not belong to the category of the postdramatic for this form is concerned with theatre outside of the ‘paradigm of the dramatic text’ (ibid), and ‘questions fundamentally the very tenets of the dramatic theatre’ (ibid). Whilst magical realist theatre subverts dramatic realism, the form still engages with the dramatic text as a central component of its production. As a postcolonial discourse, magical realism has not done away with realism for it is attempting to come to grips with the reality that realism represents. As a postcolonial country, distanced from the dominant Euro-American

⁷ *Postdramatic Theatre* was originally published in German in 1999 but did not become available in English until 2006.
centre, Australia, and the plays considered in this thesis, attempt a project of often pragmatic change.

Whilst both magical realist theatre and the postdramatic are intentionally political, their approaches differ. Magical realist theatre is an attempt to expand the bounds of realism, whilst the postdramatic is more overtly concerned with experimenting with alternative means to realism. Common strategies of postdramatic theatre include, ‘a preference for the visual image over the written word, collage and montage instead of linear structure, [and] a reliance on metonymic rather than metaphoric representation’ (ibid). Bleeker argues that the postdramatic is ‘Political not because of what is represented on stage, but because of the ways in which the postdramatic theatrical event draws attention to the problem of representation’ (2004:29). Magical realist theatre invests in the story world, the dramatic text, but challenges hegemony through a strange treatment of time, space, identity, language and history, within that dramatic world. Subversion rather than rejection of realism is what distinguishes magical realism from the postdramatic. For this reason that of all the works considered in this thesis, Kit Lazaroo’s plays are most closely aligned with magical realist theatre. Lazaroo’s plays present complete play worlds, with well defined characters and a progression of plot. Lazaroo’s resistance to realism resides not in the form of her work, but in the content. The events depicted, whilst emerging from a recognisable reality, subvert the laws of the universe to critique dominant systems of representation. As critic Helen Thompson states of True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea, ‘This play…combines factual accuracy with a sense of magic and imaginative daring’ (2004), which aptly describes all magical realist theatre.

As such, it can be argued that magical realist theatre is a better fit with the postmodern than the postdramatic, which is beyond postmodernism, and differs from the Theatre of the Absurd, which emerges from modernism. However, magical realism’s relationship to postmodernism is complicated by its overt and consistent political consciousness, not necessarily a hallmark of the postmodern. Suffice to say, postmodernism is both a style and a periodising concept describing the culture of late capitalism, and as such magical realism historically falls within the postmodern era. Magical realist theatre’s predecessors
in the era of modernism, and its emergence as a literary discourse from the geographical and political margins, as well as its engagement with postmodern techniques, suggests its boundary blurring approach to the creation of theatre. My use of magical realism in this thesis is based on its role as a literary discourse, which has spread from South America to be incorporated by the Western world. The contemporary literary form, as is demonstrated throughout, is most closely aligned with the theory of postcolonialism, engaged with by writers seeking, or forced, to speak from outside of the dominant centre. In this way I have pursued the argument for magical realist theatre’s alignment with the discourse of postcolonialism. However, as I have argued in the previous section, magical realist theatre’s political approach is in sharp opposition to a propaganda style political theatre. Through the use of story telling, magic, metaphor and subversion, magical realist theatre engages in a lyrical and anti-realist construction of dramatic worlds. As this thesis will demonstrate, the paradox of both employing and then undermining realism is where magical realist theatre’s power resides. Magical realism’s relationship to both postmodernism and modernism is further developed in Chapter One. My suggestion throughout this thesis is that magical realism intentionally and productively resists categorisation, instead drawing on aesthetics and techniques that further its own cause.

Theory/Practice/Research Nexus

The findings of this thesis have been generated through a close reading of the case studies included here, and in research through practice of my own creative work. I have investigated the possibility of a magical realist theatre in several ways, first, in the application of magical realist theory and theatre theory, and second as a methodology through which to read these contemporary plays. My intention in juxtaposing the creative components with the theoretical in the body of this thesis is to demonstrate the

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8 As a playwright I have been produced throughout Australia and I have won several national awards. I have had the opportunity to work with some of Australia and New Zealand’s best theatre makers and writers. The Joy before Thinking was staged in 2005 and will have a new production in 2008. A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light was awarded a prize in the national Monash University Student Union playwriting competition. I became interested in an exploration of magical realism at a theoretical level during my Postgraduate Diploma at the University of Melbourne. At this time I was already produced and winning awards as a youth playwright.
applicability of magical realism as both a critical reading practice and tool of creative production. In my own creative practice, I have engaged with the key elements of magical realist theatre introduced in this chapter, in the process of generating new writing. My own experience of engaging with magical realism thematically and formally is a combination of conscious application and instinctive creation. Unlike the other writers discussed, my creative work is developed for this thesis. The intentional application of magical realist theatre elements allows me to manage my own ideas and material in direct response to the theoretical potentials I am investigating. As a result, at varying times the process of writing new material appeared as a challenge to engage creatively with the dense theoretical web of magical realism. Changes were made through the research process to expand and extend the elements of magical realism in my writing.

The inclusion of my own creative practice as an integrated aspect of the thesis stems from my relationship to the playwrights whose writing I include as case studies. My attraction to the writers and their work emerges from first hand contact with the same institutions, support networks and funding options, and the opportunity to see original performances of their productions. Through shared social networks, ongoing discussion and more formal interviews, I have developed my own writing (both theoretical and creative) in response to these playwright’s original creative work, and their ideas and thoughts on their writing. As part of the same or similar theatrical environments as my case study playwrights, I was able to observe what I consider to be a phenomenon in contemporary Australian (especially Melbourne) theatre.

In particular, I am conscious of the negotiation of a theatrical space that is both recognisable and yet also distanced from the everyday; achieved through a strange treatment of time and space. I identify this as germane to a magical realist play world and key to the realisation of this space in my writing process. In practical terms, exploration of this utopia is best realised through performance, which includes fully realised productions, readings, rehearsals and workshops. Whilst my argument resides predominantly in the investigation of content, the playwright’s domain, I believe this does not inhibit a discussion of magical realist space and time. Indeed, one of the greatest
challenges to a playwright is to mentally grapple with the theatrical efficacy of the playtext and playworld. In magical realist theatre, the implications of the content can be worked out through the form. In the case of the work-in-progress of my play, *The Joy before Thinking*, this meant presenting the play on an almost bare stage. As director of this piece I was able to engage with my own theoretical questions through the presentation of the work. Playing more fully on notions of the real and unreal as they were explored in the text, an empty performance space allowed me to suggest a reality through performance and dialogue rather than through set.

In this performance, I also made the decision to have one of the actor/characters, Lilith, draw a chalk square to demarcate the otherwise empty playing space. The intention of this was to suggest the liminality of this performance, and performance more generally. In performing this act in front of the audience, the audience are made aware that this is a time/space set apart from, but not separate from, their own world. I made a specific attempt to highlight the frame of the performance. This was assisted by the presence of the actors on stage at all times, even when not performing, and the anti-mimetic use of props and set. My intention was to suggest enough of the everyday of contemporary reality to be recognisable to audiences, whilst also distancing them from the space by establishing the illusion of the performance (the theatre as useful lie). In so doing, a liminal, utopic space and time was generated, in which the world of the playtext was, to reiterate Dolan’s argument, ‘…always in process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us…’ (2005:6).

Through a complete integration of my creative works into this thesis I am attempting to demonstrate the importance of my research through practice in yielding insights into the development of my contention. In addition, the discussion of my work at a theoretical level, alongside the six case studies demonstrates the originality and uniqueness of this study, in that very little existing critical material is available on any of the writers

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9 Whilst I am referencing my plays throughout the thesis, I will refer from this point to the six plays, rather than the total eight plays. This is because the majority of the critical writing is in response to the six case studies by the three playwrights, with secondary comments on my own work.
included. Finally, I intend the inclusion of my creative works with the case studies to be read as the interconnectedness of the creation of work by the theatre community under discussion\(^{10}\), and the interface of that community with the politics and culture of its time. The following section introduces the case studies, including my own work to further contextualise the contemporary Australian theatre zeitgeist I am asserting.

**The Writers and Plays**

The two plays I have written for the creative component of this thesis are both overtly concerned with the decolonisation of female representation. The plays engage primarily with female characters and female identity and representation, particularly through the image of the body and the choice to have or not to have children. I am concerned with drawing attention to the invisible hegemony that dictates women’s roles in society and culture. A reoccurring symbol in my writing is the magical power of being able to produce life from female bodies, and also the enormous cost of this. The first play, *The Joy before Thinking*\(^{11}\), takes place in a familiar contemporary urban location. This play seeks to make the ordinary strange in its close relationship to a readily recognisable reality. The play articulates the present time gone mad, and loss of the self, privacy and independence to state control. This is represented particularly through the dissevolvement of children as a suggestion of the loss of innocence and freedom at a societal level.

This play is set in Melbourne in the not too distant future. All the children in Australia under the age of seven have literally vanished. At the same time, the threat of the unknown H Factor is at an all time high. The government responds by calling a nation wide curfew. Four women, all implicated in each other’s lives, find themselves trapped on a rooftop garden during the curfew. Eve has stationed herself there, looking for the

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\(^{10}\) I have been fortunate enough to have met and formed connections with all the writers considered in this thesis. I met both Ben Ellis and Lally Katz at the 2003 World Youth Interplay (www.worldinterplay.org). I met Kit Lazaroo as a fellow postgraduate student in the School of Creative Arts at the University of Melbourne. (Both Ellis and Katz attended this School also at different times.)

\(^{11}\) This play was first produced as a work-in-progress in June 2005 at the Mechanics Institute in Brunswick, Melbourne. After several intensive re-writes, this play was staged most recently at Theatreworks, a premier independent theatre venue in St Kilda, Melbourne. This production was staged under the directorship of Stephen Nicolazzo in October 2008.
missing children including her three daughters. Sarah arrives looking for her mother, and is attacked by Eve. Eve is unaware that Sarah is Lilith’s daughter, and that Sarah’s own child has just gone missing. It is Lilith’s place, but Lilith is also missing. Against the rules of the curfew, the Woman, a government employee, arrives and claims she has been infected with the H Factor by Sarah. Sarah is desperate for answers about the disappearance of her son, convinced that his fate is not like all the others. Finally, Lilith returns but this only brings more confusion for Sarah. As the Woman starts to share her secrets it becomes apparent that the mysterious H factor, or more precisely, its eradication by the government, is what is robbing the world of humanity, and forcing the children to leave. Finally, Lilith reveals she has had Sarah’s son all along, in an attempt to keep him safe from the ever increasing threat surrounding them. As the four women come under attack from the government, Lilith begs Sarah to accept her fate and tip the balance back to a more hopeful world.

A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light\textsuperscript{12} corresponds to the converse aspect of magical realism, making the strange ordinary. A visceral and poetic play, it draws the magical and menacing into the realm of the everyday through Boatgirl’s fight for survival from patriarchal forces. Boatgirl is looking for somewhere to belong. With the reluctant help of the strange ferryman, Boatgirl arrives on a nameless mosquito-ridden island to seek out The Blessing Place. But once there, seduced by the sentiments of the charismatic female Priest, Boatgirl finds herself cast as the Priest’s unwitting pilgrim; called upon, no less, to hand herself over body and soul. Unwilling to participate any longer in the macabre world in which she has found herself, one of selling stolen babies and ritual exorcisms, Boatgirl plots her escape but is betrayed by the ferryman who has promised her a way off the island. She becomes the ultimate sacrifice in the Priest’s twisted game but does not give in to her captor and wrecks her revenge. Spurred on by the promise of new love in the form of Joe, whom she once rescued from the Priest, and now her rescuer, she remains certain of her escape. But in all her desperate seeking, she has overlooked the obvious and once more falls prey to a false idol. Probable death seems her

\textsuperscript{12} This play is due for production in Melbourne in 2009.
only way of ever leaving the sinking island, but she discovers, moments before her
doom, that The Blessing Place is not just a myth after all.

Ben Ellis was born and raised in regional Victoria, and this Otherness to the dominant
centre is apparent in his plays, especially in response to the inequality of resources to
regional areas. Ellis describes an exchange with his careers teacher at high school. ‘I told
him that I planned to go to university. It didn't matter to him what my marks were, only
that “if we're lucky, we send one student every three years to that course and I really hope
it's you, but pull your fucking head out of your arse”’ (Ellis 2006). In addition, Ellis has
Type One Diabetes. He says of this, ‘Given that I have had Type One diabetes…since I
was five, and should not really have lived past my sixth birthday, perhaps I am a secular
post-humanist. Type One diabetes is a good motivation for anything: your life-
expectancy is cut by a third on average’ (ibid). His commitment to the transformational
and political potential of theatre is deeply apparent in his writing. Ellis has been
interested in politics and theatre since he was nine, ‘reading Macbeth for the first time,
while Bob Hawke was taking over from Bill Hayden at the outset of the March 1983
federal election’ (ibid). Ellis is now in his mid-thirties and currently resides in London.

Ellis’ plays include Poet No. 7, which recently premiered at London's Theatre 503 and
travelled to the Dublin Fringe Festival; his adaptation of Franz Kafka's The
Metamorphosis for Malthouse and Sydney Theatre Company Blueprints; The Wall
Project (co-writer); Faith, Hope and Surveillance; Eclipses, 360 Positions in a One Night
Stand (co-writer) and Outpatients. Falling Petals premiered at Playbox in 2003, and has
gone on to productions in Sydney, Christchurch and New York. These People, short
listed for both the New South Wales and Queensland Premier's Literary Awards in 2004,
premiered at Sydney Theatre Company Blueprints in 2003. Awards include the Malcolm
Robertson Prize (for Post Felicity), the Patrick White Playwrights Award and the
ANPC/New Dramatists Award. Other work includes Between the Air and the Sea, a
translation of French playwright Lionel Spycher's La Suspension du Plongeur. He
recently enjoyed the six month Australia Council Keesing Studio Residency at the Cité
Internationale des Arts, Paris, to write several new works. His new play, *The Final Shot* was produced by Theatre 503 in October 2007\(^\text{13}\).

Ben Ellis’ plays in this thesis, *Falling Petals*\(^\text{14}\) (2003) and *These People*\(^\text{15}\) (2004), function in part as a tool of social critique. I will argue that Ellis works thematically to disorient the mythology and ideology around nationhood in a manner that makes the *unseen seen* in the two plays. Ellis parodies the mythical and archetypal characters perpetuated as ‘real’ Australians, and other normalising ideologies that homogenise Australian national identity. I suggest that Ellis is concerned especially with the narrative construction of Australian history, culture and identity. For Fensham and Varney, ‘The nation, like narrative, is…subject to the partial, overdetermined processes in which difference is articulated through discourse’ (2005:16), and as such, ‘…the contested site and construction of nation…remains a powerful form of cultural hegemony’ (Fensham and Varney 2005:22). The analysis of Ellis’ writing will contend that Ellis ruptures the seamless narrative of Australian nationhood by presenting marginalised perspectives juxtaposed against dominant representations of Australian identity.

*Falling Petals* centres around three year-twelve students: Phil, Tania and Sally. Phil and Tania are desperate to escape the inertia of the small country town they have grown up in for the bright lights of the cosmopolitan city of Melbourne. Due to the outbreak of a child-ridding disease the students are unable to sit their final exams, the only means of breaking free from their dead-end rural existence. The town is quarantined and inevitably they succumb to the disease themselves, but not before, as *RealTime* reviewer Jonathon Marshall notes, turning on one another with a violence and ‘…self-interest and implicit fascism that makes even Eugene Ionesco’s *Rhinoceros* seem kind’ (2003). Ellis’s play constructs a world in which the characters embody their experience of society, politics and economics. The students, Phil, Tania and Sally, begin the play mocking the recent funeral of one of the town’s children. The number of dead children increases

\(^{14}\) This play was first produced in July 2003 at Playbox Theatre (now The Malthouse).
\(^{15}\) Produced by the Sydney Theatre Company in September 2003.
exponentially, and despite denials of an epidemic by the local council, the town is quarantined with razor wire and private security guards. Phil, Tania and Sally are abandoned by their parents and their school, and as Phil and Tania concoct futile and desperate plans to escape, Sally descends into a violent madness that sees her attempt to poison her former friends.

Shortly after writing *Falling Petals*, Ellis took up this concern for the inequality of narrative both in and of Australia in a play that deals even more explicitly with the contemporary political and cultural climate. *These People* turns Ellis’ gaze to the urban centres of Australia, and especially the notion of, ‘the new Australian archetype; the “aspirational family” [and how this] was transforming the asylum-seeker or refugee into a fecund horror garden of the mind’ (Ellis 2006). *These People* deals with the debates around Australian border protection. It uses a combination of reported, verbatim and ‘fictional’ material to imagine and re-imagine these hotly contested ideas through an ordinary nuclear family, all racked with their own individual neurosis. In this play, an unexceptional white suburban Australian family, mother, father, son and daughter, go about their mundane tasks – laundry, homework, hangovers and earning a living – at the same time that they are invaded by the lives of people dealing with Australia’s refugee crisis: a detention centre psychiatrist, a government Minister, a social activist, and an asylum seeker. The play’s action centres on how this family mediates their ‘ordinary’ lives with the extraordinary events going on around them. This episodic play manipulates the traditional narrative, bringing together crisis moments in all the character’s lives, set against a backdrop of Sydney burning in summer bushfires. This undermines any attempt at narrative closure, more accurately reflecting the seemingly endless wait and inconclusive journeys of those in Australian detention centres.

Lally Katz was born in Trentham, New Jersey. She moved with her family to Canberra, Australia when she was a young girl. She became actively involved with theatre in high school and was encouraged by her drama teacher to write prolifically. Her plays are still used as a resource in the theatre department at her high school. Despite having been a resident of Australia for most of her life, Katz’s ‘American-ness’ is clearly apparent
through her distinctive accent. Her outlandish and unique personal style sets her apart from everyone around her, and this is reflected in her distinctive theatrical voice. Katz is now in her early thirties and lives and works as a full-time playwright in Melbourne.

Lally Katz is a core member of Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company, for which she has written The Black Swan of Trespass, The Eisteddfod and Lally Katz and the Terrible Mysteries of the Volcano. These works have toured extensively, winning several awards. Other works include: Criminology (co-written with Tom Wright, for Arena Theatre Company and Malthouse Theatre), Goodbye New York, Goodbye Heart (premiered in New York), Waikiki Palace and Hip Hip Hooray (premiered in Sydney Theatre Company’s Wharf2loud program). She’s currently writing commissions for Malthouse Theatre, Belvoir Street, and Sydney Theatre Company. Lally was a delegate of World Interplay in 2003. Lally’s play Return to Earth was recently a recipient of an RE Ross Trust Playwriting Award.

The Black Swan of Trespass (2008) and The Eisteddfod (2008) were first produced by Stuck Pigs Squealing theatre company, under the directorship of Chris Kohn. The two plays are conceived through a collaborative working relationship, which contributes much to Katz’s style. Katz describes her process of working with Kohn:

We were originally kind of co-writing it, we did that over a really short period of time... [Chris] would come to my apartment at night after I had been at work. And it was his idea because he wanted to do it on Ern Malley, and I didn't like Ern Malley. And he would come over and play the guitar and say, 'Can you write a scene with the mosquito and Ern?' And then I'd do that and I'd give that to him and while he read that I would do another one. And he wrote the songs. And then I went to the cellar a few times and watched them improvising and thought, 'Errgh, well this is going to be great.' (Laughs) I thought it was going to be really bad. Chris was kind of editing my stuff together, and he'd call me up and say, 'I think we need a scene between Ethel and Ern'. And so I'd write a scene and then e-mail it. Or then I'd have a crazy night and have these realisations and write a scene and e-mail it to them (2006).

16 This information has been provided by the playwright.
17 ‘The Eisteddfod was the same because I was in London. So that started...originally Luke Mullins wanted Chris to direct him and Jessamy [Dyer] in Macbeth, and he'd be Macbeth and she'd be Lady Macbeth in the cellar. And then Chris said so why don't we do it about this guy who wants to do Macbeth in an Eisteddfod
Katz, I will argue works with the dichotomy of absence and presence, exploring the
cultural imaginary of Australia and how this is represented. The two plays demonstrate
some of the artistic and cultural expressions in and of Australia, and interrogate what
these forms suggest about Australian identity. In my analysis of Katz’s plays, I suggest
that what is revealed is an Australian culture plagued by uncertainty, which emerges from
Australia’s brief (white) history, yet desperate to locate some sense of self in an
immutable truth. Katz also positions the female and the feminised Other in the theatrical
space to reveal and subvert the ideological forces that constrain and suppress female
representation. Gilbert states, ‘One way of reconceptualizing the phallocratic economy is
through an emphasis on theatre as a stronghold of presence’ (Gilbert 1999:169).
Thematically, absence and presence works in Katz’s plays in two ways. First, absence
operates to omit the woman character and second, presence offers recuperation of the
female and feminised subject in the theatrical space.

_The Black Swan of Trespass_18 engages with the life of the fictional poet, Ern Malley. The
play tackles the infamous Australian literary hoax known as The Ern Malley Affair,
which saw two established traditional poets attempting to catch out the charismatic
modernist poet and publisher, Max Harris, by sending him several modernist poems that
they claim to have conjured up in an afternoon’s work. The hoaxes, Stewart and
McCauley were attempting to undermine modernism by shaming its most vocal defender
in Australia. Harris published the entire collection of poems in the literary journal, Angry
Penguins, of which he was editor. Even after the hoax was revealed, Harris stood by the
worth of the poems. But Harris was arrested, accused of publishing obscene material. He
was publicly shamed as this was a time of great conservatism in Australia. The Affair
garnered international attention and had a radical and far-reaching impact19. Essentially,
it went to the heart of what Australia believed itself to be culturally at that time and for
several decades after WWII. In this production, Ern Malley is given life, alongside his
sister Ethel, and plays out his dying days in a tiny bedroom of her home. The play focuses

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18 Staged most recently by Stuck Pigs Squealing at the Malthouse Theatre in July 2005.
19 For more information see http://www.ernmalley.com/index.html.
on Ern’s love for the unattainable imaginary Princess, and his friendship with Anopholes the mosquito (an army manual warning of the dangers of malaria was apparently part of where the hoaxers, McCauley and Stewart, gained their inspiration for one of the poems).

*The Eisteddfod*\(^{20}\), about brother and sister Abalone and Gerture, is set entirely in a world of the siblings’ own making. Both in their thirties, but with no more ability to control their lives than small children, Abalone and Gerture are trapped in their Angela Carter-esque bedroom playing out the alternative fictions of their own invention. It is only in the subject matter of these invented lives that it becomes apparent that these two are not children. Abalone plays Ian, Gerture’s abusive boyfriend; Gerture plays Mother to the needy Abalone; and together they play out scenes from their own childhood as their deceased parents, who died in a tree pruning incident. Abalone prepares for the local Eisteddfod, in which he will play Macbeth, and offers the part of Lady Macbeth to Gerture in an attempt to draw her back from her imaginary classroom. The prize for the winner is a one-way ticket to Moscow, and ultimately it is Gerture who is awarded the accolade, freeing her to escape from Abalone’s stifling clutches.

Kit Lazaroo is a general medical practitioner living in Melbourne. She is also completing a PhD working with the East Timorese refugee community in Melbourne. She was born in Perth, Western Australia of Singaporean decent. Lazaroo is sensitive to a sense of Otherness in her life in several ways. ‘I think growing up not white in Perth, made me really aware of the whole thing of whiteness and not-whiteness. I think I do try to bring a sense, a different sense to theatre apart from white, mainstream society’ (Lazaroo 2006). Lazaroo’s relationship to her work as a doctor also articulates this. ‘…Every play I’ve written up to now has had a doctor. I am a doctor so that is part of it…Most of the doctor characters are the one I poke fun at a little bit so it probably is again that belonging and not-belonging. Like not really feeling like I belong to the profession I’m in and wishing I was somewhere else’ (ibid). Lazaroo is now in her early forties and living in Melbourne with her partner and two daughters.

\(^{20}\) Staged most recently in August 2007 at The Malthouse Theatre.
Kit Lazaroo’s writing for theatre includes: *Hospital of the Lost Coin* and *The Vanishing Box*, which were La Mama productions in 2003 and were both nominated for a Green Room Award for most outstanding writing in the fringe/independent theatre category; *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*, which was a recipient of an RE Ross Trust Playwright’s Award and was also nominated for a Green Room Award for most outstanding writing in the fringe/independent category; *Asylum*, which was the 2006 Wal Cherry Play of the Year, enjoyed a sellout season at La Mama in March 2007 and was shortlisted for the Queensland and Victorian Premiers’ Literary Awards; and *Letters from Animals*, which was shortlisted for the Max Afford Memorial Award in 2004 and was produced at the Store Room Theatre in November 2007. Kit’s most recent work includes *Topsy*, which has received an RE Ross Playwright’s Award in 2007, and *Room for Night and Day*. Kit enjoys an ongoing collaboration with director and dramaturg Jane Woollard and the award winning Here Theatre. She is an associate artist of the Store Room Theatre Workshop\(^{21}\).

Through analysis of the plays *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea* and *Asylum* (2008), I will argue that Kit Lazaroo employs notions of belonging and not belonging to delineate this in relation to, in part, refugees and notions of asylum for both multi-generational Australians and those newly arrived. Suggested in Lazaroo’s writing, through the motifs of madness and faith is the process of Othering in Australian cultural politics. Lazaroo attempts to understand the paradoxical relationship between the real and the unreal in her plays. This manifests through where and in what her characters, especially the women, locate their faith. In particular, this thesis contends that an emphasis on marginalised female characters in Lazaroo’s plays can be understood in that ‘…women, like subalterns generally, can be understood to act through magic because other routes may be closed to them’ (Faris 2004:178). But Faris also believes that this magic is inherent in women. Lazaroo’s plays demonstrate Faris’ contention of ‘the female body as a bridge to the beyond’ (2004:181), and even in their subordinated state, I suggest that the central female characters of both plays possess a power to transform the lives of those around them.

\(^{21}\) This information has been provided by the playwright.
Asylum is the story of Chinese asylum seeker Siying. She has at some previous time whilst in Australia contracted HIV from a man she claims raped her. Despite this, she is being deported to China and fears for her life on her return. As the play begins she has sought out Lally Black, a psychologist, to prove that rather than having a paranoid persecution complex she does have real reason to fear for her life. Lally is resistant to take her on but Siying convinces both Lally, and Turlough, the government bureaucrat assigned to her case, that Lally is assessing her. Siying insinuates herself in Lally’s life, visiting her home and making friends with Smudge, Lally’s unfortunate brother. He has lost his hearing after shooting an escapee whilst working as a prison guard. Meanwhile, Turlough tries to secure Lally to be his psychologist, and Lally is visited by a puppet show that acts out scenes from Siying’s life in China. The puppet show suggests that Siying is in danger if she is deported there. This prompts Lally to offer asylum to Siying in her own home. Smudge offers to marry Siying to keep her in Australia, and also because he believes he has fallen in love with her. But Turlough blackmails Smudge offering his protection to either Siying or Lally. So Smudge, his hands tied, offers Siying up and she is found. As the play ends, Lally finally makes the commitment to go to China to help Siying.

True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea begins with Olley Fletcher washed up on the shore of her home after being lost at sea for forty days, with no memory of how she has survived. She returns an orphan and is taken in by the local policeman and his wife, Dido. Dido is suspicious of Olley’s survival from the start. Olley is desperate to learn to read and write, but Dido’s own obsession with gaining scientific knowledge through performing autopsies on mice and other small creatures makes her impervious to Olley’s requests. The body of Olley’s father is soon washed up on shore and Dido insists her husband order an autopsy. Dr Plank arrives and proves to be a weak man and unexceptional doctor. Whilst conducting the autopsy that suggests drowning, Olley gives birth to a creature, supposedly begat by the giant octopus, the Kraken. She believes

22 Produced at La Mama Theatre, Melbourne in March 2007.
23 Produced at Trades Hall, Melbourne, in 2004.
that the Kraken loved her and kept her alive under the ocean. Dr Plank and Dido are overjoyed with this scientific anomaly and plan a European tour to show it off, despite the little creature having expired in the course of their experiments. But the creature is labelled a hoax by the European medical society and both Dido and Dr Plank are thrown into jail. Dido returns home full of rage at Olley’s trick and accuses her of having killed her father. As a result Olley is sent to the gallows, but not before Dido concedes to Olley’s wishes and takes down her story.

The Contemporary Australian Theatre Context

Whilst not discussed necessarily as magical realism, there are many other playwrights in Australia working with anti and hyper-realist techniques. These plays are produced both from within and outside of the mainstream with the outcome of critiquing dominant representations of Australian nationhood, identity and representation. All the plays in this list engage with narrative-based theatre. This includes Elise Hearst. Hearst engages with techniques such as direct audience address and utopian settings, as well as echoing historical narratives, with the intention of writing the familiar to make it strange24. Stephen Carleton’s play Constance Drinkwater and the Last Days of Somerset25 is a gothic and postcolonial play addressing Australian nationhood and identity. Critic Douglas Leonard states that, ‘Melodrama provides Carleton with stock characters to drive home points about myths of nation building, and also the means to confabulate what has been historically repressed’ (2006:8). He goes on to state that Carleton is, ‘…masterfully aware of, and in love with, the slipperiness of language yet he leaves the audience with no possibility of retreat into ambivalence’ (ibid) echoing the magical realist engagement with politics, language and history. Tee O’Neill’s Stalking Matilda26 subverts the murder mystery genre with black humour and a Greek chorus to critique Australia’s treatment of asylum seekers. Gareth Ellis’s play A View of Concrete27 subverts the relationship between the imagined and the real in the lives of a group of twenty somethings. ‘Ellis

24 Hearst’s unproduced manuscript Dirtylands, is currently in development with Playwrighting Australia.
26 Produced by Theatre@Risk, Theatreworks, August 2005.
conjures what he calls ‘an alternative present’ – where cats and dogs are dying mysteriously, the phone never stops ringing, and drugs are on the menu for breakfast, lunch and tea’ (Malkhouse website 2006).

Successful contemporary Australian play, Matt Cameron’s Ruby Moon subverts the Little Red Riding Hood fairytale and employs black humour to critique the supposed safety of suburban Australia, undermining what is known and what is imagined. Tom Wright, in his play Babes in the Wood, employs the colonial era form of pantomime to critique the contemporary society of Australia and the fiction of Australian history. He states in his notes in the 2003 Playbox production, ‘More alert (but not alarmed) audience members will no doubt detect many historical impossibilities, anachronisms and inconsistencies in the play. Well done’ (2003: iv). The use of the hyper-real, celebratory and unpredictable form of the pantomime, serves Wright’s attempts to undermine hegemony in the construction of contemporary Australian culture. Merlinda Bobis is a Filipino born Australian writer who engages with magical realism in both her literary and dramatic texts, critiquing images of war and violence through a revelatory use of language. She engages with the liminal in response to postcolonial subjectivity.

This is a highly contestable list and not every writer has a body of work that concurs with this reading. As such I have identified one text from each of the writers that responds to the themes discussed with non-naturalistic, anti-realist, highly imaginative and expansive tendencies. Some writers here respond through a formal approach and others through content alone or a combination of these things. This list provides a broader context for my suggestion of a magical realist zeitgeist, and the general tendency in contemporary Australian theatre, particularly from new and emerging playwrights, to critique dominant systems of representation through hyper-real and subversive theatrical and narrative strategies. This is also a consciously contemporary list that does not address the writers that have worked in this way for many years to undermine the dominant systems of

30 Her dramatic works include River, River, and Cantata of the Warrior Woman Daragang Magayon.
representation. It is not my intention to create a comprehensive or historical map of Australian theatre but suffice it to say I identify writers such as Dorothy Hewett\(^{31}\), Patrick White\(^{32}\), Jenny Kemp\(^{33}\), and Louis Nowra\(^{34}\) amongst others that have worked with the exploration of non-naturalistic theatre to reveal what is hidden in the seamless, well-made representation of reality in much mainstream theatre.

**Chapter Outline**

In this chapter, I have introduced the key aspects of my argument for a magical realist theatre theory and practice. I have introduced the writers, whose work forms the basis of this analysis, including two of my own plays. I have briefly located these writers in the broader context of contemporary Australian theatre and outlined the historical context leading to the emergence of magical realism in theatre at this time. In addition I have provided synopses of the eight plays critiqued throughout the following chapters. I have included these synopses in the introduction of this thesis to be utilised as a reference for the reader throughout the proceeding chapters. In the following chapters I build on and evidence my argument for a magical realist theatre. Chapter One lays the foundation for a magical realist theatre reading practice. In the first section I detail the history of literary magical realism, its political potentials, and offer a comprehensive definition. The following section provides a reading of theatre as I am engaging with it, including an overview of recent Australian theatre. In Chapter Two I consider the writing of Australian novelist David Ireland to locate magical realism in an Australian context, paying particular attention to Ireland’s concern with Australian culture, which, I contend, he addresses in an overtly magical realist manner.

I incorporate the two plays I have written for the creative component as chapters within the body of the thesis (Chapter Three and Six). Chapter Four considers the coexistence of

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\(^{32}\) White’s (1912–1990) dramatic writing includes *The Ham Funeral* (1947) and *Night on Bald Mountain* (1964).

\(^{33}\) Kemp’s (1949–) plays include *The Black Sequin Dress* (1996) and *Still Angela* (2005).

\(^{34}\) Nowra’s (1950–) plays include *Radiance* (1993) and *Cosi* (1992).
the concrete and abstract registers in magical realist theatre, and how this functions to admit the extraordinary as an aspect of the everyday. This chapter also includes discussion of the liminal as the ‘betwixt and between’ (Turner 1979:465) space of magical realist theatre. Chapter Five discusses space, time and history as these concepts are presented in magical realist theatre, in particular the subversion of these things to undermine realism’s claim to fully know and represent reality. Chapter Seven describes magical realist theatre’s engagement with the meta-theatrical as a strategy of subversion of dominant ideological constructs of reality. Finally, in Chapter Eight, magical realist theatre’s concern with marginalised subjects is delineated to recast notions of marginalisation and the ideological Other. This chapter also suggests magical realist theatre’s connection to notions of madness, metamorphosis and acts of faith. The following chapter provides a detailed reading of the theory of both magical realism and theatre, offering a historical context and contemporary application of the mode and the form, building on that which has been outlined here, including magical realism’s relationship to postmodernism.

35 This is a term relating to liminality, described by Victor Turner as ‘…literally “being-on-a-threshold,”…a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status’ (1979:465).
CHAPTER ONE. MAGICAL REALISM AND THEATRE

This chapter delineates the theory and key terms of magical realism and theatre. Beginning with magical realism, this includes a discussion of the paradoxical use of the term ‘magic’, also considering the literary techniques employed to undermine realism’s prominence as the dominant representation of reality. These include fusion of realistic and fantastic elements, defamiliarisation, authorial reticence, employment of historical detail and the literalisation of metaphor. Second, in my discussion of theatre, I consider the components central to my discussion including presence and space, myth and illusion. I provide an historical overview of the usage and development of magical realism and theatre. I present a working definition of theatre and magical realism, suggesting the political potentials contained within each.

Part One: Magical Realism

Magical realism is writing that is grounded in the real. The mode does not generate fantastical or alternative worlds. The mode’s authenticity as a tool of cultural criticism emerges from its grounding in the real. ‘[….] Magical realism may be considered an extension of realism in its concern with the nature of reality and its representation, at the same time it resists the basic assumptions of post-enlightenment rationalism and literary realism’ (Zamora & Faris 1995:6). Apparent in the work of magical realist writing throughout the world, especially places of political upheaval and oppression, is the displacement of realism, and by extension reality, through a process of defamiliarisation. Magical realists are those who ‘…attempt to capture what is strange and marvellous about ordinary life’ (Chamberlain 1986:14) both within the world of fiction and the world that is our day-to-day waking reality, in an attempt to ‘underline once again to what extent the perception of “reality” actually depends on pre-existing categories’ (Hegerfeldt 2002:77). Magical realism, ‘…highlights that reality is not merely a given over which there will exist a natural and universal consensus, but that what individuals and groups will think of as ‘reality’ depends to not an inconsiderable extent of social and cultural factors, causing expectations and assumptions about the world to differ with time and
place’ (ibid). Magical realism is as its very name attests, a paradoxical form accommodating both the mundane and the extraordinary as equally valid.

**Historical Evolution**

The initial literary works discussed as magical realism emerged in German-Austrian and Flemish literature in the 1930s and 1940s, and not in Latin America during the *Latin Boom* as is generally believed (D’Haen 1995:191–92). As Jeanne Delbaere states, during a time of political oppression writers such as Johan Dainse in Belgium and Ernst Junger in Germany expressed their faith in imagination through the use of magical realism. ‘Johan Dainse’s first novel came out in 1942 during the German occupation of Belgium and several of Ernst Junger’s works were published in Hitler’s Germany’ (1992:75–6).

The European strain of magical realism, closely aligned with Surrealism, was ‘…more individualistic and idealistic…as a rule confined…to a narrow strip between the real and the uncanny’ (Delbaere 1992:76), and was more prominent before the term made the leap to South and Central America. This occurred on the part publication of Franz Roh’s book there in 1927. However, from the 1950s and 1960s the concept of magical realism was increasingly associated with Latin American fiction and ‘became more intimately connected with particular places in which it was practised as well as with the myths and cultures of the indigenous populations’ (ibid). The strange juxtaposition was then associated with the clash between European rationalism (realism) and a mythic (magic) view of the world, inherently possessed by the indigenous populations of South America. Yet, this view of magical realism in South and Central America was coupled with ‘a political determination to regain an identity largely eclipsed by colonialism and neo-colonialism’ (ibid), by the colonised population.36

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Currently, the term is forcefully rejected by many contemporary Latin American writers, whilst at the same time it has become internationally popular. Yet, any historical analysis of magical realism has failed to provide a clear and diffident definition. Anne Hegerfeldt asks why ‘the glaring discontinuities in the usage of the term’ (2005:27) have been so often glossed over in an attempt to provide a historical continuity. Her response to this is to suggest that it is tied up in the political sub-text of much magical realism, especially the question, ‘…who can write as magic realist’? (ibid) This question, has in part, been answered in the fact that magical realism is now employed by writers from all over the world. This is because, ‘…magical realism is one of many new literary forms that, in a quasi-reversal of Western colonization, come from the cultural margins to revitalize the centre’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:35). Some contemporary literary writers employing magical realism at this time include Salman Rushdie, Isabelle Allende, Carlos Fuentes, Ana Castillo, Kate Atkinson, Tim Winton, Jeanette Winterson and Australian author Suneeta Peres Da Costa, whose debut novel, Homework (1999) I use to illustrate examples of the magical realist mode.

**Defining the term**

Amongst the international literary establishment, there is a great deal of misuse and misunderstanding of the term magical realism. It is therefore essential to investigate this mode at this time in relation to four key texts that have done much to further the critical debate and application of magical realism over the last thirty years. Importantly in this section, ‘We are less concerned with what happens in [magical realist] texts than with the

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37 In a 2002 article entitled *Is Magical Realism Dead?*, Mac Margolis stated, ‘Even the genre’s staunchest defenders agree that it has lost its magic’ (2002:52). In response, Kennedy wrote an article entitled, *Remedios the Beauty is Alive and Well.* In this he explained an incidence in which, ‘…Alberto Fuguet, a Chilean-American writer…in 1996 replaced Garcia Marquez’s imaginative town Macondo with his own mock town McOndo. He says the old theme of Latin American Identity, “Who are we?” is out. The new theme, “Who am I?” is in. No more collective epics. McOndo wants down-and-dirty realism about individuals’ (Kennedy 2002:56).

38 This is a question key to both postmodern and postcolonial discourse and central to my employment of magical realism. This is because, whilst discussing Australia as a postcolonial country, I also apply the term to writers not traditionally included in the postcolonial debate.

39 Hegerfeldt employs the term *mode*. She spends several pages in *Lies that tell the Truth* detailing why she has made this choice within the current bounds of literary criticism (for her the choice is between genre or mode). I choose to follow her argument and employ the term *mode*. For further consideration of this see Hegerfeldt (2005:46–50).
fact that magical realism includes both realistic and fantastical elements and with how that strategy is meaningful in the context of recent literary and cultural history’ (Faris 2002:103).

I begin this discussion by framing the use of the term magical. Hegerfeldt highlights the fact that the magical is a literary technique, not a mimetic reproduction of extratextual reality. The magical is employed as a supplement to the dominant outlook (2002). As such, magical realism is not confined in its application to those cultures that have an indigenous superstitious culture in conflict with a rational scientific culture, for:

This would be to suggest that a rational-scientific world view – whatever its drawbacks – is the prerogative of a dwindling dominant “center”, while the margins are characterized as incapable of rational thought in the first place – a reaffirmation of precisely those constructions of the “Other” that postcolonial as well as feminist and other theories of the ex-centric most urgently seek to overcome (2002:71).

The aligning of the marginal with the magical suggests instead the ideological Other in its innumerable forms resistant to the Western, rational-scientific hegemony.

In Magical Realism and the Fantastic (1985) Amaryll Chanady lays the groundwork for a contemporary critical comprehension of magical realism and distinguished magical realism and fantasy from one another. Lois Zamora and Wendy Faris edited a seminal publication in 1995 called Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community. This text did much to expand and explore the critical definitions of magical realism and its theoretical implications at a time when the use of the term was rapidly growing. It is an often cited and much utilised text. In 2004, Faris published her own theoretical text on magical realism entitled The Remystification of Narrative. This text, as well as Lies that tell the Truth (Hegerfeldt 2005), makes the most recent contribution to the increasingly contentious debate about the relevance and currency of the critical term ‘magical realism’. Surveying these texts, I provide an overview of magical realism as it is critically apprehended in relation to its political and cultural implications. In addition, I will also provide a definition of the term based on its mechanics – how magical realism works as a literary device.
‘[M]agical realism combines realism and the fantastic in such a way that magical elements grow organically out of the reality portrayed’ (Faris 1995:163), wherein the magical is naturalised at the level of the text generating a seamless coexistence of the mundane and the extraordinary. Hegerfeldt believes that, ‘Rather than of fantastic elements, it might be more precise to speak of non-realistic elements’ (2005:51). This is a productive employment of the term magic as it moves the definition away from folkloric notions of the superstitious and supernatural towards a more encompassing definition based on the notion of subjective experience of the world. Terms such as ‘realistic’ and ‘non-realistic’ are problematic, as Hegerfeldt goes on to discuss, because these terms mean different things in different times and places. However, they cannot be avoided in consideration of magical realism (2005:52), and in fact this questioning forms the basis of magical realism’s potency as a political discourse.

The proponents of the magical realist mode are overtly concerned with drawing out this semantic question of real and unreal for its political, social and cultural implications, and as such, any questioning of these terms is productive. As a style that emerges from outside the discourses of power and representation, for reasons of language, race, class, religion or gender, or by those resisting the dominant hegemony, magical realists use ‘the paradoxical doubled positioning to critique the outside and the inside’ (Hutcheon 1988:69). Faris refers to magical realism as *literary decolonisation*. ‘In addition to its disruption of realism and reimagining of history…many of its texts reconfigure structures of autonomy and agency, moves that destabilize established structures of power and control’ (2002:111). This is achieved by the admission of the exceptional, undermining rationalist notions of probable relations of cause and effect. This has the effect of subverting existing power structures including the ‘reader’s relation to the text and the text’s relation to the world’ (Zamora and Faris 1995:6). As a result of this, ‘Contemporary magical realist writers self-consciously depart from the conventions of narrative realism to enter and amplify other (diverted) currents of Western literature…’ (Zamora and Faris 1995:2). In fact, it is often used as ‘…a ruse to invade and take over dominant discourse(s)’ (D’Haen 1993:40).
As is evidenced, the use of the term ‘magic’ suggests a tendency to expand the bounds of what is permitted as real in literary realism, with the intention of decolonising representation at an ideological level. As such, engagement with magical realism as a literary device is a response to the prescriptive and limiting mode of realism, and is an attempt to critique notions of the real and unreal.

**Magical Realism’s Relationship to Postmodernism**

Wendy Faris locates magical realism between modernism and postmodernism:

>T]he epistemological concerns along with the mythic elements, the primitivism, the psychological interiors and depths, align magical realism with much modernism; the ontological questions raised by the presence of magical events, and the confrontations between different worlds and discourses, together with the collective spirit and political pointedness of the writing, align it with postmodernism (2004:32–33).

Faris goes on to state however, that magical realism’s historical ambiguity is due to the nature of the mode. ‘[I]n the way in that its texts slither dizzyingly between modern and postmodern sensibilities, magical realism exemplifies the way in which those very categories destabilise themselves the longer we look at them’ (2004:33).

The majority of the theoretical writing on magical realism locates it is as a discourse of postmodernism. Theorist Theo D’Haen calls magical realism the cutting edge of postmodernism (1993:40). In fact, the list D’Haen offers to describe postmodernism could be a role call for the features of magical realism – self-reflexiveness, metafiction, eclecticism, redundancy, multiplicity, discontinuity, intertextuality, parody, the erasure of boundaries, the de-stabilisation of the reader (1993:36–37). In arguing that these techniques belong to both magical realism and postmodernism, and that there is a consensus in international theory that magical realism is a particular strain of the contemporary movement of postmodernism, I briefly detail the aspects of magical realism that I argue differentiate it from postmodernism.
Magical realist texts, it can be argued, were in circulation historically before the term postmodernism existed. As D’Haen suggests, writers formally belonging to their own idiosyncratic tendencies, were annexed by postmodernism in the eighties (1993). These include authors such as Angela Carter, Italo Calvino and Gunter Grass. Some of the twentieth century texts now discussed as magical realism were written and published well before postmodernism was a prominent cultural movement. Authors such as Jorge Luis Borges and Franz Kafka, both demonstrating magical realist tendencies in their writing, belong to the historical period of modernism. In addition, the term magical realism can also be applied to writers generating texts in a time prior to the historical periods of both modernism and postmodernism. As Zamora and Faris argue, magical realism has a long tradition, ‘beginning with the masterful interweavings of magical and real in the epic and chivalric traditions and continuing in the precursors of modern prose fiction – the Decameron, The Thousand and One Nights, Don Quixote’ (1995:2). The oral, storytelling quality present in many magical realist texts suggests that the tradition of magical realism goes back much further, springing from the ancient traditions of the indigenous cultures of the countries in which magical realism can be found. Magical realist novels:

…have their roots in the common scene of international postmodernism, while at the same time confronting it with its own needs, problematizing it, and parodying it. They likewise go beyond existing definitions and frame-works by giving their postmodernity an even more critical accentuation, voicing yet new aesthetic needs and social revindications (D’Haen 1993:41).

Indeed, it is through its subversiveness that magical realism marks itself as the most excentric discourse available in postmodernism, with both practices’ sharing a lack of faith in the centralising and totalising impulse of humanist thought. As D’Haen sees it, marking magical realism as a powerful political discourse, ‘The really significant resistance within the international postmodern movement is being put up by magical realism’ (1995:201). As such, I emphasise magical realism’s alignment with the discourse of postcolonialism.

D’Haen suggests magical realism’s proliferation in South America is because ‘…the discrepancy between its nominal independence and its continuing cultural dependence exacerbated the feeling of ex-centricity of many Latin American authors, and thus alerted
them to the problematics of centers and margins in literature, and hence to the possibilities of magical realism’ (1995:200). He goes on to say that Latin America is a continent most ex-centric to the privileged centres of power. The reason this is so ‘…is perhaps that the United States has been the most “privileged center” of all in our post-war world’ (ibid). However, in Canada magical realism is a prolific genre. Linda Hutcheon argues that Canada is itself a country of repressed minorities and therefore its ‘…history is one of defining itself against centres’ (1995:201), marking Canada’s tradition of ex-centric literature. Theorist Geert Lernout goes as far as to say, ‘what is postmodern in the rest of the world used to be called magic realist in South America and still goes by that name in Canada’ (1989:129). Whilst acknowledging magical realism’s contextualisation in the historical period of postmodernism, this thesis argues for magical realism as a discourse of decolonisation, suggesting that its consistent employment as a political tool of critique marks a distinct separation from postmodernism.

A Working Definition

Chanady (1985), Faris (1995, 2004) and Hegerfeldt (2005) have all provided working definitions of magical realism as a literary mode. Determining what it is exactly that demarcates a magical realist text and differentiates it from other modes lies in understanding how form and content are inextricably linked in magical realist texts. In addition, this clarification aims to debunk criticisms of the mode that would suggest it is without any structure or form, and that it is too freely applied to any text hoping to appeal to its popularity.

Hegerfeldt lists five key points as germane to her reading of a magical realist text: fusion of realistic and fantastic elements, matter-of-factness, literalisation of metaphor, fantastic reality and production of knowledge (2005). I discuss these points in relation to those put forward by Chanady and Faris. To illustrate this discussion I utilise examples from Australian novel Homework by Suneeta Peres Da Costa. In brief, this novel is concerned with the young girl, Mina, middle of three daughters in an Indian family living in Australia. Mina is born with feelers on her head, which make exactly what she is feeling obvious to all those around her. From the beginning of her life, Mina grapples with the
paradoxical nature of life as she tries desperately to understand her mother’s unhappiness and eventual insanity, and her father's complete withdrawal from his family. Mina has been failed by those around her, but still seeks to understand the nature of her reality, turning to an obsession with death, in abundance all around her.

In her first criterion, the fusion of realistic and fantastic elements, Hegerfeldt suggests that the magic within magical realism is constructed from more than the appearance of supernatural events. ‘… [M]agic realism blends elements of the marvellous, the supernatural, hyperbole and fabulation, improbable coincidences and the extraordinary with elements of literary realism’ (2005:51), rather than being limited to occurrences of the fantastic.

For Chanady, three main points feed into one another: the coexistence of two conflicting perspectives, the resolution of antinomy and authorial reticence. She suggests that the readers of a magical realist text are able to distinguish between the magical and realistic in the text, but choose not do so because the magical events are related without narrative hesitation. She states:

Magical realism is characterised first of all by two conflicting, but autonomously coherent perspectives, one based on an "enlightened" and rational view of reality, and the other on the acceptance of the supernatural as part of everyday reality (1985:21).

Chanady argues that the supernatural, or magical, is not presented as problematic as this element is integrated into the very fabric of the story (1985:23). The magical realist reader ‘must accept their integration within the fictitious world’ (Chanady 1985:22). She refers to this as authorial reticence:

What the magical realist does…is to present a worldview that is radically different from ours, as equally valid. He neither censures nor shows surprise (1985:30).

The seamless integration of the supernatural and the resolution of logical antinomy can occur because the author, and therefore the narrative voice ‘…presents the strange world view without any judgement’ (Chanady 1985:24), and it remains the task of the implied reader to perceive the conflict on a semantic level (which they can do because of their
rational, enlightened perspective) yet accept the story being told because of the lack of judgement within the text.

For Hegerfeldt it is not merely the appearance of the two elements, natural and supernatural, but the way in which they are presented. Instead of resolution, Hegerfeldt states that the two competing registers engender hesitation in the reader. ‘While the narrator’s attitude indicates that a certain event is to be accepted as an empirically real and often not even particularly astonishing occurrence, the conventions of the realist mode point in the opposite direction, designating the event as impossible’ (2005:54). For Hegerfeldt it is the ‘evocation and subsequent transgression of the narrative conventions of literary realism’ (ibid) that occurs rather than the magical realist narrator situating ‘the two antimonous codes on the same level of reality merely by describing them in the same way, as if there were no difference in their perception of them’ (Chanady 1985:104).

Instead, Hegerfeldt builds on the idea of the transgression of realist conventions. ‘The uncertainty over which set of conventions to apply in reading draws attention to these conventions as cultural constructs’ (2005:55). In the novel *Homework*, the seemingly unbelievable occurrence of Mina’s feelers is presented with realistic detail:

Sophisticated diagnostic tests had been performed on me during my first days on earth, yet despite countless reassurances that the swellings were benign, Mum and Dad had continued to harbour the suspicion that I might, on account of those excrescences, turn out to be a dud child (1999:3).

The unlikeliness of the feelers on Mina’s head is rendered possible due to the scientific evidence provided and the matter of fact way it is presented. Yet, the narrative focaliser is a little girl and this affords the possibility to the reader that the event is an imaginary one. In addition, it is unlikely in a rational-empirical reality that such an event would occur. Reader hesitation results.

Faris also believes that a magical realist text will engender hesitation. She contends, ‘…before categorizing the irreducible element as irreducible, the reader may hesitate between two contradictory understandings of events and hence experience some unsettling doubts. (2004:17). It is apparent then that, like Hegerfeldt, Faris believes that
the antinomy in the text will not be resolved just because a reader is directed to do so. In fact both theorists suggest that the text directs the reader to hesitate. For Faris, this is because:

…this hesitation frequently stemming from the implicit clash of cultural systems within the narrative…moves toward belief in extrasensory phenomena but narrates from the post-Enlightenment perspective and in the realistic mode that traditionally exclude them (2004:17).

This will lead to some readers, depending on the time and place, to hesitate more than others in their reading of the text. As an example of this, Mina contemplates her parents’ beliefs around their deformed daughter:

In the subcontinent, from where they came, physical disability is understood to be the work of karmic intervention. I had thus been ordered from birth to carry, alone, the onus of universal malevolence, global errors and atrocities, practised before my conception (1999:3).

In a Western culture, not built upon a religious code that includes such things as karma, a radically different reading of the reason behind Mina’s feelers would result. As a manner by which to critique inherent belief structures, it is apparent that both Faris and Hegerfeldt identify that an imperative element of magical realism is its ability to engender reader hesitation rather than smooth over the apparent discontinuities.

For Faris, the primary element in a magical realist text is that the text must contain an ‘irreducible element’ of magic, something that cannot be explained according to the laws of the universe, as we know them (1995:167). The magic in the text refuses to be assimilated into realism. The results of this include, amongst others, disruption of the ordinary logic of cause and effect. The real is made to seem amazing or even ridiculous (Faris 1995:168). For Hegerfeldt, the fantastic reality, or the presentation of the realistic as fantastic, generated in magical realist texts is ‘the reverse side of magical realism’s matter-of-factness’ (2005:59). In Homework, Mina’s feelers are the irreducible element that cannot be explained away and, as becomes apparent as the narrative unfolds, not the product of a child’s imagination. In fact, their presence functions to highlight the strange aspects of reality, and conversely suggest that these are rarely the most unusual. These things include the bullying that Mina experiences at school, rejection by her mother, her
father’s obsession with re-wiring the house, her sister’s precocious genius and her own
death drive. All of these occurrences, whilst realistically possible, are made to seem
bizarre and unnatural when held up against Mina’s emotional sensitivity and the pain
expressed through her feelers.

As an extension of this example:

…reality’s outrageousness is often underscored because ordinary people react to
magical events in recognizable and sometimes also in disturbing ways, a
circumstance that normalizes the magical event but also defamiliarizes,
derlines, or critiques extraordinary aspects of reality (Faris 2004:13).

Hegerfeldt suggests that fantastic reality is used, ‘…to describe atrocities of war,
governmental oppression, police brutality or racism…in supernaturalizing cruel events,
the texts express a stunned incredulity about the state of the world, implying that the idea
of such things actually happening exceeds – or should exceed – the human imagination’
(2005:61). But the fantastic reality, or defamiliarisation of the everyday, however cruel it
may be, also permits us to view events with a fresh wonder and childlike innocence.
Mina’s perspective of the world, as a six-year-old child, supernaturalises the cruel events
of her own reality – the withdrawal of both her parent’s affection in particular – presented
as they are from her limited scope of understanding. Without the full knowledge of why
things are happening, Mina locates herself as the catalyst for all the negative events in her
family’s life and uses a child’s logic to come to grips with them. In the following
example, Mina steals a souvenir, a can of Californian sunshine, from a classmate recently
returned from the USA:

The Californian Sunshine vanished, just like that. I hadn’t seen it, it had neither
made us any warmer nor the weather fairer. In fact it rained, rained, and rained.
Maybe it had never been there to begin with…More than the shame of my crime,
I felt duped. Why were the secrets of the sun so invisible to the human eye? How
could I make Mum warm, if I couldn’t steal that for which she longed? (1999:22).

In this example it is apparent that Mina has identified that her mother needs warmth to
make her happy again, and sees it as her responsibility to meet that need. She is unaware
that her mother is ill, or that the souvenir does not contain any real sunshine. As a result
of her actions she is punished rather than thanked for trying desperately to meet her mother’s needs and hopefully regain her affection.

Faris’s second point is that ‘Descriptions detail a strong presence of the phenomenal world – this is the realism in magical realism, distinguishing it from much fantasy and allegory’ (1995:169). Great detail is often employed in the creation of a realistic world. Often events are anchored in an historical reality, which may in some cases go against officially sanctioned accounts (Faris 1995:170). Disappointed with Australia’s national heroes, Mina writes her own version of the Burke and Wills history. In response to her assignment, her teacher writes:

This is very imaginative, Mina, but you need to spend more time focusing on the actual details of their expedition. Please note: Burke was an Englishman. He did not – under any circumstances before God – indulge in cannabilism (1999:137).

As well as re-writing and undermining the historical narrative of Australian’s nationhood, this excerpt demonstrates the inherent racism and Christian values of Australian culture, in relationship to which, Mina is located as Other. Hegerfeldt speaks to this when she argues ‘…a number of magic realist writers…lay claim to a high degree of verisimilitude, higher even than that of traditional realism (2005:62), stating that this is because, ‘fiction written in a magic realist mode is actually truer to life, than realist fiction’ (ibid).

Claiming both an irreducible element and an accurate depiction of reality as hallmarks of magical realism is to claim that magical realism, paradoxically, is closer to the lived experience of humanity than realism, which cannot admit the non-rational as part of everyday life.

Faris contends, ‘We experience the closeness or near-merging of two realms, two worlds’ (1995:172). She goes on to state that, ‘The magical realist vision exists at the intersection of two worlds, at an imaginary point inside a double sided mirror…’ (ibid). This in-between world appears as a positive site for creating a more complete picture of the plurality of lived experience. Mina occupies this in-between space at all times as a result of the marginalisation she experiences because of her feelers, and her ethnicity. This is
compounded by her family’s Catholicism, which Mina literalises, and her own obsession with death:

And I had more than once wondered, was it true, that like Shanti stumbling about reality in her dreams, we would one day be awoken to eternal life or something sweeter than this hurricane-life full of moods and moons and losses? What of the Gates of Heaven, of that place where my soul was to be measured by St. Peter; what if he, too, didn’t want to hold my hand (after all, he had a record for disavowals) and, on a whim, sent my soul to purgatory (1999:24).

Susan Baker argues that in blurring the distinction between myth and reality, ‘Magical realism attempts to shake the sense of the normal or rational, opening the way for the reader to question what has previously been accepted as “real”, and therefore true’ (1993:57). The dissolution of power structures and dominant discourses takes place, ‘…since the natural and supernatural are inextricably interwoven, there is no hierarchy of reality’ (Chanady 1985:104). This is clearly evidenced in the above example. Faris’s final point is that magical realist fictions question received ideas about time, space and identity (1995:173). She describes these elements as being undermined or subverted within the magical realist framework. Fluid boundaries between the living and the dead, for example, often mean the presence of ghosts and challenge conventional notions of time and space (Faris 1995:172–178).

Hegerfeldt addresses both these points in the discussion of the production of knowledge. She claims that magical realist texts critically examine, ‘the status of the dominant as well as “Other” knowledge by tracing and revealing the manifold ways in which knowledge is produced’ (2005:62). For her, and for Faris, the rearticulation of history is central to magical realism’s task of questioning dominant forms of meaning making. ‘By telling the story from a different, usually oppressed perspective, they reveal the extent to which history never consists of purely factual and impartial accounts, but serves the interests of those who write it’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:63). According to Faris, ‘…history is the weight that tethers the balloon of magic’ (2004:16). The revisioning of history suggests the political potency of the mode. The critiquing of, ‘Western historiography and official history once again links magical realism to postcolonial theory and fiction. It also ties in with magic realism’s subversion of literary realism, which has been seen as the mode of’
representation *par excellence* of post-Enlightenment historiography’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:63). In *Homework*, Mina’s father, a Goan liberationist, states:

‘India,’ I heard him declare recently while we were standing in a lengthy queue at the checkouts of Woolworths, ‘is a figment of the Western imagination, a metonymical artifice!’ (1999:154).

Finally, Hegerfeldt addresses the literalisation of metaphor as a feature of magical realist texts, which Faris also takes up in her discussion of the merging of two realms stating that to question one is to question the other (2004:23). Hegerfeldt discusses how the literalisation of metaphor blurs the boundary between the literal and figurative or the abstract and the concrete. Importantly, ‘in magic realism the figurative dimension always remains visible, hovering, so to say on the surface of the text’ (2005:59). As such, there is a, ‘transgression of linguistic and conceptual boundaries, thereby deconstructing traditional dichotomies such as abstract/concrete, word/thing, past/present’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:57). This occurs frequently throughout *Homework*:

The moon’s crepuscular shadow faintly outlined her face, a face I loved so dearly that it sometimes hurt, and I hoped that soon, one day very soon, I would stop my own reckless mastication and, having stuffed myself with all small pieces of the world, metamorphose into such a beautiful creature as she (1999:22–23).

These techniques include rendering figures of speech real, endowing thoughts and concepts with physical existence, the embodiment of memories, subjective impressions rendered as objective fact and, abstract entities given physical presence (Hegerfeldt 2005:56–57). Confronted with her crime of stealing the Californian sunshine, Mina wonders where the guardian angel her grandfather claims she possesses, has gone:

A great emptiness suddenly entered me and I could feel my perforated heart sinking. No guardian angel came to rescue me, even though I knew it was the end of my life and even though I lifted up my right hand.

‘Jesus is listening.’

She had to say that, she always had to say that; just when I supposed that I might be able to tell the truth about something, Mum would say, ‘Jesus is listening,’ and that was enough to turn my resolve. I would rather dissemble just to keep a good record, if indeed he was listening (1999:18).
This example illustrates that, ‘Because no difference is made between the material and the ideal, ontological existence loses its significance as a criterion of value – the world of ideas is put on a par with material reality’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:57). To Mina, there is no distinction between the literal and the symbolic.

According to Hegerfeldt, ‘The debate about magical realism has from the very beginning been about more than just another literary concept; it has always also been influenced by political agendas’ (2002:63). Hegerfeldt reads contemporary magical realism as an attempt, ‘by which individuals and communities try – and have always tried – to make sense of the world’ (2002:64). Current magical realist writing, including the plays under consideration in this thesis, ‘…emphasise the extent to which alternative, frequently marginalised modes of thought are not restricted to (post)colonial cultures but exist also in Western settings’ (ibid). In magical realism, the combination of the magical and the real is about more than the collision of the non-scientific ‘native’ perspective with the rational colonising power. Magical realist texts, ‘suggest that cultures cannot be neatly divided into rational vs. irrational, scientific vs. magical, but that certain patterns of meaning making are anthropological constants which will persist even if they are incompatible with the dominant…world view’ (Hegerfeldt 2002:64). As a tool of cultural critique magical realism is especially useful in its neutral observation of the ‘helpful as well as harmful uses to which the various human strategies of meaning making may be put’ (Hegerfeldt 2002:65).

This section has provided a detailed overview of the formal tenets of magical realism as it functions as a literary device. Analysing the criterion of the three theorists Chanady, Faris and Hegerfeldt, I have shown the similarities and contrasts between the major arguments they present. Chanady offers a reading of magical realism that suggests total acceptance on behalf of the reader of the supernatural as part of the everyday. Faris and Hegerfeldt instead believe that magical realism’s ability as a tool of cultural critique actually emerges from engendering reader hesitation. Rather than total acceptance, as Chanady argues, the hesitation between the realistic and the unrealistic detail feeds into one another for the reader, which enables questioning of embedded hegemony. For all three
theorists, however, the presentation of magical events emerges from a detailed
description of the real world. The transgression of this reality and the binary structure
(self/other, magic/mundane, margin/centre) inherent within it is the location of magical
realism’s power.

**Part Two: Theatre**

I begin with a definition of theatre proposed by Colin Counsell:

> Perhaps the first thing we expect is a plot, or more accurately, a narrative, a series
> of events and actions, which succeed each other according to causal or
developmental logic. This narrative will be enacted live, by performers who
> occupy the same physical time/space as the audience (1996:3).

Counsell goes on to list other features including visual and spatial arts and the separation
of actor and audience (ibid). Ultimately, though, he states that the indispensability of any
of these elements has been constantly challenged throughout the twentieth (and twenty-
first) century. Thus theatre cannot be defined by a checklist. Rather, it is the employment
of cultural frames that surround the event, including audience engagement, that determine
the theatricality of an event.

This definition of theatre is situated within the larger perspective of Western theatre
conventions, which is the subject under consideration here, although its influences may
be highly varied. I have defined my case studies as Western theatre, which is an
ideological, linguistic and political division, for geographically Australia certainly isn’t
part of the Euro-American centric. I employ this demarcation in recognition of the fact
that meaning is always culturally specific. The dominant culture in Australia is Western.
As Counsell states, ‘…to operate under the assumption that “Theatre” is an activity
pursued and understood in the same way by all, is both to misconstrue the processes of
meaning and to overlook the distinctness of cultures, our own and others’ (1996:1).

The zeitgeist of much contemporary Western theatre, outside of mainstream spaces, is of
challenging, subverting and deconstructing dominant cultural and social hegemonies in
one way or another, for, ‘…at least in the West, we have witnessed a wide-spread and
multiform subversion of theatrical traditions on a scope unparalleled in the past’ (Alter 1990:1). This is mirrored also in theatre theory wherein there are no, ‘…normative implications, no universal justifications’ (Alter 1990:3). This argument is valid in the context of non-mainstream theatre, as mainstream commercial theatre on the whole remains committed to the performance of traditional, canonical realist narrative-based productions\textsuperscript{40}. However, as Featherstone states, ‘…mainstream culture will always catch up with particular avant-gardes and incorporate them into dominant ideologies because that is their socio-political destiny at their inception, that is what it means to be avant-garde’ (qtd in Kershaw 1999:61). Theatre, despite its status as the traditional performance method in Western culture, is a potential source of cultural change, precisely because it operates from the centre of the discourse of power, rather than from the margins of performance culture. As Turner states, ‘The stage drama, when it is meant to do more than entertain – though entertainment is always one of its vital aims – is a metacommentary, explicit or implicit, witting or unwitting, on the major social dramas of its social context’ (1990:16). In the following sections I identify the elements that demarcate theatre and lend it its potency as a tool of cultural critique.

**Presence**

It is the presence of both audience and performers in a particular space/time that defines theatre. Richard Schechner describes the relationship between these space/time elements as the intensity of performance. Schechner states:

> Spectators are very aware of the moment when a performance takes off. A “presence” is manifest, something has “happened”. The performers have touched or moved the audience and some kind of collaboration, collective special theatrical life, is born. This intensity of performance – and I, personally, don’t think the same kind of thing can happen in films or television, whose forte is to

\textsuperscript{40} In 2008, the seasons of the major mainstream theatre companies in Australia have included productions of *A Streetcar Names Desire* by Tennessee Williams (Sydney Theatre Company), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* by Tennessee Williams (Melbourne Theatre Company), and *The Importance of Being Earnest* by Oscar Wilde (Queensland Theatre Company). The remainder of these company’s seasons fall well within the bounds of dramatic realism, with new works by established mainstream Australian writers such as Joanna Murray-Smith and David Williamson.
affect people individually but not to generate collective energies – has been called “flow”… (1985:10–11). 41

In being drawn to the collective presence of theatre, I suggest that the audience and theatre makers are hoping for and intending a transformation, made possible through theatre’s actuality, its very being-ness. ‘Theatrical communication situations are not…fundamentally different from other forms of fiction, but in theater they appear in a radicalized form’ (Helbo et al. 1987:104), and what is most radical about theatre and the audience’s engagement with it is their mutual presence42. Combined with the collective presence of theatre makers, performers and spectators, the reason that theatre retains its appeal and cultural viability in the face of far more realistic media of this century and the last, is the direct and urgent ‘present-ness’ of the theatrical event. For indeed, ‘The word theatre (from the Greek theatron, a place for viewing, the amphitheatre surrounding the orchestra) designates a social space’ (Helbo et al. 1987:4). Theatre’s power to effect cultural change emerges from the danger to the self (both audience and performer) through its very presence.

Counsell states that, ‘…theatre is an “uncomfortable” art form because its symbolic register is continually threatened by another, one in which theatre’s fictionality, its meaning-making remains overt’ (1996:17). It is the uncomfortable space of theatre that lends it to a tool of ideological revelation and transformation. This discomfort comes from its confrontation between the real and the other, the fiction and the non-fiction of the theatrical event, live bodies in a living spatio-temporal axis. The dialogic space of the theatre makes it a rich and fertile site for the deconstruction of meaning, for it engages the presence of both audience and performer in a live space implicating all in the meaning making process. ‘Theatre governs its own reading by establishing relationships, ways of viewing that enable the audience to make-sense of the theatrical text, and in doing so

41 I agree with this statement and also emphasise the terms ‘collaboration’ or ‘collective’. It is no doubt true to anyone who has been to the theatre that a certain life or energy is almost tangible when an audience ‘travel’ with the performance they are witnessing, and this is especially true in large audiences. I locate this within my own experience, of course. I agree with Schechner’s conclusion that television and film cannot generate this same experience.

42 ‘…It is clear that in every age the theatrical genre has been deemed as having, among other things, the potential to change people and their reality, a quality shared naturally with all artistic genres, but which shines out in a particularly direct and urgent form in theatre. (1987:126).
determine the kinds of sense that can be made’ (Counsell 1996:22). In theatre, the sign between performer and audience is fluid, and as such meaning can momentarily resist, reinterpret and reinvent the structures of pervasive ideologies of reality.

**Space**

‘Theatre as a cultural system is…based on a given spatial relationship different from those involved in other spatial systems’ (Helbo et al. 1987:48). It is the spatial relationship between two groups of live bodies in a particular space and time that provides theatre’s power. ‘It is not these separate spaces for player and audience that make theatre, but their confrontation’ (ibid). Herbert Blau states of theatre, ‘There are two realities meeting, then, at a single vanishing point, life and death, art and life, the thing itself and its double, which prepares the ground for performance’ (Eds. Schechner and Appel 1990:260). The concurrent fictionality/reality, ‘the thing itself and its double’, of the theatre space is particularly intriguing to theatre semioticians, for, as has already been discussed, theatre occupies a unique place in semiotic theory (amongst others) for being the simultaneous real space and enacted space, or ‘other-place’. Counsell states:

> Functioning symbolically in this way, characters, actions, and props must therefore be translated into something else, with the result that the whole space becomes ‘illusionistic’. Indeed, it is precisely this illusionistic and symbolic status which allows realistic depiction to flourish… (1996:18).

This is because, as Counsell goes on to state, the theatrical event signals its other-place-ness and encourages symbolic reading, in order that the audience may interpret and understand the event (1996).

By framing the event as an illusion, achieved by the very act of performing in a demarcated theatrical space, wherever and whatever that space may be, the audience is able to enter into the illusion of the fiction presented, and to engage in the interpretative act with full confidence. The audience is not seduced by the illusion, but is encouraged in their understanding of it, by it. ‘The audience becomes aware of both actors and characters, real place and other-place, and is required to adopt two contradictory postures towards the stage, to view it as both a symbolic locus and a concrete platea’ (Counsell
1996:19). This leads me to pose the question that I believe is at the core of my usage and understanding of theatre; what is it about the formal, shared statement of theatre that allows it to be used as a communicative tool of change?

Schechner states that ‘the beauty of “performance consciousness” is that it activates alternatives...performance consciousness is subjunctive, full of alternatives and potentiality’ (1985:6). Theatre always achieves the space of ‘this’ and ‘that’. The spectator of a performance is making connections across the spatio-temporal axis of the performance. The space of the performance is a sacred secular space in which everything within it acquires a deliberate meaning. As Cole states, ‘…theatre occurs in a mystic place where two worlds confront one another – the uncanny, dangerous, and fascinating space of the archetypal illud tempus inhabited by our representative shaman/actor while we watch from the duller but safer world of everyday reality’ (qtd in eds Helbo et al. 1987:48). This ‘mystic’ place could also be described as the liminal. Theatre’s effectiveness as a tool of transformation can be prescribed to its location in and of the liminal. ‘... [L]iminality itself is then the process of transformation at work. The technique of consciously achieving transformation is the process of entering the liminal state’ (Turnbull in eds Schechner and Appel 1990:79). Liminality is discussed at length in Chapter Four.

**Myth and Illusion**

‘There is nothing more illusory in performance than the illusion of the unmediated. It can be a very powerful illusion in the theatre, but it is theatre, and it is theatre, the truth of illusion, which haunts all performance whether or not it occurs in the theatre, where it is more than doubled over’(Schechner and Appel 1990:253). Schechner and Appel’s contention offers insight into why avant-garde theatre, ‘…has lost all confidence in a mimetic reproduction of reality by theatre’ (Pavis 1982:185). In contemporary theatre practice and theory there is a ‘…calling into question of the mimetic nature of art and the refusal of the stage to presume to imitate a pre-existent world view’ (ibid). Elam states that the semiotics of theatre is engaged with the fact that, ‘…all that is on the stage is a sign’ (1980:7). Politicised theatre affords a powerful space in which to subvert the sign.
Counsell elaborates on Elam’s proposition: ‘Theatrical “illusion”, therefore, does not involve hallucination; the event signals that its elements are to be read symbolically, as parts of an other-place, and the audience does so in order to understand, to interpret, the text’ (1996:18). As an extension of this, Alter believes that there is an inherent duality of theatrical activity. ‘…on the one hand, its reference to a story that takes place in a mental space outside the stage; on the other its display of real performances on the stage’ (1990:31). The theatrical event functions productively as a *useful lie*. The transitory nature of the theatrical, its malleability, reflects or indicates these things in the performance of cultural myth, and can work to reinscribe them. As Schechner offers, ‘The human achievement…is the ability to make decisions based on virtual as well as actual alternatives. These virtual alternatives take on a life of their own. Theater is the art of actualizing them…By turning possibilities into action, into performances, whole worlds otherwise not lived are born’ (2003:208). New myths for living are inscribed in the presentation of and engagement with the theatrical.

Brennan indicates several applications of the notion of myth: ‘…myth as distortion or lie; myth as mythology, legend or oral tradition; myth as literature per se…’ (1990:44). Importantly, theatre functions as both myth and mythical space in its enactment of ritual and its connection to the historical time when theatre was seen as the mouthpiece for the gods or in mimesis of the gods. It is therefore a particularly apt place to play out and reinscribe cultural myths. As Bhabha states, ‘Terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative, are produced performatively’ (1994:2). It is via the repetition of the actions of culture, politically inscribed or otherwise, that a cultural identity emerges. Theatre’s own illusory nature, an imitation of the real, can be used to reveal and exploit the illusory nature of cultural myths that are propagated as real and as such, unchangeable. As Dolan states, ‘The very present-tenseness of performance lets audiences imagine utopia not as some idea of future perfection that might never arrive, but as brief enactments of the possibilities of a process that starts now, in this moment at the theater’(2005:17).
Recent Australian Theatre – A Brief Historical Overview

In contextualising the plays under consideration in this thesis in relationship to recent Australian theatre, it is apparent that, ‘Australian theatre has a long history of staging the nation; of plays and productions that have explored Australian themes and highlighted the national politics of the day’ (Glow 2007:3)\(^\text{43}\). Glow’s study of recent mainstream Australian theatre analyses several writers who employ theatre as a public forum, engaging with debates around cultural, political and economic life. Glow suggests that the economic rationalism of Australian cultural policy of the last decade or so has contributed to reduced opportunities for experimentation and failure, and has acted as a detriment to the creative process (2007:4). Yet, as Georgina Safe surmised in *The Australian*, in November 2004, ‘Away from the bright lights of the Arts Centre and from reassuring government subsidy, Melbourne's independent theatres are thriving. The city is experiencing a resurgence of small, gritty, politically motivated groups, comparable to the activity of the 1970s and early ‘90s’ (2004). These companies are, according to Safe, ‘redefining Australia's theatre aesthetic. Theatre historian Julian Meyrick calls it the “beginning of a new sensibility”’ (ibid).

Payne suggests that in the early nineties, ‘Playwrights frequently reflected and promoted the growing conservative belief in the immutability of economic rationalism, and displayed cynicism towards compassion, social justice and change’ (2006:346), which clearly stands in stark contrast to the playwrights of the twenty-first century. Going back further to the late sixties and seventies, Australian drama, ‘…was related to the broader social movements occurring at the time’ (ibid). It is apparent, even in scant review that Australian theatre is overtly produced by and in response to the political climate from

\(^{43}\) The potency of employing theatre as a means of constructing and deconstructing national identity is not a new one. In Australia, this striking example illustrates the desire to have a compelling and certain sense of self. ‘When Lesley Haylen, playwright, journalist, novelist and Labor MP representing Sydney’s western suburbs, asked the House of Representatives in 1944 to consider his six-point scheme for a publicly subsidised ‘National Theatre’, he denied that he was peddling ‘middle-class notions’. Rather, he wanted Australians to be like the valiant people of Britain, Russia, and the USA, who were strong because they ‘know their own story’. Aligning ‘theatre’ with ‘nation’, Haylen’s words implied that if Australia’s ‘story’ were to be told effectively theatre would be its best vehicle. He predicted that Australia’s post-war migration program would set governments new challenges of social integration’ (Bennett/Carter Culture in Australia 2001:114).
which it emerges. In the late sixties and early seventies there was an attack on ‘tradition
and conformity’ and also on ‘US imperialism and Australia’s traditional perception of
itself in terms of regional and world hierarchies’ (ibid). The drama of this period, labelled
the New Wave, produced theatre that saw ‘the potential for and need to overthrow
existing structures of thought and oppression’ (ibid). According to Payne’s analysis, the
period from the late seventies up to 1988 saw a pessimistic shift, one in which the
youthful ideals of the previous generation were abandoned in exchange for a cautious
operating within the system (2006:347). ‘Works by upcoming authors such as [Louis]
Nowra and [Stephen] Sewell emphasised this shift, dealing with decaying ideals and the
internalisation of the oppressed of the standards of their oppressors’ (ibid). In the next
phase Payne argues that, ‘The plays of the early nineties appear to conform to the
growing conservative momentum. Plays such as David Williamson’s *Money and Friends*,
Katherine Thomson’s *Diving for Pearls*…are examples of the belief in the triumph of
free-market capitalism over any possible alternative’ (2006:348).

It is Payne’s suggestion that in present-day Australian drama, a rejection of extreme
economic rationalism is a subversion of highly conservative, neo-liberal government
policy, in which ‘it becomes increasingly untenable for any politician to argue a case not
fundamentally premised on economic “reality”’ (Payne 2006:351). Unlike the previous
generation of Australian theatre, Glow has found in her study of contemporary Australian
playwrights that these writers ‘regard the theatre as a forum for political debate…and
want their work to contribute to it’ (2007:2). Clearly, an ideological shift has once again
taken place in Australian theatre, and despite the decrease in funding available to the arts,
playwrights, both mainstream and independent, are accessing the opportunities to stage
their resistance to and questioning of contemporary Australian society. Glow believes
that the contemporary writers under discussion in her study, which includes Ben Ellis, are
not like the New Wave artists, in that they ‘do not constitute a “wave” of like-minded
artists; they belong to different generations and their work manifests a range of styles and
aesthetic priorities. However, what they have in common is a passion for theatre as a
place for public political engagement’ (Glow 2007:2).
This section has offered an overview of the elements of theatre that are most pertinent to my employment of the form of theatre. In so doing I have begun to suggest the aspects of theatre that align most closely to my suggestion of a magical realist theatre practice and theory. These include presence and space, and myth and illusion. In the following chapters I demonstrate how magical realist theatre employs these elements, working to disorient fixed notions of culture, identity, history, time, space and ideology, through a magification of the everyday. Overall, this chapter has laid out the historical, theoretical and political approaches of magical realism and theatre. I have provided concise definitions of the key terms engaged with throughout my argument and, I have attempted to clarify the confusion and misuse of these terms, especially around magical realism. My intention has been to suggest the possible imbrication of the mode and the form, with the possibility of developing a transformational discourse. The material provided in this chapter forms the basis of a magical realist theatre reading practice, which is developed throughout the following chapters. In the following chapter I consider four novels by Australian author David Ireland. I will argue for the location of magical realism in the geo-political site of Australia, evidenced through examples from Ireland’s novels.
CHAPTER TWO. DAVID IRELAND

“All Australia has an empty belly”, said jolly Mister Chandrager. “Look at the map and you will see that the ocean and coastal strip contain emptiness. That is the first impression Australia makes. When you get to know it, it is strange how that motif repeats itself. No ghosts, all is plain and above-board, you see. Not even a bunyip”.

…Whatever emptiness the land had, we were born to: we shared it (Ireland 1979:186).

In this chapter, I consider the literature of Australian novelist and three times Miles Franklin winner, David Ireland. I will argue that the potency and theoretical potential of considering magical realism in relationship to the Australian social, cultural and political context can be best elucidated through the novels of David Ireland. This chapter will demonstrate that, whilst Ireland’s literary novels do not form the main part of the argument of this thesis, his writing affords a striking insight into the potential of magical realism in Australia. A consideration of Ireland’s writing brings to this thesis an understanding of the application of magical realism to Australia. This ultimately informs my study and understanding of magical realism in this geographical region. In addition, I position this critique of Ireland’s work here as an introduction to the first creative component of this thesis. In so doing my intention is to parallel the thematic concerns of Ireland’s writing with my own, to evidence an Australian magical realism.

Ireland employs non-naturalistic, anti-mimetic tendencies to challenge the ideology inherent in constructions of Australian nationhood. His subversive, excessive and explosive use of language, form and content destabilises the peculiar and didactic imposition of a univocal Australian voice. Theorist Tim Brennan states, the myth of nationhood “…does not refer only to the more or less unsurprising idea that nations are mythical, that…there is no “scientific” means of establishing what all nations have in common’, but also to ‘…the way that various governments invent traditions to give permanence and solidity to a transient political form’ (1990:47). In Ireland’s writing, Australian culture and national identity are presented as a narrative fabulation invented by the dominant hegemony. The idea of Australian nationhood built around the image of Australia as a British penal colony is evidenced in the following example from The
Unknown Industrial Prisoner, written by Ireland in 1971. The workers in the novel inherit the marks from leg irons from their fathers, directly calling upon the memory of Australia’s convict history. But rather than accepting that this history is behind us, it ‘…suggests Australia is still a penal colony, still an outpost of foreign powers…Ireland's novel is built on the contention that Australian society now is a penal colony, its workers herded into prisons by huge industrial monoliths subcontracting for the government’ (Daniel 1982:46).

Ireland began writing at around the same time as the publication of Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s One Hundred Years of Solitude (1967), cited as the classic magical realist text. Garcia Marquez is considered the grandfather of Latin American magical realism. Other seminal magical realist authors include Isabel Allende and Salman Rushdie. These magical realist literary authors share a narrative investment in the, ‘collective practices (sometimes oral and performative, as well as written) that bind communities together’ (Zamora and Faris 1995:3). Garcia Marquez refers to himself as a social realist. He wrote One Hundred Years of Solitude by, in part, observing reality (Simpkins 1995:149). The relationship between Ireland and other seminal magical realists resides in a shared understanding of the communal and societal impact of language. Blaber states, ‘For Ireland the relationship between individual and community is a means to challenge the ways organisations put in place systems that forget, ignore or override the human’ (2006:60). In writing characters and places that are marginalised in the dominant hegemony, Ireland attempts to recuperate a sense of humanity and community at a governmental, bureaucratic and corporate level.

Through a close reading of four of Ireland's novels, I illustrate how Ireland's work can be read as magical realism thematically and formally. These four novels are The Chantic Bird (1968), The Unknown Industrial Prisoner (1971), A Woman of the Future (1979) and The City of Women (1981). The earliest of the novels, The Chantic Bird, follows the anarchic journey of an already jaded young man unable and unwilling to conform to the societal ideals. Instead, he engages in reckless, destructive and sometimes dangerous wanderings in and around Sydney. He returns occasionally to observe his family, Bee and
the children, but most of the time remains outside or inhabits buildings in unconventional ways, in rooftops and abandoned train carriages. Half-way through the narrative, he murders his biographer and disposes of the body, and in so doing takes over writing his own story. He is cynical and deeply contemplative, and convinced he is dying throughout the novel.

_The Unknown Industrial Prisoner_ depicts the life of workers in a Sydney oil refinery, detailing the many different aspects of this industrial culture from the perspective of a plethora of disenfranchised, devastated characters. This novel suggests the dehumanisation of individuals in the face of industry. It also describes Australia as merely a colony of powerful, foreign multinationals. _Ireland_ depicts an unrelenting work environment, the only escape from which is hedonism. The characters flee across the swamp for a brief time to the refuge of the Home Beautiful to partake in alcohol and women. Ultimately, this last resort is also taken away as a fire destroys the oil refinery and kills many of the workers.

_A Woman of the Future_ challenges Australia’s traditional masculine self-image and Australia’s relationship to the rest of the world. The central character, Alethea, is in high school and about to emerge into productive adulthood. Her journey parallels the emerging nationhood of Australia. _Ireland_ attempts to align national identity with a feminine rather than overtly masculine, historical war hero imagery. The novel is set sometime in the future. Society is divided into two categories: the Proles are productive working members of society, and the Pros are prohibited from working or earning a living, regarded as secondary citizens. The Pros are not only unproductive members of society; they exhibit extraordinary deformations of their bodies. Coins, canons and caskets emerge from bodies, and people grow roots into the ground. A little girl nurtures a vulva under her arm. As high school ends, students are graded into one category or the other depending upon their performance. Alethea is brilliant and destined for the Prole category, but instead metamorphosises into a leopard and disappears as the novel ends.
Finally, *City of Women* continues with a central female character to establish a version of Sydney in which all the men have been expelled. The story follows one woman whose lover (or friend or daughter) has left her. This novel suggests the violence of men against women, but that even in the absence of one gender human nature remains largely the same. The women appear to take on some typically masculine behaviours and traits. The lack of love in the central characters life is what causes her greatest suffering, and this is mirrored in the wider community of this imaginary Sydney. As the story concludes it appears to suggest that this Sydney has been manufactured only in the central character’s mind.

Briefly considering the seminal magical realist novels of Isabel Allende and Garcia Marquez offers a contextualisation of Ireland’s ‘Australian’ magical realism. Gabriel Garcia Marquez’s classic text *One Hundred Years of Solitude* describes a century of the history of a single family, normalising and naturalising magical and supernatural events by treating them as though they are very ordinary. In addition to this, as Simpkins explains, ‘Generations of characters…also encounter the bizarre aspects of “real” life in the inherently supernatural tropics’ (1995:150). Simpkins goes on to suggest that magical realists present familiar things in unusual ways to stress their innately magical properties, a technique that works to prevent an overwhelming sense of disbelief (Simpkins 1995:150). This is a conceit of Ireland’s magical realism and underlies the connections that humans make with one another to communicate and express, to control and repress. D’Haen argues that Spanish American literature’s pioneering role in magical realism can be explained by Latin America’s historical place as a geo-political continent ex-centric to the dominant or privileged centres of power (1995:200). At the same time, however, ‘it was nominally independent enough early enough to utter its “other”-ness, in an emancipated way’ (D’Haen 1995:200). I contend that Ireland writes magical realism for the same reasons and in a similar manner to the Latin American authors, because Australia also occupies a space that is both ex-centric and nominally independent. As Brennan suggests:

…in one strain of Third World writing the contradictory topoi of exile and nation are fused in a lament for the necessary and regrettable insistence of nation-
forming, in which the writer proclaims his identity with a country whose artificiality and exclusiveness have driven him into a kind of exile – a simultaneous recognition of nationhood and alienation from it (1990:63).

Arguing for the postcolonial status of Australia, I believe that Brennan’s interpretation of ‘third world’ literature is applicable to the writing of Ireland’s considered in this chapter.

Ireland, writing from the same historical moment as Garcia Marquez, took up the mode of magical realism as a response to the ex-centric independence of Australia, several decades before mainstream Australian literature did so through authors such as Peter Carey and Tim Winton. Carey’s novel *Illywhacker* (1985) follows several of Ireland’s concerns. Richard Todd suggests that Carey presents a ‘…vision of Australian society in search of a self…counterpointed by the belief that Australia consistently presents herself as an exploited colony’ (1995:311). This tendency is pronounced in several of Ireland’s works considered here, especially in *The Unknown Industrial Prisoner* (1971). In the following example, acknowledging Australia’s origins as a colonised nation is not officially sanctioned:

“Bloody colonial crap”, muttered the Enforcer in a low voice. The word colonial was taboo, but you could still think it or say it quietly (1971:196).

Attention is drawn to white Australia’s origins through the banishment of the word ‘colonial’ by a dominant power, which has the ability to withdraw words from circulation. This also serves to highlight the way in which history is recorded by those who have the power to define and name.

Seminal magical realist, Isabel Allende, argues that magical realism emerges from ‘the confluence of races and cultures of the whole world superimposed on the indigenous culture, in a violent climate’ (as qtd in Foreman 1995:286). This is something Allende identifies as belonging specifically to Latin America, but which I argue is equally applicable to the Australian condition. Allende’s most readily recognised magical realist text *The House of the Spirits* (1985) echoes Garcia Marquez’s novel with the addition that it also ‘feminizes and politicizes the magical mode’ (Foreman 1995:294). *The House of the Spirits* functions, in part, to criticise Pinochet’s Chile, told through the matriarchal
lineage of Clara del Valle, her daughter Blanca and granddaughter Alba, and as Foreman argues, ‘The conflict between women’s desires, expressions, and the expectations of their decorum within the established social order is at issue’ (1995:293). Ireland, too, engages specifically in *A Woman of the Future* (1979) with a feminised magical realism that inevitably politicises his depiction of Australian culture. For example, Ireland goes far beyond a comfortable depiction of Alethea’s sexuality into an unsettling zone, which remains none the less amoral rather than immoral, because of Alethea’s lack of judgement around her behaviour. This tactic, I suggest, is a highly politicised and feminist approach to transgressing the boundaries of the female and feminine behaviour.

A point of difference, I aver, between these international writers and an Australian magical realism is the lack of white history in Australia, which Ireland masterfully parodies in his texts, as is demonstrated in the following sections. Ireland’s work does not present multi-generational, ghost-filled families, attempting to undo the disasters left them by previous generations (although this is an intentionally simplistic description of what the other writers mentioned are doing). White Australia is quietly and cleverly mocked for its attempts to manufacture a history that would somehow afford it some legitimate right to Australia as a homeland. Whilst the novels by Allende and Marquez deal with exile and diaspora, they express these issues in relationship to a lost homeland that has afforded them a long and complicated history of belonging and not belonging. Ireland depicts a country occupied by those who would lay claim to a land that has never belonged to them, defined by a history that has worked consistently to conceal this fact.

Ireland discards popular myths of Australian nationhood to reveal impossible unity, instead engaging in an investigation of the plurality of Australian identity. For Gelder, the characters in Ireland’s novels ‘…seem to speak to us directly, calling upon “Australians” to do certain things, to reveal certain traits, to realise a certain (as-yet-imaginary) future for the nation as a whole’ (1993:8). Yet Ireland’s vision is far from totalising. Ireland's ‘…warp of time, space and subjectivity acts to undermine any pre-existent notions of what might and might not be plausible, and even the most unlikely explanation for change cannot be entirely eliminated’ (Richards 1985:15). Helen Daniel goes as far as to
say, 'Nothing is fixed or final. Ireland has even suggested he does not believe in “belief” because it implies a constancy at odds with his perception of reality, and “belief” itself becomes a structure blocking the view’ (1985:15). Ireland is situated to offer a startling critique of Australian nationhood, challenging hegemony, whilst presenting an ideological alternative. In the following sections, I analyse Ireland’s approach to an ideological alternative of Australia through the subjects of history, time, space and identity.

**History**

The desire to form an idea of Australian national type was encouraged by two central features of nineteenth century thought. As White suggests, ‘It is clearly related to the rise of nationalism in Europe…The very words ‘nationalism’ and ‘nationhood’ were nineteenth century inventions…Gradually the idea that a state embodied a nation replaced the old monarchical alliances and dynastic empires’ (1981:65). For Australia, the emergence of the country as a nation was meant to have transpired during and after WWI. The historical figure and cultural myth of the Australian Digger emerged out of this war, and is familiar to most Australians. Yet, Ireland works to resist this pervasive, masculine image. ‘Out of the old myths of the silent, inhospitable land, stretching its alien presence to the perimeters of our huddled existence, Ireland builds a new myth of fertility and water and the future contained in its enormous stretches of potential’ (Daniel 1982:127). Ireland is able to highlight the peculiarity and embedded ideology of this Australian archetype through an anti-realist extension of logic:

The Australian digger had been given new meaning by the system of declaring areas free for archaeological investigation. People were digging everywhere. Holes appeared in the city, holes not meant for the foundations of buildings; building sites were invaded at weekends by people licensed to dig. Everywhere, Australians were digging, searching for evidence of the past (1979:94).

The idea of the Australian digger is estranged from its originary meaning in this example and is used several times throughout the novel in the form of the Carraways:

The Carraways, searchers for Australia's past, came round from house to house asking, looking, photographing, noting, giving catalogue numbers to the relics of
the past. Not much over two hundred years, yet to them it was precious (1979:202).

The collection of historical items amassed is not a collection of indigenous Australian history, and Ireland draws attention to this lack and absence. It is alluded to in the following quote from *A Woman of the Future*, which suggests not only the damage wrought by white Australia on the land, and by extension, on those who owned the land before it was occupied, but also the lack of faith, of anything to guide this new Australia. This is evoked by the image of young people flocking to the ‘religion’ of digging up Australia, an attempt to find something which might locate this diasporic population in and of the land:

> Mr and Mrs Carraway had a legion of helpers: young people converted to the religion of the country’s past, older Australians dedicated to the idea that there might be something worth preserving, something the rest of us had over looked, something hidden somewhere that would make sense of our here and what we had done to the land (Ireland 1979:202).

The collection of artefacts from white Australia's short history satirises the ironic perpetuation of the myths that Australian identity is founded on, including such archetypes as The Digger. As Richards notes, 'The play of power requires the manufacture of myths and the smoothing over of contradictory or inconvenient evidence' (1985:32). Ireland attempts to complicate and parody the propaganda of the Digger, demonstrating its hollowness. Further to this, ‘Ireland’s work operates within what I call a populist imaginary, one that reacts to the contemporary but also takes as problematic a mythic or nostalgic “memory” that configures a past to which we might return as individuals or as a collective’ (Blaber 2006:61). Ireland’s writing is overtly critical of empty stereotypical archetypes and narratives that fail to represent Australian identity in its diversity and complexity.

Fensham and Varney state, ‘The early national self-image or national type was avowedly masculine and was readily transformed into the twentieth century addresses to the digger, the mate and, more recently, the battler’ (2005:17). Through this metaphor-made-real, Ireland not only challenges the dominant ideology of ‘Australian-ness’, but he also includes women in Australia's identity and future history. As Daniel describes it, Ireland ‘fashions new myths out of old’ (1982:110) dismantling the status quo inherent in much
of Australia's national identity. This dichotomy also highlights the fact that cultural myths are as important as official histories in determining national identity. Alethea's new vision of Australia (as a young, fertile woman), generated through releasing herself from cultural expectation by transforming into the uncategorisable leopard/woman, is made real because she feels it, and lives it. Her ‘…vision of Australia becomes “true”…not just because she speaks it but because she is so fundamentally identified with it’ (Gelder 1993:14). Ireland rejects the traditional imagery of Australia. ‘…the sterile male image of Australia as the land of tall sun-bronzed ANZAC's…I wanted to change this, and when I started my book I thought - here is the right image for Australia. A young female, alone in a special way, with a promise of greatness and resources in her body…’ (qtd in Daniel 1982:11). The theme of digging up the past is juxtaposed with Alethea's own search for the future. Indeed the future, Australia's future, is a central concern of the novel. Alethea's identity is bound to her country. This is a recurrent theme in magical realist texts. This is when the history (or story) of a nation corresponds to the life or lives of the characters, exaggerated and particularised in magical realist texts. Characters experience historical forces bodily (1995:170):

The country is a virgin, as I feel I am, essentially. The hidden place in me has not been touched; my trivial adventures have not touched it. Besides, in a larger sense I am not the person who did those things: I am different.


Australia's own youthfulness, her lack of (white) history, is embodied in Alethea, searching throughout the novel for her identity and place. But this search is also Australia's search for some sense of coherent nationhood. Ireland’s vision of Australia contradicts dominant ideological representations:

I had grown from the soil of Australia; its promise of greatness was my own; it was unique, as I was; in a sense it too was an outcast, like I feel I am (1979:319).

This ‘promise of greatness’ pervades the novel and yet is never fulfilled. Perhaps in the way Australia's promise has not been fulfilled, neither can Alethea’s.
Unravelling Time

Along with the reinscription of history, Ireland’s texts question realist representations of time. Strange treatment of time undermines a sense of its solidity, challenging the logic of cause and effect. As Richards states, ‘The novels are situated at a point of indefinite interaction between the realms of subject, time and space. The site is a vague incarnation of contemporary Australia…’ (1985:6). As a ‘vague incarnation’ rather than actual object, Alethea’s Australia in *A Woman of the Future* occupies a liminal space, marking its content malleable and open to change. As Bhabha suggests, ‘The liminal figure of the nation-space would ensure that no political ideologies could claim transcendent or metaphysical authority for themselves’ (1990:299). Linear time is one such element undermined in this liminal space with the purpose of revisioning the past and opening up the potential of the future. For Bhabha this is key: ‘The focus on temporality resists the transparent linear equivalence of event and idea that historicism proposes; it provides a perspective on the disjunctive forms of representation that signify a people, a nation, or a national culture’ (1990:292). Ireland’s subversion of temporality disorients the cause and effect of linear historicism and affords a reinscription of national identity.

The youthful narrator of *The Chantic Bird*, always sixteen and three quarters, is obsessively concerned with the passing of time:

> Then later, I remember closing my eyes, just as if I was on the back of a train, and seeing the receding column of the present as it may have been, except I didn't see it. I was looking at the receding past. That was a depressing thought; I started to think there was no such thing as the present time, only the nearest piece of the past instead. Where was I? (1968:84).

The ontological questioning of and relationship to time is why death is a reoccurring theme in Ireland’s novels. Here, death represents the history that continues to haunt us, those aspects of our past that both culturally and personally we cannot escape, and it functions also to demonstrate the circular nature of time, a motif that reoccurs in Ireland's writing. As Richards states of Ireland's writing, ‘Each of (his) images are deeply ambivalent, being intimately related to life-death-birth. It is oriented toward a world in a condition of unfinished metamorphosis, where all elements ceaselessly pass from one
state to another’ (1985:56). Metamorphosis acts as a kind of death to Alethea in that she passes away from her life as she knew it, when she turns into a leopard at the end of the novel, but more obvious examples of death also appear in Ireland’s texts. As the narrator of *The Chantic Bird* notes:

I remember thinking to myself, perhaps this isn't life at all, yet. Maybe it’s a sort of pre-life, a foyer, a vestibule, an ante-chamber of life and I'm due to get to live sometime later. But life isn't around you on this planet. Practically everything around you is dead; you have to move things yourself and be the only life there is. Life is buried in us and you sometimes have to dig it out (1968:110).

The narrator lives his life constantly in the presence of the shadow of death. ‘…I can never stop hearing a sort of inside laughter that tells me beyond the next heartbeat there may be nothing’ (1968:67). As Alethea's father in *A Woman of the Future*, an actor who plays the same death over and over in the play *Chances*, espouses, ‘Death may come anytime…so confront it. After all, what is death?’ (1979:77).

In transgressing the boundaries between life and death, Ireland points towards a circular or cyclical time. ‘Does history really move in a circle? Is any given moment simply a dot on that circle?’ (1979:251) asks Alethea. Ireland suggests that we are always in a process of becoming, and at the same time never free from what we have been. In addition, whilst recognisably Australia, Gelder argues that setting of *A Woman of the Future* sometime in the near future is a means by which to highlight and magnify the power structures already inherent in Australian culture. Situating the narrative in the future expands the imaginative capabilities by freeing the story from adherence to a realistic present time.

This representation of time suggests, finally, that Australia may be condemned to repeat its history endlessly, unable as governmental policy has been to acknowledge and build upon it. Instead, Australia remains trapped in an illusory, narrative constructed by the dominant systems of representation, resistant to the multi-vocal, untidy and unnarratable identity that more completely represents the Australian condition. ‘Australia does as the world says, it sits on the comfortable coast of life, where its settled nature is steeped in the past. The future is the greatest problem. The future is at the centre of Australia’s problems’ (Ireland 1979:187). The future is Australia’s problem, as Ireland articulates,
because the lack of acknowledgement of white Australia’s true foundations leads us into a kind of stasis, a place in which there can be no looking ahead; from the viewpoint just articulated as characteristic of these novels, Australia, as a nation, is paralysed, unable to determine who and what it is and as such unable to proceed.

Space

‘It is a continent of dreams we inhabit, a waiting continent. All of who have set foot in its bush, its lonely places, know that silence – The continent is dreaming, We have felt it and been afraid, and turned to trivial things, and retired to the outer rim as if ready to depart’ (Ireland 1979:310).

The theme of space in Ireland's work addresses displacement, belonging and interactions of diversity in Australian culture. The city in The City of Women is a liminal space. Daniel argues that it is an imagined place, played out in the central character, Billie's, apartment in Sydney. As Daniel states, ‘The theatre of the novel is her flat, the cast her creations, the City her fiction, fashioned out of her propositions about the varieties of pain and decay, love and death, making new connections between herself and the world because the old ones have failed her’ (1982:130). However, it is less imperative in a magical realist reading to establish if the city is imagined or real, as Billie never doubts its reality, and thus, the reader is encouraged to also engage with it as real. Interestingly, for a magical realist reading, Daniel goes on to say, ‘The city is no fantasy but the obverse face of reality, no escape from reality, but the means of contending with it’ (1982:156). The City of Women is a sacred, although not necessarily safe space that allows Billie to play out her story. As Faris states, ‘Many magical realist fictions…carefully delineate sacred enclosures…’ (1995:174), as an antidote to the spatial homogeneity of realism that abolishes the older form of sacred space, ritual and cyclical time (Faris 1995:173).

This thematic employment of sacred space also occurs in The Unknown Industrial Prisoner. The workers escape the invasive and impersonal space of Puroil by crossing the river to the refuge of the Home Beautiful in the boat of The Volga Boatman. This series of ramshackle huts devoid of anything but alcohol and prostitutes is run by The Great
White Father, who appears to have some level of freedom from the despotic regime of Puroil, a sense of freedom he encourages the other workers to claim for themselves, (this freedom operates only for men in this world, wherein women appear purely as objects of pleasure). Here, identity and self-determination is allowed the characters before returning once again to the anonymous and oppressive refinery. This is a magical, half-real, half-imagined place hidden by the rapidly decreasing mangrove swamp. There is the overwhelming sense throughout the novel that this last outpost of freedom and peace will be discovered at any moment, making it ever more sacred, and made even more holy in the fact it is run by the Father. The Home Beautiful is also a place of belonging for the displaced workers of the factory. The workers, for the most part, are forced into ridiculously long hours, and sleep in shifts at the factory on rags on the floor. There is little space assigned to them, and Puroil encourages this, ensuring that no worker gets too comfortable. Even when the workers get back to their real homes, they are often only transitory visitors. The smell of the refinery so offends Blue Hill's wife that before being allowed into the house he must completely strip off. These workers are in a constant state of displacement, which serves the purposes of Puroil, to keep them fractured, disrupted, uncertain and unlikely to take organised action against the horrific work conditions of the refinery.

Identity

As a strategy to destabilise meaning, identity is rarely fixed in Ireland's novels. The fact that so many characters in A Woman of the Future undergo metamorphosis means it is impossible to achieve any sense of fixed identity. Resisting fixing identity, as a means by which to resist the fixing of meaning and the formation of ideology, occurs also in The Unknown Industrial Prisoner. A succession of characters with tiny fragments of the narrative in their hands march by the reader, only to disappear just as quickly without allowing the reader time to understand their purpose. The reader, as with the mosaic narrative, is left in a state of flux. Indeed, not even the characters are entitled to know their purpose, with one character asking, ‘We know that man is alienated from his true function, but what is he? What is his true function? This is the hardest question. What should he do? What should he try to be?’ (1971:25).
As with Alethea’s Australia in *A Woman of the Future*, the right to an identity is based on the ability to be a productive member of society, and despite the desperation of the workers to escape Puroil, many find when they do that they long to return to the only identity with which they are familiar. Ireland is concerned with Australia’s colonisation, both historical and contemporary, and with releasing the culture from the archaic notions of identity that fail to represent society. As the narrator of *Prisoner* notes:

> They took it as quite the natural thing that this patch belonged to Britain, that to France, another to America and so on from one valuable patch of Australia to the next. Yet if you referred to them as natives of an underdeveloped colony with not enough guts to toss the foreigners out as the Indonesians did, they’d look at you (1971:48).

Australia, according to Ireland, is unable to admit it is controlled by foreign ownership and foreign culture; that Australia is colonised even well into the twentieth century. At the same time Australian society appears unwilling to relinquish the idea of itself as maternally defined by the empire, no longer just Britain, but of the remainder of the Western world. Ireland also addresses perceptions of Australian national identity in *A Woman of the Future*. Rather than continuing to be defined through a colonial past, Ireland suggests that Australia look to the future. ‘Alethea Hunt is…a metaphor for the possibilities of a country’s future. Brilliant, reckless, cynical, beautiful, fiercely individual and compellingly real, Alethea is a metaphor for Australia still in its adolescence’ (Daniel 82:110). By imagining an alternative way to view Australia's national identity, he reveals the ideology embedded in the current sense of nationhood, the masculinity of mateship, which conceals a rampant sexism, the inherent racism in Australia’s ‘tireless commitment to Britain and a history of discriminatory immigration policy, including the Citizenship test*[^1] It also suggests a sense of worth and identity only to be gained through employment.

A culture of ‘them and us’ is endemic of Australian society, and this is made apparent in Alethea’s fate in *A Woman of the Future*. She transforms from the idealised vision of

intelligent, healthy, young woman to an incomplete metamorphosis somewhere between human and animal. Her body transgresses any binaries. She states:

Everything I thought I was wrong. The tall girl who seemed to succeed at everything she touched – so healthy and intelligent – contained all the time the seeds of failure and shame. The person who seemed certain to step through the grading gate to become one with the responsible, hard-working Servants of Society, was becoming something other than human (Ireland 1979:347).

Helen Daniel states of this:

In the last part of the novel she is a divided self, and into the division are subsumed all the opponent forces of the novel: freedom and servitude, male and female, fertility and sterility, growth and stasis, future and the past, the dynamic Alethea and the tame society…the object and the word (1982:126).

Deconstructing binary oppositions undermines what is known and sayable about the world. Alethea’s transformation works to resist fixed meaning. As Bhabha states, the ‘…boundary that secures the cohesive limit of the western nation may imperceptibly turn into a contentious *internal* liminality that provides a place from which to speak both of, and as, the minority, the exilic, the marginal, and the emergent’ (1990:300). Ireland flaunts this system to divest these binary structures, which always value one side of the binary over the other, of their power, and Alethea’s transformation into a leopard is a potent manoeuvre to dismantle and merge the separation generated by binaries.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued for Ireland’s contribution to the project of questioning, critiquing and collapsing the myths of Australian nationhood. This establishes the basis for a reading of Australian culture and society through the use of magical realism. Through his example it has been made apparent the ways in which magical realism is capable of revealing and reinscribing images and ideologies of Australia. Daniel states, ‘The fiction of the city is the other face of reality, and Ireland's fictions are, in form and content, the other face of the reality of contemporary Australia’ (1982:157).

I employ this quote here as an introduction to the following chapter, the first of the creative works, *The Joy before Thinking*. Of the two creative components, this play in
particular functions as the obverse face of the reality of contemporary Australia. In embedding the creative component of this thesis within the theory, my intention is to encourage the reading of the theoretical through the creative and vice-versa. In providing a chapter on David Ireland in an otherwise theatre based discussion, I have attempted to illustrate the applicability of magical realism to the issues of Australian identity, culture and history. In so doing my hope is that the following play will be read through the marvellous examples of Ireland’s work, and the critical questioning of Australia that is set up in this chapter. Specifically, in positioning this play immediately after the chapter on Ireland, my intent is to align the reader’s gaze with the Otherness investigated in both Ireland’s writing and my own. This Otherness is manifested through the themes identified in this chapter including identity.

Resisting the normalisation of identity manifests as a feminist critique of gender in *The Joy before Thinking*. The character of Eve, the very image of the perfect, middle-class housewife and mother is played by a man in the 2008 production at Theatreworks. Eve has a monologue early in the play in which she states that all women are made to be mothers as God has given them a uterus. She is dressed femininely and behaves in a lady-like manner. In the original work-in-progress in 2005 the part was played by a woman. Whilst the sense of parody of feminine affectation was still apparent, it is all the more heightened and exaggerated when the part is played by a man. My intention in recasting this part was to suggest the culturally constructed nature of femininity and to question the very text that Eve delivers especially relating to the often unquestioned role of women as mothers. In this case, my research through practice was able to radically alter the playtext and to shift the play into a far more overt and successful critique of gender identity.

*The Joy before Thinking* is a critique of contemporary Australian culture and political environment. In analysing Ireland’s novels, I was made acutely aware that the questions I am posing in my own creative work have not differed from the questions posed by writers such as Ireland, over the last five decades (and more) of contemporary Australian culture and society. The magical realist approach in both Ireland’s writing and my own generates engaging and dangerous worlds. *The Joy before Thinking* and Ireland’s novel *A Woman*
of the Future (and arguably The City of Women) inhabit urban, domestic spheres which are then subverted through a disjunction in space and time. This is done by locating the action in a not too distant future time, but one in which the laws of cause and effect have been radically altered. This is the known world turned on its head. In so doing, a critique of history is made possible through the temporal and spatial distancing effect. In The Joy before Thinking I suggest a future time through a heightening of already existent societal fears and restrictions. Children cannot be conceived without fertility treatment, approval must be gained to be exempt from a nuclear family, the nation is under a military controlled curfew and there is a campaign to eliminate an unknown and unidentified threat. These extreme parodies of contemporary society suggest a normalisation of behaviour through fear and repression. The occupation of the liminal allows for the recasting of these contemporary issues by manifesting a world just outside of the present reality, in which the laws of cause and effect are subverted.

The subversion of cause and effect is achieved through the coexistence of the concrete and the abstract registers. In Chapters Four and Five I discuss this, including a discussion of the liminal, and the subversion of time, space and history as it relates to the following creative work and the plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo. As an introduction to the theoretical analysis of the playtexts I offer the first creative component as a full length example of magical realism in the theatrical context. In so doing I hope to establish a more complete and satisfying engagement with magical realist theory in the following chapters. In addition, I offer this play as the next chapter with the intention of allowing the reader to see how I have engaged with magical realist theory thematically and formally, read through the work of David Ireland.
CHAPTER THREE. THE JOY BEFORE THINKING
THE JOY BEFORE THINKING

CAST

Sarah  25 years old. Looks younger than her age. Beautiful and strong.
The Woman/Mary  35 years old. An unexceptional, average looking woman.
Eve  40 years old. Masculine and tall frame, but femininely dressed.
Lilith  In her 50’s. Wild hair and wild eyes. Voluptuous and feminine.

SETTING

Except for Scene One and Four, the play is set on the roof garden of a high-rise block of apartments in the middle of a busy city.
SCENE ONE

The Woman, plain and dressed in a non-descript uniform, is standing, motionless, on the stage. Sarah, around 30 years old, but with an eternally youthful face, emerges from the audience, where she has been sitting, and comes to stand in line with an invisible but audible crowd. She moves forward one place at a time, jostling for space in the busy queue. The Woman is standing behind a counter. She suddenly sparks to life as Sarah approaches. The crowd noise fades.

Woman: Next!

Sarah approaches the counter.

Form please.

Sarah hands over a form.

You haven’t filled in your address.
Sarah: We might be moving.
Woman: Your current address.
Sarah: 11 Haynes Street, North Melbourne
Woman: Postcode?
Sarah: 3051.
Woman: Pre or Post-disevolvement?
Sarah: Pardon?
Woman: Is your child still with you?
Sarah: He’s outside. Apparently he’s not allowed in the building.
Woman: Pre-disevolvement.

The Woman scribbles furiously on the form.
Sarah: How old?
Woman: What’s disevolvement?
Sarah: It’s the official term.
Woman: For the children evaporating?
Sarah: We don’t refer to the cases in that way.
Woman: The children?
Sarah: You’ve come to register your child?
Woman: They told us to. At his school.
Sarah: A precautionary measure. All children under the age of seven go onto the national database. Makes it easier to track them when they do disappear…disevolve.
Sarah: You expect they’ll all go?
Woman: Sooner or later. It seems inevitable.
Sarah: Why?
Woman: Relationship.
Sarah: I'm sorry?
Woman: Your relationship to the child?
Sarah: I am his mother.
Woman: Your name?
Sarah: Sarah Winterdark.
Woman: Date of birth?
Sarah: My son's or mine?
Woman: Yours
Sarah: 2nd February 1983.

Woman: Husband?

Sarah: I don’t have one. He isn’t…

Woman: The child’s father. His name and date of birth.

Sarah: He isn’t involved.

Woman: His name?

_Sarah hesitates._

Yes?

Sarah: I’m not sure.

Woman: Oh. I’ll just put down ‘unknown’. Age?

Sarah: He'll be seven in three weeks.

Woman: No. The father.

Sarah: As I don’t know his name…

Woman: Yes, it’s not likely that you’ll know his date of birth. Unknown. Right, your son's name?

_Sarah stares hard at the woman. There is a long pause._

*(speaking more slowly)* Can you tell me your son's name Mrs. Winterdark?

Sarah: Disevolvement.

Woman: Please, Mrs Winterdark. Answer the questions.

Sarah: What does it mean?

_The Woman shuffles her papers._
Woman: As yet, there has been no official scientific data to verify any of the proposed theories. Indeed, there has been dissent amongst the ranks as to whether or not we should believe the parents that bring us these stories.

Sarah: Stories?

Woman: Disevolvement is a very new phenomenon. Our team was only established 6 months ago. We should complete these questions. Then we can get on with the good business of registering your son so this unfortunate occurrence doesn’t eventuate in your nice little life. What was your reason for conceiving Mrs. Winterdark?

Sarah: Pardon?

Woman: The reason for your son's conception? We have a list of options to make it easier. A) Was it to save your marriage?

Sarah: No.

Woman: B) to be like all your friends?

Sarah: No.

Woman: C) a reason to no longer work?

Sarah: No.

Woman: D) Family expectation?

Sarah: No.

Woman: E) further ways to spend your money?

Sarah looks at the woman in disbelief.

I don't think we have any more reasons for conception…

Sarah: He was conceived naturally.

Woman: You mean after a fit of passion?

Sarah: That’s a nice way of saying it.
Woman: Ulterior motive?
Sarah: No.
Woman: And your fertility treatment?
Sarah: None.
Woman: And do you have your Exemption from the Nuclear Family Pass?
Sarah: *(Gritting her teeth)* I left it at home.
Woman: It says here you never formally applied for one. Is that correct?
Sarah: I have an issue with this…
Woman: *Mrs. Winterdark*…
Sarah: Ms.
Woman: What?
Sarah: Ms.
Woman: Meese?
Sarah: I am MS Winterdark.
Woman: Oh, msssssee. I see.
Sarah: How many children have you got back?
Woman: As of todays date…none.
Sarah: And how many have gone?
Woman: As of today’s date…I’m not really supposed to discuss this with you.
Sarah: My son’s class is nearly empty.
Woman: It is significant.
Sarah: And none have been found?
Woman: We’re optimistic about the future!
Sarah: How can you know?

Woman: All based on statistics. Very important government data. Complicated.

Sarah: I don't understand how…

Woman: Best not to try. Well, I think we have everything we need.

Sarah: I brought a picture of my son.

Sarah fishes through her bag. She draws it out.

Woman: Don’t show me that! It’s not permitted. We don’t need it.

Sarah: Surely it can only help.

Woman: It cannot and does not help. Please return the item to your bag.

Sarah returns the photo to her bag.

As government employees we cannot risk exposure to the H factor. Contamination would be mean immediate dismissal.

Sarah: So you can’t look at anything?

Woman: Anything to do with the children.

Sarah: But it’s your job.

Woman: Collecting and cataloguing the accumulated data is my job.

Sarah: Surely looking at a photo…

Woman: Thank you, you’ve been very helpful. We’ll let you know by SMS when your child’s data has been successfully added to the register. Don’t forget to access our other helpful info-bits via SMS including minute-by-minute updates on the success of the H factor eradication plan. Did you know we are almost 87% towards the target total for this year? With your help, we could reach that target early and all live in a safer, more peaceful world.

Sarah: I don’t have a mobile phone.
Woman: No mobile phone?
Sarah: No.
Woman: That’s significant. You should have mentioned it.

*The Woman types something into her computer.*

There is a mobile number registered to your name.
Sarah: I lost my phone. How do you have that information?
Woman: Get a new one.
Sarah: I never used it.
Woman: How do people contact you?
Sarah: They don’t.
Woman: *Ms Winterdark, you really should secure a new handset.*
Sarah: How is this relevant? I mean, more relevant than my son’s picture.
Woman: Any post office sells them. You can go pre-paid. You don’t have to sign up to a plan, although they are generally better value.
Sarah: Wouldn’t it be more relevant for me to tell you what I have seen?
Woman: What have you seen?
Sarah: My neighbour’s child. I saw him disappear.
Woman: You saw it?
Sarah: He was on the swings.
Woman: What do you mean?
Sarah: Outside his house. He was going so high, the wind rushing passed him. Then he let go. I thought he would fall, but he just kept getting higher and higher, floating above the tress. I didn’t take my eyes off him. He just faded away.
Woman: You saw it?

Sarah: Yes.

Woman: You witnessed a disevolvement?

Sarah: Isn’t that the way it normally goes?

Woman: There have been no witnesses up to this point.

Sarah: How can they know then? The parents?

Woman: Here one minute gone the next. That sort of thing. I’m not sure what this means.

*The Woman looks increasingly nervous.*

Sarah: He looked peaceful.

Woman: I wouldn’t go on if I were you.

Sarah: I didn’t feel scared for him at all.

Woman: Please be quiet.

Sarah: In fact, I quite envied him…

*The Woman’s phone rings. She picks it up without speaking. After a few moments she replaces the handset. Her mood has changed.*

Woman: Mrs. Winterdark, I do have a few more questions. We can’t hand this form in incomplete after all. You said you might be moving, is that right? Can I have that address please?

Sarah: I haven’t decided yet…

Woman: Well, your mother’s address then.

Sarah: My mother’s address?

Woman: Just in case Mrs. Winterdark.
Sarah: In case?

Woman: *In the event of an emergency.*

Sarah: I don’t know it off hand.

Woman: Mrs. Winterdark, you must answer these questions. You don’t have a choice.

Sarah: She lives in...Queensland.

*Instantly the phone rings. Once again the Woman does not speak, but listens and then replaces the handset.*

Woman: You know that we need the whole truth if we are to return your child to you Sarah.

Sarah: My child is just outside.

Woman: It’s only a matter of time…

*Her tone changes. She looks around. The phone starts ringing. She does not answer.*

*(Whispering)* Don’t go home! Go now. Get out of here! Don’t look back.

Sarah grabs her form from the Woman’s hands. *Without looking back, she turns and runs. The photo of her child flutters to the ground behind her. The Woman picks it up. The phone keeps ringing.*
SCENE TWO

A rooftop garden. Lilith enters and sets up a basic washing line and then hangs out the clothes. Now, there is a washing line, a simple string between two poles with children’s brightly coloured clothing fluttering in the breeze. The first four items spell out the letters H, E, L and L. The fifth item is wrapped around itself on the line. Lilith exits.

Sarah appears on the roof garden. The ringing phone stops. She looks around.

Sarah: Mum?

It is eerily silent. Sarah wanders around the rooftop garden, slowly, taking it all in. It has been a long time since she has been here. She notices the clothes on the line and straightens the last item. It has the letter ‘o’ on it. The clothes now read ‘hello’. Sarah looks over the edge. Eve appears from the apartment. She spies Sarah and is instantly terrified. She grabs her binoculars from her wicker basket, runs at Sarah and smacks in her the back of the head. Sarah falls to the ground, unconscious.

BLACKOUT.
SCENE THREE

Sarah is tied up in a chair. She is blindfolded and gagged. Eve is pacing. She is concerned, unused to her violent actions. She whips off Sarah’s blindfold. Her eyes are open and she is trying to yell through the gag. She is clearly very angry. Eve hesitates. She is overwhelmed. She continues pacing, trying to figure out what to do with her hostage. Sarah grows increasingly agitated. Eve attempts to touch Sarah to soothe her but Sarah thrashes about in her chair. Eve yelps in fear.

Eve: Now listen to me. I’m just a woman on my own doing what I have to do to protect myself.

This does not calm Sarah.

But I’m fair so I am going to give you a chance to explain yourself. In one moment. First, you must calm down. How can I remove your gag with you thrashing about like that?

Sarah stops moving. She is panting. Eve gingerly reaches towards the gag and quickly unties it. She moves hurriedly away from Sarah. The two women pause and stare at one another.

Sarah: Who are you?

Eve: I’m going to ask the questions.

Sarah: (yelling) Who are you!

Eve: Eve. Mother of three. All gone. Mimi, Michaela and Madeline. 3, 5 and 7. All at once. There one minute, gone the next.

Sarah: Untie me.

Eve: Better all at once than in dribs and drabs, don’t you think? They say they’re all going to go anyway.

Sarah: Untie me.
Eve: 236 days ago. I was one of the first. I rallied the government for the establishment of the DCSS. The Disevolved Children’s Social Service. You have registered haven’t you?

Sarah: Untie me!

Eve: Not sure how much good they do. But it’s comforting isn’t it?

Sarah throws her chair over violently. She releases herself quickly from the badly tied restraints. She stands. Eve runs to the wall screaming. Sarah does not move. She touches the back of her head where Eve hit her.

Eve: I’m so sorry about that little bang on the head. I thought you were going to kill me! Or rob me. That is why you’re here isn’t it?

Sarah: Why are you here?

Eve: Me?

Sarah: Why are you on my mother’s roof?

Eve: Your mother’s? You’re not…You’re Lilith’s daughter?

Sarah: You know my mother?

Eve: Yes! Yes! Oh yes! Hallelujah! We’re on the same side. Thank heavens! I thought for sure you had the look of a killer. There has just been so much of it lately.

Sarah: Why are you here?

Eve: This is my station!

Sarah stares unknowingly at Eve.

Eve: My P.V.P lookout station. Parents for Vigilance and Protection. I established them 3 months ago. We have twenty posts now. This is mine. It’s important to keep active. A non-intrusive way to assist in the return of our children.

Sarah: What are you doing on my mother’s roof?
Eve: Wonderful woman your mother.

Sarah: Where is she?

Eve: Took me in from the cold. Metaphorically speaking. It was a low point. I’ve had a few low points.

Sarah: When was she last here?

Eve: You see I knew this would be the perfect spot, but that bastard across the street wouldn’t even let me in the building. Your mother was walking past and invited me up here. We’ve been great mates ever since. Keep an eye out. She’s away a lot.

Sarah: Has she gone somewhere?

Eve: She’s underground I imagine.

Sarah: Underground?

Eve: I shouldn’t speak of it. She’s very discreet.

Sarah: About what?

Eve: She speaks so highly of you.

Sarah: She does?

Eve: You shouldn’t be surprised. You’re just like her.

Eve’s phone rings.

Sorry.

Eve rummages through her basket and draws out her phone.

Hello?

She is silent as she listens. Her face drops. She puts the phone on loudspeaker and holds it towards Sarah.
Voice: This is a pre-recorded message. Do not leave your current location. If you are outside go immediately to your home or to the home of your nearest friend or relative. If you are unable to do so, go directly to the school nearest your current location. A national curfew begins in thirty minutes. This is a state of emergency. Anyone found outside after this time will be taken into police custody. Do not ignore this message. This is a pre-recorded message.

Sarah: My mother.

Eve: Shocking. Thank goodness we are safe inside, hey?

Sarah: Where’s my mother?

Eve: She hasn’t been here for days.

Sarah: Where did she go?

Eve: She didn’t say. You know what she’s like. Here one minute, gone the next. My husband will be fine. No children to be concerned about. Just me. Safely tucked away here. Do you have any children?

Sarah: I’m not staying here.

Eve: You can’t leave. They won’t let you out.

Sarah exits before Eve can finish her sentence.

Eve: You won’t get out of the building. It’s not safe out there. The government is obviously trying to protect us from something…(She fumbles for the word)...well, something just awful…Ah, just like her mother.

Eve is left alone on the roof garden.
SCENE FOUR

The Woman from the DCSS appears on the street with an armful of children’s photos and files. She is lost. She drops the files. She fumbles through them looking for a piece of paper. Lilith appears.

Lilith: Need a hand?

_The Woman looks up at Lilith, terrified._

Should you be out here?

_The Woman gingerly shows Lilith her government pass._

Looking for something?

_The Woman nods. Lilith picks up a few of the scattered photos and then hands them back to the Woman._

You’re very brave, being out here, with that information.

_The Woman attempts to protest._

You’re doing an important job.

_Lilith starts to walk away. She pauses and pulls a piece of paper out of her pocket._

What’s this? Is this what you are looking for?

_She hands it to the Woman. The Woman smiles in relief._

It’s just around the corner. Take a right at the next intersection. About halfway up. Don’t be intimidated by the young one. She’s all heart.
Underneath. And get a move on. They’ll kill each other if you don’t get there quick.

*The Woman stands awkwardly with all her files.*

Shall I take those off your hands?

*The Woman is hesitant.*

I’ll take good care of them.

*The Woman gratefully hands over her bulky load. She hurries off. Lilith hugs the files to her. Children’s shoes fall from the sky.*
SCENE FIVE

Eve and Sarah sit side-by-side on the roof garden. Eve is holding a glass of wine.

Eve: I’ve always maintained that women were put on this earth to be mothers. After all it’s our God given right. You can’t deny that. We are made to be mothers.

Eve looks to Sarah for a response. Sarah stares anxiously ahead.

I’m always amazed at these women who question whether or not to have children. Isn’t it simple? You have a womb. God gave it to you. Reproduce!

Sarah is startled out of her thoughts by Eve’s last statement. She looks at Eve blankly, and then returns her gaze ahead.

I personally couldn’t wait to be a mother. I’d have had more, but Harry seemed convinced I’d only have more girls and he couldn’t really see the point in that. Oh, he loves them though. Just adores them all. I just can’t get enough of them. They make me so happy.

Eve blurts out a single unexpected sob. Sarah looks at her. Eve holds up her hand in protest. She wipes her eyes with her sleeve. She quickly regains her composure.

There really is something special in the bond between mother and child, isn’t there? Fathers have a bond, but it isn’t the same. When something happens to your child, it’s as though it has happened to you. There’s no difference between their flesh and yours. (Pause) I feel quite absent.

She stands and fills her wine glass with a nearby bottle. There are several empty ones alongside. She goes to the edge and peers over.

It is peaceful isn’t it? There’s not a single soul down there.

Sarah: The curfew.
Eve: Oh yes, you’re right. Well, it certainly makes things peaceful.

Sarah: They’ve locked us into the building. We’re prisoners.

Eve: Well, I for one am glad you couldn’t get out. Not a good time to be alone. Strength in numbers.

Sarah looks around.

Sarah: Did you hear something?

Eve: No.

Eve finds her mobile in her wicker basket. She holds it up to the sky.

Mobile networks still down. No surprise really. People have probably panicked and jammed the lines. People do love a panic. Gives them a sense of purpose.

Do you think you might tell me your name now?

Sarah remains stonily silent.

What if I let you doink me in the back of the head? Would we be even?

Eve’s phone springs to life with the noise of about ten text messages being received. She looks at Sarah.

Oh look, my phone seems to be working again. I’ll just ignore those, shall I? We need to get to know each other. Have a little face time. Is there anyone you’d like to call?

Sarah: No thank you.

Eve: A husband? Do you have one of those? Obviously I understand that single motherhood is on the rise…

Sarah: Like the crime rate.
There is a loud bang through the apartment doors.

Eve: What was that? Oh God, what was it?

Sarah: It’s probably mum.

Eve: Shoosh! Be quiet! You’ll lead them right to us. Looters! I bet it’s looters. Or rapists! Rapists and murderers!

Eve is flapping about. Sarah stands.

Sarah: Sit down.

Eve: Don’t let anyone in here! Your mother coached me on this. No matter who it is, no matter what they offer, just say no!

Sarah exits. Eve readies herself, binoculars in hand. Sarah returns, moments later, with the Woman. The Woman takes in her surroundings.

Oh, not the government! Your mother said especially not the government! If it was up to me I’d have the whole bloody place packed with them. They never attack their own.

Sarah: Where is my son?

Eve: You two know each other? Your son is missing? You have a son?

Sarah: Where is he?

Woman: I don’t know.

Sarah: He was with me until I saw you! You made me leave him outside!

Woman: It wasn’t us.

Sarah: You threatened me.

Woman: No! No, I was trying to help.
Sarah: Where did you take him?

Woman: It isn’t the way things are done.

Sarah: Where is he?

Woman: He must have disevolved.

Sarah: No.

Woman: Yes, Sarah. The curfew has been called because approximately eight hours ago the last child under the age of seven disevolved. They have all gone. Your son included.

Eve: (To Sarah) Your name is Sarah? Never would have picked it.

Woman: The curfew has been called because they think we must be under attack of some kind. The government is terrified. They don’t understand what is happening. No one does.

Sarah: (To the Woman) How did you find me?

Woman: Your mother is on the database.

Sarah: How did you know I’d be here?

Woman: I’ve been tracking you.

Eve: Tracking Sarah?

Woman: Because you saw.

Eve: Saw what? What did you see?

Woman: A disevolvement.

Eve: You saw?

Woman: I wanted to talk to you.

Sarah: How did you get up here?

Eve: You must be very high up in the government.

Woman: I stole a pass.
Eve: You stole a pass? A government employee stealing!

Sarah: Why do they want to speak to me?

Woman: Not them. Me. You left this.

The Woman hands Sarah the photo.

Woman: I looked at it.

Eve: Oh dear, you’re not supposed to do that.

Woman: It was an accident. (Pause) I have it.

Eve: You do? How do you know? What’s it like?

Woman: I went to all the homes of my children.

Sarah: Your children?

Eve: Your cases. Do you mean your cases?

Woman: I asked for a picture of every child that I’ve completed a form for.

Eve: You are breaking lots of rules, aren’t you?

Woman: They didn’t know what to make of me.

Eve: I’m not surprised. It goes against policy.

Woman: But then they started talking. They gave me pictures. Lots of pictures. They told me stories. When I left, they hugged me and thanked me for listening. It was wonderful. I put every photo with every file and I wrote down all the stories. There wasn’t nearly enough room in the ‘other relevant information’ section of the form. So I went outside the lines. I just wrote all over it.

Eve: But what is it? What is the H factor like? Do you have any symptoms?

Woman: It’s wonderful.

Eve: Wonderful?

Woman: I’ve never felt more…welcome.
Eve: She’s delusional.
Sarah: It’s wonderful?
Woman: It’s wonderful to be alive.
Eve: We should call someone. It can’t be healthy for us to be exposed.

_Eve backs away and runs inside to the apartment._

Woman: I wanted to see your son. I didn’t know. I’m sorry. It wasn’t us Sarah. He has gone like all the rest.

_Sarah nods. There is a pause._

Sarah: What would have happened to me today if I had gone home?
Woman: I don’t know.
Sarah: But you suspected something.
Woman: Of course.
Sarah: And you risked your job to warn me.
Woman: Yes.
Sarah: Why?
Woman: I didn’t feel like I had a choice.
Sarah: Oh. Thank you.
Woman: To be honest, I was starting to go a little crazy in that place. Have you ever felt like you were living two lives at the same time? I go to work and take details from distraught parents and fill in forms and file them, and then go home and make my dinner. And then there is this other me, watching and thinking, ‘What in God’s name are you doing? What is wrong with you? Stop it!’
Sarah: But you didn’t?
Woman: I didn’t know how. Stop what? Stop going to work, stop breathing? And I knew something was happening. Even before the children started to go. I just didn’t think it would happen so soon.

Sarah: You knew it was coming?

Woman: Didn’t you?

Sarah: I suppose so. I never believed it was real…

Woman: No, no one did. Perhaps that’s why it’s been so easy for it all to come about. It is too unreal to be true.

*Eve’s mobile phone, in its basket, beeps loudly and intrusively. They both look at the basket.*

Sarah: Ignore it.

Woman: An H Factor SMS no doubt. The campaign has been a huge success. It’s almost gone. I helped make that happen. *(Pause)* What if we can’t actually live without it?

*She stands. Suddenly she is running towards the wall as if to jump off. Sarah grabs her and tackles her to the ground.*

Sarah: You want to kill yourself?

Woman: No, no, of course not. I couldn’t help myself. Please don’t tell.

*Eve enters. She is wearing a surgical mask. She tentatively lifts the mask.*

Eve: What’s wrong?

Woman: I don’t feel very well.

Eve: *(Exclaiming)* It’s started!

Woman: I’m cold.
Eve: I’ll get a blanket. I don’t want her coming inside!

_Eve exits hastily._

Woman: I won’t do it again.

Sarah: Why did you help me? Why me?

Woman: You know what you saw. You know it means something.

_Eve enters again. She is carrying a blanket. She holds another mask out to Sarah._

Eve: Sarah, put one of these on.

Sarah: What?

Eve: Put one of these on.

Sarah: I can’t hear you.

_Eve pulls her mask to the side._

Eve: Protect yourself from contamination.

Sarah: Don’t be ridiculous.

_Sarah takes the blanket and covers the Woman._

Eve: You must Sarah. We can’t all get contaminated.

Sarah: She’s just cold.

Eve: Don’t say I didn’t warn you.

_Eve returns the mask to her face and moves as far from the Woman as she can. She tries to talk to Sarah through her mask._
Sarah: I can’t understand what the hell you are saying.

*Reluctantly, Eve lifts her mask.*

Eve: I said, Sarah, that I tried to rustle up some food. But there’s nothing in there! Nothing! We all saw the adverts on TV about being prepared. Stocked pantry, plenty of bottled water…In case something like this should happen.

Sarah: She doesn’t have a TV.

Eve: More fool her. In any case, it’s too late now. No food for us. We can’t just pop down to the David Jones food hall can we. *Can we?* Special dispensation for emergency rations. We can’t be the only unprepared house. I fancy one of their samosas, big fat things…I hardly have to cook these days for all the wonders of that food hall.

Woman: Tell me about when you saw the child.

Sarah: He was on a swing. When it reached the top he let go and I thought he would fall. But he kept going up and up. And then he was gone.

Eve: Gone?

Woman: How?

Sarah: He faded. It took a few moments, but really the whole thing was over so quickly. There was nothing left behind but his shoes.

Woman: What did he look like?

Sarah: He was dark haired, quite small, maybe four…

Woman: No. How did he seem?

Sarah: He was peaceful. As though he knew he wasn’t in any danger. That something good was happening.

Eve: What do you mean by that?

Sarah: I thought he was making a choice to go. He looked like he wanted to go. But…
Eve: But now you know, don’t you? Now you know what it feels like to lose them.

Sarah: Yes.

Eve: We are their mothers! We protect them. They wouldn’t leave us if they had a choice.

Sarah: To think that my son might have had a choice and left me anyway…

Eve: You are one of us. No more romantic illusions of children floating off into space.

Sarah: But would it be worse to believe he had no choice? That he is somewhere without hope…

*The Woman jumps up again and runs toward the garden wall.*

Sarah: Stop!

*The Woman stops in her tracks. Sarah goes to her.*

Eve: What in God’s name is wrong with you?

Woman: It’s passing.

Eve: It’s the H Factor. She shouldn’t be here. We’re all going to get sick. We don’t even know who she is. She might not even be a government employee.

Woman: Mary. That’s my name.

Eve: Well Mary, don’t you think you should do what is right for everyone involved?

Mary: I don’t have anywhere to go.

Sarah: Be quiet Eve.

Eve: This is not fair!
Suddenly, there is the almighty sound of a chopper flying nearby. The torchlight from the helicopter is visible scanning the roof. Mary throws herself out of the chair.

Mary: Run! Get inside now!

Eve: Don’t panic. They’re probably dropping food parcels.

Mary: Get inside! Get inside! You’re on the list!

Mary runs to the doors and disappears inside. Eve and Sarah look at one another as the sound of the chopper gets louder. The spotlight of the helicopter stops on Eve. She stares up into the light. The women look at one another in disbelief and run after Mary to the cover of the apartment.
SCENE SIX

Lilith is up on a rooftop overlooking her garden. It is the beginning of a new day. She is with her grandson. She talks to him.

Lilith: It’s a fun being up here, isn’t it? You’re great at playing hidey. Mum doesn’t even know you’re here! I hope she’ll understand why nana had to bring you away for a while.

Shall we play a game? Good! Now tell me, what can you see? You’re friends up there in the sky? Good. And what else? Yes, you’re right. There’s mummy down there. You and me, we’re looking out for your mum.

You’re mates up there, you visit them don’t you? Oh darling, you aren’t in any trouble. I think it’s wonderful! I’ve always known you are a very clever boy. I think mummy might like it there. You two could have a great adventure. Would you like to invite mum along? Good man. You can be like an explorer. You can show her the way! That would be a very big help to your old nana.

Now don’t tell mum, but I’m putting you in charge. You’re going to take over what nana has been doing all these years for your mum. She may not know. In fact she mustn’t, that’s the point of what you and I do. We’re watchers. We see the things no one else does. And best of all, no one knows we are doing it.

Don’t get that serious look on your face! Everything is going to work out just fine. Your mum is strong and she’s good. You make a great team. You’ll know what to do. Oh no, my love, nana can’t come. My eyes aren’t so good anymore. You’ll be a better watcher even than me.

Enough of this hey darling? Now, let’s play another game. I’m going to go and see the grown-ups. Why don’t you visit your mates? Have a play? I’ll race you! And the last one back here is a rotten egg! Ready. Set. Go! Good lad.

Lilith looks up to the sky in wonder as the boy disevolves. A flash of light or sound of laughter indicates he has gone.
SCENE SEVEN

It is very early morning. The light of day is just starting to appear. Sarah appears from the apartment. She has to fight her way through the newly barricaded doors. Every piece of furniture imaginable is shoved in the doorway. She is tentative at first, as she makes her way onto the rooftop garden. She feels like she is being watched. There is the momentary sound of the laughter of children. It fades. Then several pairs of children’s shoes drop from the sky and batter Sarah. She retreats to the wall edge. She looks up and sees Lilith standing on the garden wall.

Sarah: Mum!

*Sarah runs to Lilith and helps her mother down from the wall. Lilith stands and faces her daughter.*

Lilith: Darling!

*She drops her bag and pulls out a water bottle, taking a big swig. She is dressed in combat pants a t-shirt that reads ‘Happy Warrior’.*

How have you been?

Sarah: Mum!

Lilith: When did you get here? Sorry I wasn’t here to meet you. Did you find everything you needed?

Sarah: Where have you been? Don’t you know what’s going on?

Lilith: I need a change of clothes.

Sarah: There is a curfew.

*Lilith grunts disapprovingly.*

Everything is going wrong.

Lilith: It’s been like this for a long time.
Sarah: And you! You’ve been underground apparently! What does that even mean?

Lilith: Eve is a drama queen.

Sarah: She tried to kill me! Who is she?

Lilith: She’s with the PVP.

Sarah: I know that!

Lilith: Darling, it’s ok. Everything is ok.

Sarah: You’re on the list! I’m on the list. Eve is on the list and I’m pretty sure that Mary is on the list by now.

Lilith: Mary? Is she one of Eve’s cronies?

Sarah: No. She works for the government.

Lilith: I told Eve not to let them in.

Sarah: She’s changed sides.

Lilith: That’s good.

Sarah: Mum!

Lilith: Yes darling?

Sarah: What are you doing?

Lilith: I’m not doing anything.

Sarah: You just scaled a forty story building.

Lilith: I could hardly walk in the front door now, could I?

Sarah: Why not?

Lilith: Because of the curfew. Don’t be such a conspiracy theorist darling.

Sarah: Mary has told us everything. There are lists and we are on them.

Lilith: There have always been lists.
Sarah: I have always comforted myself in the belief that you are full of shit! Now I discover that this conspiracy theory world is real and you are a major player. How long has it been like this?

Lilith: The government’s attention is elsewhere. I’m sure we’re only on a sub-list.

Sarah: Please try to be serious.

Lilith: I’m hungry.

Sarah: Are you part of an underground movement?

Lilith: Listen to me Sarah. I don’t own a TV, I don’t read newspapers, I don’t even have a phone. How could I be part of anything? Eve is here because I pity her. She came knocking on the door one day and I let her set up here because she’s desperate. Imagine losing three children. It doesn’t bear thinking about. I’m exactly as you’ve always known – a try-hard activist who probably didn’t spend enough time reading fairy tales to her daughter.

Sarah looks closely at her mother.

Eve’s not here is she?

Sarah: She couldn’t leave after the curfew.

Lilith: I was so looking forward to some time alone with my only child.

Sarah: She won’t be up for a while. Hangover.

Lilith: Good. Let’s sit.

Sarah: I’m glad your back. But I have to tell you…

Lilith: Now, who is this Mary?

Sarah: A case worker for the DCSS. I met her when I went to register. She tracked me down. To warn me. About being on the list. She’s turned. Eve thinks she has the H factor. Mum, I have to tell you something…

Lilith: I’ve heard about her.

Sarah: It only happened yesterday.
Lilith: I’ve heard of it happening.

Sarah: I haven’t. And I read the newspapers.

Lilith: They don’t publish that kind of thing. They keep it quiet. Just take the poor soul away and hope that it passes. It never does.

Sarah: Mum, I have to tell you…

Mary appears descending from a wall of the roof garden. In an instant, Lilith has vanished.

Mary: Good morning.

Sarah looks around confused by Mary’s sudden appearance and Lilith’s absence. Mary is shaking and clearly disturbed.

Sarah: Did you see my…

Mary: Sarah, what do you think it is?

Sarah: What? (She looks up to the wall from where Mary appeared) What were you doing up there?

Mary: I don’t understand it. The H Factor. Is it good or is it bad? Is it in everyone? Do I have it because of who I am or because of who I’m not?

Sarah, unable to locate Lilith, turns her attention to Mary.

Sarah: Didn’t they tell you anything about it?

Mary: The government? Yes they did. They said to be constantly on the lookout for the signs in yourself and others. Even if you only vaguely suspected something you had to report it. They said it was the only way to ensure complete elimination. Even one or two people with it would remind others. That’s how they said it. Remind others. As though it is something we all have that we have just forgotten. And those that can’t forget, I don’t know. If they are careful I suppose they just do a good job of pretending.

Sarah: Or they are taken away.
Mary: Are they?

Sarah: You don’t know anything about that?

Mary: This feeling in my chest is terrible. Last night I felt…I felt so much. And now I feel like I’m going to explode. I can’t keep it all inside of me. I don’t even know what it is. If I have known this before, it must have been a long, long time ago.

_Eve marches in carrying a tray of tea things. She is pristinely presented, hair in place, freshly washed._

Eve: Ladies! Do you really think we should be out here?

Sarah: What difference does it make? They know where we are.

Mary: I can’t stand being inside.

Eve: (To Mary) It’s probably better that way. I rustled up some tea.

Sarah/Mary: No thank you.

Eve: (Eve is distraught) Fine.

Mary: I’ll have some. On second thoughts.

Eve: No, it’s fine.

Sarah: Eve, tea would be lovely.

Eve: I don’t like feeling useless you know.

Sarah: We’ll all have some tea. How did you sleep?

Eve: Fine, thank you. Surprisingly. I thought I’d have been too het up to sleep.

Sarah: You probably needed it.

Eve: Yes. It has been a rather difficult few…months.

_Mary places her hand over her mouth._
Mary: Sorry, I forgot my mask.

Eve: I’m sure we all have it by now if we’re going to get it.

Sarah: I suspect you’ve had it all along.

Eve: Pardon?

Sarah: Well, we are on the list. There must be a reason.

Eve: I don’t have it! I have a strong constitution. I don’t pick things up.

Sarah: It might not be such a bad thing.

Eve: The government wouldn’t be so insistent on doing away with it, if it was of benefit to us.

Sarah: What’s of benefit to us might not be of benefit to them.

Eve: The government is on our side. After all we elected them.

Mary: There was some talk. Little things would make it into the office from above.

Sarah: What?

Mary: It was all so vague.

Sarah: Tell us.

Eve: This is nonsense.

Mary: Why did we have to keep away from the children? And why did no one in the department have young families? If a woman got pregnant she was transferred to another area, but I heard that they would offer them big redundancy packages if they just went away altogether. I don’t know what they were so scared of.

Sarah: That you would be reminded of something.

Mary: You don’t think…

Sarah: I don’t know. It’s possible…

Eve: What are you talking about?
Sarah: Can they get rid of every child…

Mary: The photo! It’s what triggered this in me!

Sarah: They’re eliminating the children?

Mary: And pretending to help get them back!

Sarah: But they haven’t got any back.

Mary: No, they haven’t. They don’t want to!

Eve: Quiet! Please, ladies. The tea is getting cold.

Sarah: Eve, it explains it.

Eve: Do you take milk?

Sarah: Eve.

Eve: Mary, will you please sit down? You’ve got to keep your strength up.

Sarah: Eve!

Eve: I’m not listening. This is conspiracy theory rubbish.

Mary: We’ll find your children.

Eve: Apparently not. Apparently the government has taken them all away. Now I know, I suppose I can sleep easy at night. I forgot the sugar.

*Eve exits. The women sit silently for several moments. Mary looks around anxiously. Fear overcomes her.*

Mary: We’ve got it wrong.

Sarah: It adds up.

Mary: No. We shouldn’t be talking about this. It’s too dangerous. We should go inside.

Sarah: My son is gone and no one knows why! Or where! I have nothing more to lose! *(Calling out)* Mum!
Mary: Sarah. You don’t want them to get you.

Sarah: I don’t care. I don’t care! They can have me.

Mary: No they can’t.

Sarah: Mum! Get out here now! I want some answers.

Mary: Sarah, I don’t think she is here.

Sarah: She is!

Mary: Maybe you should have some tea.

Sarah: I don’t want tea. Mum!

Mary: Calm down.

Sarah: She is here!

Mary: You’re upset.

Sarah grabs Mary in sheer frustration.

Sarah: Mary, if you know something, you must tell me. Anything! Please! Where is he?

Sarah let’s go of Mary. She sinks to the ground. There is a long pause

Mary: If I tell you what I know, I don’t know what they will do to me.

Sarah: What do you mean?

Mary: I’ve never told a single soul. I was never meant to know.

Sarah: What is it?

Mary: They might kill me Sarah.

Sarah: I have lost my child. If you don’t tell me, I might kill you.
Mary composes herself.

Mary: I’d just broken up with my boyfriend. I thought he might be the one, so I was really down, which is why I agreed to go out with John in the first place. John was in the research and development department. I suppose he had the respect and the money I should have aspired to but he was really unattractive. I wouldn’t have wanted him to be the one, but I needed a little bolstering.

Sarah: Mary, please.

Mary: As it happened I fell in love with him and we had several beautiful months together. But I got pregnant and he said he would never agree to have children. I didn’t want to do it on my own. And that was the end of that.

Sarah: I’m sorry.

Mary: Don’t say sorry. He really was very unattractive. He had the strangest habit of calling out things when he was in the act. He told me things. In his most vulnerable moment. And then I’d have to pretend he’d said nothing. I tried to bring it up once and he hit me. Just like that. A slap right across the face at the dinner table. A dirty confession in public. I think he was Catholic.

Eve’s phone beeps loudly.

Mary: It’s the phone!

Sarah: Ignore it.

Mary: Mobile phones! They measure people!

Sarah: For what?

Mary: No one thought it would work back then, when it all started. How do you get a whole country to carry those things around? It seemed ridiculous. I read an article in the newspaper once. It took radio thirty years to reach 30 million people; 15 years for TV to reach that number. But it took mobiles just a year. Can you believe that?

Sarah: But what do they measure?
Mary: The H Factor Sarah. It was always the plan. To eliminate the H Factor. If they can measure everyone’s levels, they can control it. Who do you know who doesn’t have one?

*Sarah stands and picks up the phone. In one swift move she launches it off the rooftop.*

Sarah: That’s why they are after me?

Mary: You’re different.

Sarah: I’m not.

Mary: You saw. They know what that means.

Sarah: I have it.

Mary: Unnaturally high levels of the H factor. It’s the only possible answer. No one else has seen. I’m sorry.

Sarah: But what about my son? What has happened to him? What has any of this got to do with disevolvement?

Mary: All I know is that the more children that have disevolved the less of the H Factor. That’s all I know.

*Mary cannot breath.*

Sarah: What is it?

*She gasps for air.*

Sarah: Breathe! Breathe! Eve, I need help!

Mary: My heart!

Sarah: Don’t try to talk. Eve!

*Eve comes running from the apartment.*
Help me. She can’t breath. I think she’s having a heart attack. Don’t stand there. You know first aid. Help her.

The doorbell rings. Eve and Sarah look at one another.

I’ll go.

Eve: But don’t open it. Look first. Don’t let anyone in.

Sarah exits.

Eve: Tell me where it hurts.

Mary: My heart. My chest. It’s going to burst.

Eve: No it isn’t. Lean forward.

Mary does not respond.

Eve: Mary!

Mary: Is this my death?

Eve: You are not dying, you silly woman. You are having a panic attack.

Mary: I can’t breathe.

Mary faints into Eve’s arms. Eve throws Mary over her shoulder effortlessly. Sarah appears.

Sarah: It’s them.

Eve: Them? Did you open the door?

Sarah: No.

Eve: Did they see you?
Sarah: I don’t think so.

Eve: Don’t make a sound.

Sarah: What do they want?

Eve: Who, you mean. Mary, obviously.

Sarah: It could be my mother.

Eve: You’re right.

Sarah: Or me.

Eve: Yes. You did see.

Sarah: Or you.

Eve: Me?

Sarah: You started the PVP. You’re an activist.

Eve: I suppose I am.

Sarah: We’re a dangerous group.

Eve: Do they think we’re some kind of revolutionary bunch?

There is more loud knocking.

Sarah: They are right outside!

Eve: Don’t move.

Sarah: We can’t just stand here.

Eve: Not like this! What should I do with her?

Sarah: What did you do to her?

Eve lays Mary on the ground.
Eve: Should we hand her over? She won’t resist.
Sarah: We can’t. What do you think they’ll do to her?
Eve: Put her in a public servant jail.
Sarah: We can’t. They might not even know she is here.
Eve: They know. No doubt she led them to us.
Sarah: They might have my son.
Eve: Sarah, he disseved!
Sarah: What if he didn’t?
Eve: Why is it so hard for you to believe it?
Sarah: I don’t know. The timing. It wasn’t right.
Eve: It wasn’t exactly a great time for any of us.
Sarah: (Calling out) Mum!

_Eve grabs Sarah and puts her hand over Sarah’s mouth._

Eve: You must not do that.

_Eve removes her hand._

Sarah: (Yelling) Lilith!

_Eve grabs Sarah and clamps her hand over Sarah’s mouth again._

Eve: Sarah! Lilith would expect better of you. Now I am going to remove my hand and then I am going to go inside and see if they are still at the door. Ok?
Mary sits up with a jolt. She starts screaming. Sarah throws herself on top of Mary and covers her mouth with her hand.

Sarah: You cannot make any noise. You have to be quiet. They are here.

Sarah takes her hand away but Mary starts screaming again. She clamps her hand over Mary’s mouth once more.

If you promise not to make a sound I will let you go.

Mary nods. Sarah lets go of Mary. Mary stands. Suddenly she is running to the wall in an attempt to jump off. Sarah grabs her by the leg and then they are both on the ground. They struggle together until Mary makes another break for the wall. Sarah clings to her arm and drags her back. She forces Mary into a chair and sits down on top of her. Eve appears. She takes in the scene.

Eve: Mary, you’re awake.
Sarah: Are they out there?
Eve: They’ve gone. As far as I can tell.
Sarah: They’ll be back.
Eve: Felling better Mary?
Sarah: I am going to stand up. You stay in the chair.

Sarah stands slowly. Mary is momentarily still. But then she is up and running to the wall. Eve grabs her.

Eve: I’ll lock her in the bedroom.

Sarah nods. Eve exits with Mary fighting uselessly in her arms. The sound of children playing can be heard. Sarah looks all around her. Several more pairs of children’s shoes drop from the sky. She looks but cannot see where they have come from. She is baffled.
SCENE EIGHT

Continues straight on from previous scene. Eve returns.

Eve: She’ll quiet down soon.

Eve rummages through her basket.

Did you happen to see my phone? Oh well, I always carry a spare.

Sarah: Have you thought about where they might have gone?

Eve: Of course. (Pause) They’re not dead if that is what you are getting at.

Sarah: I know.

Eve: What do you mean you know? How would you know?

Sarah: That’s my feeling too.

Eve: I think I can hear them at times.

Sarah: You can?

Eve: I haven’t mentioned that to the DCSS! Not talking to me. Playing. Just silly children’s noises.

Sarah: Do you think that means they are close by?

Eve: I don’t know. If they are that is all the more cruel.

Sarah: Do you think there is a way to get to where they are?

Eve: No. No, I don’t. No magic portal has opened up for me to climb through. Wherever they are there is a big sign that says, ‘No grown-ups allowed!’ Never Land.

Sarah: What?

Eve: Peter Pan? Your mother never read you that?

Sarah: No.

Sarah: I don’t know the story.

Eve: Oh darling, you must read it.

Sarah: So if it is Never Land they have gone to…

Eve: Then we’re going to need some bloody fairy dust!

Eve laughs riotously.

Oh, darling, thank you. I haven’t laughed like that in months.

Sarah: I don’t get it. There is no reason for any of this.

Eve: The children?

Sarah: Everything. Life is a…mess.

Eve: Oh, Sarah. Don’t think like that. You must keep fighting.

Eve picks up the binoculars and passes them to Sarah.

Eve: Here. Have a look through these. It’ll make you feel better.

Sarah looks doubtful, but she puts them to her eyes all the same.

Eve: My life is the mess. I’m selfish. I use people. To keep away the silence. For their noise. I can hardly bear the quiet without the girls. It’s worse than anything else, all that nothing. I keep the TV on. I have all the PVP meetings at my house. And company dinners for Harry. Everyone thinks I’m incredibly generous. I’m not. I’m a user.

(Beat) On the plus side I do like being busy; I like being useful. I really have rallied lots of people into action in the last few months. I’m good at that. Strong leadership skills. I’m not afraid to admit it. That’s a sign of a strong leader. Truth be told, oh I hate to say it…
Sarah: Go on.

Eve: You’ll think I’m awful.

Sarah: I doubt it.

Eve: I get more depth, more life, from not having my children with me. My reason for being seems clear now. To assist others. To lead them into action. It sounds appalling.

Sarah: No it doesn’t.

Eve: I thought all I wanted was what I had. It takes something like this to show you otherwise. It’s the one thing you are not allowed to say. Don’t mention you might not have wanted to be a mother that much after all. But in the end we must say to life, ‘I accept your challenge’. Do you understand? Sarah, are you listening to me?

Sarah: I can see something.

Eve: You can?

Eve: What is it? Sarah, tell me.

Sarah: Mum! Get down from there! This instant! And bring me my son! Don’t you shake your head at me! Get down here. Mum!

Eve: Lilith is up there?

Sarah: With my son!

Eve: Oh, that’s wonderful news.

Sarah: That stupid crazy old woman!

Eve: But your child is still here.

Sarah: She doesn’t think at all. What is wrong with her?

Eve: Sarah. Your boy isn’t gone. You were right. He didn’t disevolve. How did you know?

Sarah: I don’t know.
Sarah’s anger builds as she paces, waiting for Lilith to appear. Eve is nervous.

Eve: Sarah, you mustn’t be too hard on your mother. She would have known what she was doing.

Sarah: You really believe in her, don’t you?

Eve: Oh yes. Now she’s a leader!

Lilith appears.

Lilith: They’ve shut off the gas and the water. Just when I wanted to take a piss. Bastards.

The women turn to face her.

Eve: Lilith!

Sarah: Where is he?

Lilith: Mary’s with him. He shouldn’t be out here. I don’t want him to be seen.

There is the sound of children laughing. More shoes fall. Only Sarah can see them.

Sarah: How could you trick me into thinking I had lost my child?

Lilith: Shall we talk?

Sarah: Now you want to talk!

Eve: Sarah, you must hear her out…

Sarah tries to argue but Lilith begins talking.

Lilith: The time is getting close.

Sarah: What are you talking about?
Eve: Lilith has a theory.

Lilith: It isn’t just a theory.

Eve: Lilith, who knows all and sees all, believes that when the moment comes that all the children are gone…

Lilith: There will be a shift.

Sarah: What sort of shift?

Eve: Not a good one.

Lilith: Things can only get so hopeless before people slide into despair. The key is The H Factor. We need to find a way to bring it back!

Sarah: So when all the children are gone…

Eve: No more H Factor.

Sarah: It must be happening now. Mary said…

Lilith: Not quite.

Sarah: Why not?

Eve: (Excitedly) Because all the children haven’t gone!

Sarah: My boy?

Lilith: He is the last one.

Sarah: He is the only thing stopping this shift?

Lilith: No. And yes.

Sarah: Yes and no?

Lilith: He is. And you are. (Beat) Eve, would you go and check on Mary?

Eve: Must I?

_Eve reluctantly exits._
Sarah: No more of this. Enough trickery and double talk.

Lilith: Just trying to lighten the mood ...

Sarah: They were here! Outside the door!

Lilith: And now they are gone.

Sarah: You knew they were coming.

*Lilith does not reply.*

Sarah: Is this about me? Have I caused this chaos?

Lilith: Darling, you must go!

Sarah: Go where?

Lilith: To the children!

Sarah: Can I do that?

Lilith: You’ve got a better chance than anyone else.

Sarah: But why would I want to go?

Lilith: Don’t you get it yet?

Sarah: No! I don’t even know where the children are, or who has them.

Lilith: No one has them. They have gone of their own free will. Under the age of seven the concentration of the H Factor is very high. It fades with age. The children are protecting themselves.

*The sound of children playing. Several pairs of children’s shoes fall from the sky.*

Sarah: What is that?

*Lilith laughs.*
Lilith: What, darling?

Sarah: Don’t pretend you didn’t hear them? And the shoes…

Lilith: I can sense that they are around. But no, I’m not like you. I can’t hear them. Or see them. And shoes?

Sarah: You’re playing with me!

Lilith: No darling, they are. Trying to show you who you are.

Sarah: Are they really that close?

Lilith: To you, yes.

Sarah: No, I’m not buying into this.

Lilith: It is real darling. So is the threat. The children have disevolved for good reason.

Sarah: What am I meant to do about it?

Suddenly all is in darkness. The power has gone out. There is no more light from the city. The sound of sirens can be heard close by. They get louder. Mary suddenly appears, forcing her way through the barricade. She is carrying a torch. Lilith produces one from her pocket. Mary trips and falls hard on the ground as she approaches Sarah and Lilith. Sarah helps her up.

Mary: They’re back! I saw them from the bedroom window. There is an army of them! Eve has the boy. They are hiding under the bed. You must come inside!

Mary looks at Lilith realising who she is.

Sarah: Mary, this is my mother, Lilith.

Lilith: Hello Mary.

Mary: It’s you.

Sarah: You know each other?

Mary: She told me how to find you.
Sarah: (To Lilith) Why would you do that?

Lilith: I knew she had a part to play.

Sarah: What part? What are you talking about?

Mary: Oh Sarah, forgive me.

Sarah: What have you done?

Mary: They sent me to find you.

Sarah: All this is because of you?

Mary: But then you gave me the H Factor.

Sarah: I didn’t!

Mary: And everything changed. I tried to throw them off but they had already found us.

Sarah: Why me? Why are they here?

Mary: No one has ever registered such high levels of the H Factor.

Sarah: How could you do this to my family?

Mary: I’m sorry.

Lilith: No. Sarah, she has done the very best thing for you. For everyone.

Sarah: You showed her how to get here!

Lilith: And now you know what you have got to do!

Sarah: They are banging on the door. They will have all of us in seconds!

Lilith: No, they won’t.

More shoes fall.

Mary: What are those?
Sarah: You can see them?
Lilith: You’re ready Mary. It’s time for you to go.
Sarah: Where is she going?
Mary: Yes, I’m ready.
Sarah: Ready for what?
Lilith: Tell them we are changing things. And tell them Sarah is on her way!
Mary: Sarah, I am so sorry for all of this.
Lilith: Don’t apologise to her. It will all work out in the end. It always does.

There is a blinding light. With that, Mary is gone.

Lilith: Now we must hurry.
Sarah: Where is she?
Lilith: She’s disevolved.
Sarah: I did that to her?
Lilith: Yes darling! Finally, you see! There is no one else like you. That’s why you can go there, to the children. That’s why you must go!
Sarah: I don’t understand.
Lilith: Now you’re just being dull on purpose.

A helicopter spotlight illuminates the rooftop garden. Eve appears through the barricade. She is holding Sarah’s son’s shoes, t-shirt and shorts. She looks at Sarah, speechless. Sarah runs to Eve and takes the clothes.

Eve: Help me! They are in there! They’ve broken down the door!

Lilith runs to the barricade and helps Eve push against it.
Lilith: He’s gone darling. Your boy has gone. And now you must go too.

Sarah looks down at her son’s clothes.

Sarah: How?
Lilith: Like Mary.
Sarah: I can’t do that!
Lilith: Yes you can. You’ve got to!
Sarah: To get my son? If he’s gone, it’s too late.
Lilith: To get all of them! And bring them back!
Sarah: What?
Lilith: Flood the place with the H Factor. You must tell them we need them to come home!
Sarah: Well, what happens if we can’t get back?
Lilith: Your boy is waiting there to help you.
Sarah: Mother! This is too much.
Lilith: It’s up to you now Sarah.
Sarah: What if I can’t find them?
Lilith: You’ve got to try!
Sarah: Where am I going?

Banging on the barricade starts up.

Lilith: Just go! Stop thinking and just go!
Sarah: Why are you so frustrating?
Lilith: Me?
Sarah: Ok, I’ll bloody do it. But if this goes wrong…

Lilith: Yes, yes, hate me for a thousand lifetimes. Now, go!

Sarah looks over the garden wall. She looks back at her mother in sheer frustration. She removes her shoes. There is a flash of light illuminating the darkened rooftop. And then, she is gone. Eve scans the roof, not believing her eyes.

Eve: Where is she?

Lilith: Safe.

Eve: Are we going too?

Lilith: We have a job here, Eve.

Eve: But we need to escape.

Lilith: Might as well stay here and face the music.

There is an enormous crash from inside the apartment. The chairs and furniture from the barricade start to tumble. Eve and Lilith move to the wall of the garden.

Eve: What job? What are we doing here?

Lilith: How many numbers do you have in your phone?

Eve: Hundreds. (Eve scrolls through her phone).

Lilith: I’ve taken the liberty of adding a few more.

Eve: A few thousand!

Eve stares at Lilith blankly.

Lilith: The phones took the H Factor, now they can bring it back. If we spread enough of it around …

Eve: Like a virus?
Lilith: Yes.

Eve: Then what?

Lilith: The conditions are met…

Eve: For the children to come home. My girls?

Lilith: Everybody’s children.

Eve: I could do that?

Lilith: If everyone you know sends a message to everyone they know…

Eve: What can I say in 160 characters?

Lilith: Just tell them help is on the way.

The banging reaches a crescendo as the helicopter draws close. The barricade is almost gone.

Lilith: You’re on the front line now Eve. Ready?

Eve: Ready.

As the lights fade, the sound of the banging turns into the sound of a marching army. It reaches a deafening pitch. Suddenly, in the blackness the crescendo of deafening sound stops. Then, there is the sound of a single text message being sent. And more. And more. And more.
CHAPTER FOUR. THE FIRST ELEMENT: THE CONCRETE AND THE ABSTRACT

This chapter will argue that magical realist theatre emerges from the coexistence of two contrary states, the concrete and the abstract. Through close analysis of the plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo, (and a consideration of The Joy before Thinking), this chapter suggests the contrary coexistence of magical and mundane lends itself to the space and time of liminality. Engaging techniques such as the collision of verbatim, fictional and historical material, and inverting the relationship between the real and the imagined, the case studies generate the liminal site as a potential space of transformation. I situate this as the first and most integral element of a magical realist theatre reading practice, underscoring as it does the discussion of the remaining three key elements.

Schechner states of performance:

All effective performances share this “not-not not” quality…Performing focuses its techniques not on making one person into another but on permitting the former to act in between identities (1985:123).

Magical realist theatre juxtaposes the magical and the real generating the ‘not-not not’ space that Schechner references. This is a malleable and shifting space, which facilitates the possibility of transformation. In combining the magical and the real the possibility for transformation is manifested. Magical realist theatre is engaged with transformation as a means by which to transgress dichotomous thought. The content of the playtexts considered in this thesis are situated in the space between transformations from one state to the next: adolescence to adulthood, life to death and self to other, to name only a few. For example, in Ellis’ Falling Petals (2003) the disease that consumes the children is brought about through the process of trying to occupy two or more states at once, the collision of disparate realms. The children, on the brink of adulthood, falter before their own metamorphosis into fully economically viable adult members of society. This is because they literally cannot occupy the reality that has been constructed for them. The
incomplete metamorphosis, the sickness, represents their entrapment between two states of being. The transformational potential of magical realist theatre emerges also from the space between the fictional world presented in the performance, and the real world from which it is generated. This in-between space is the liminal, described by Victor Turner as ‘…literally “-on-a-threshold,”…a state or process which is betwixt-and-between the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending, preserving law and order, and registering structural status’ (1979:465). In the first creative component, *The Joy before Thinking*, it is apparent that through the occupation of the liminal the characters are able to undertake radical action because they are ‘betwixt and between’ the normal and day-to-day. These acts are as extreme as ‘disevolving’, and as mundane as sending an SMS, but all the characters actions take on a powerful resistance to societal norms because of their location outside of the structures of normal reality. This is enhanced through the juxtaposition of the two competing registers.

**The Concrete and the Abstract**

Theatre operates in two registers, the concrete and the abstract, in the same way that magical realism contrasts two textual worlds, the magical and the real. The abstract register, ‘suppresses the practical function of phenomena in favour of a symbolic or signifying role’ (Elam 1980:8). It is through this abstract register that the stage becomes an Other place, as Counsell puts it, dealing with abstractions, ‘not the tangible and equivocal social world we experience, but a world already quantified, categorized, by the discourse the locus encodes’ (1996:19). In other words, the spatio-temporal frame of the theatrical event has already demarcated an environment separate from the ordinary social space of the audience, and as such anything occurring in that space/time takes on special or abstract meaning. ‘The whole space becomes “illusionistic”’ (1996:18), or to put it another way, magical.

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45 An extended discussion of metamorphosis takes place in Chapter 8.
46 This is Colin Counsell’s terminology (1996). Elam calls these the connotative and denotative (1980).
On the other hand, the concrete register, ‘…does not function symbolically, as its stage is not differentiated from the real, social space/time of the audience’ (Counsell 1996:20). In this space, the illusion is not maintained at all costs. The actor can step in and out of role, and even address the audience, as it is not necessary to hide the mechanics of meaning making, the artifice of performance (1996:18). However, as Elam states, ‘The sign-vehicle may be semantically versatile (or ‘over-determined’) not only at the connotative but also, on occasion, at the denotative – the same stage item stands for different signifieds depending on the context in which it appears’ (1980:12). As a result of these two competing registers, ‘…Theatre is an ‘uncomfortable’ artform because its symbolic register is continually threatened by another, one in which theatre’s fictionality, its meaning-making remains overt’ (Counsell 1996:17).

The two registers can be juxtaposed or one privileged over the other to determine how an audience engages with the performance (1996:20). The project of magical realist theatre is to resist a seamless or closed process of meaning making in narrative or performance, and instead draw attention to the fictionality of what is presented. Paradoxically, however, it is not the intention of magical realist theatre to undermine the validity of the unfolding text. As a result of this, ‘The audience becomes aware of both actors and characters, real place and other-place, and is required to adopt two contradictory postures towards the stage, to view it as both a symbolic locus and a concrete platea’ (Counsell 1996:19). Whilst this is the condition of all theatre, it is particularised and exploited intentionally in magical realist theatre. The event of disevolvement in The Joy before Thinking is an example of this. Whilst the term is not a word used in reality, the seamless integration of it into the playworld, evidenced in the opening scene for example, permits the audiences ready acceptance of the concept. The fact that the play world is a recognisable reality, yet one in which disevolvement occurs, causes hesitation in the audience. This hesitation comes about through the contrary co-existence, yet seamless integration, of that which is known and that which is not known.

This is demonstrated in an example from These People by Ben Ellis, in his employment of verbatim material. These People engages voraciously with the boundary between the
real and imaginary in Australia’s narrative of border protection. For Ellis, the use of verbatim material is complicated by the desire not merely to represent, but to challenge the narrative of national borders. As Ellis states, the meaning-making processes around the issue of refugees in *These People* have to be theatricalised and fictionalised in order to be fully explored, and is, ‘an attempt on my part to show the imaginative realm of ideology, that it is in fact an imaginative transformation of reality’ (2006). Working in collaboration with Benjamin Winspear, the play’s director, Ellis describes their process on *These People*:

We both felt that straight out verbatim theatre, where actors merely quote the results of interviews, would not make for a sufficiently engaging work, because as soon as the audience heard a character speak ‘as refugee’ the character is already spoken for, and then the drama becomes for the audience a matter of having one’s prejudices (however nice) substantiated. We asked ourselves, what’s the problem? And the problem wasn’t ‘refugees’ but Australians’ responses the refugee story. So we decided to investigate the theatrical potentials of those responses (2006).

Ellis achieves the not-not not space by juxtaposing the concrete and the abstract, in the following example, set inside the detention centre in *These People*:

Lyn: …They watched Lateline and the ABC if they could. They were allowed television, but every now and then, mysteriously-

* A Detainee bangs the side of the set.

Detainee: What happened to the ABC?!

Lyn: And they got the papers. They would absolutely hang on whatever Ruddock was saying…

Detainee: We will decide who comes to this country.

Detainee Two: And the circumstances too.

Detainee: According to my information, he may not even be Afghani (2003:31).

As Turner states, ‘To look at itself a society must cut out a piece of itself for inspection. To do this it must set up a frame within which images and symbols of what has been sectioned of can be scrutinized, assessed, and, if need be, remodelled and rearranged’ (1979:468). In employing verbatim material within the frame of the illusionary (the play world) Ellis conjures a space and time outside of, and sectioned off from the normal
workaday reality. In so doing he provides the possibility of reframing and reinscribing the issue of asylum seekers in contemporary Australian culture.

In the following scene in *These People*, Ellis conflates the imagination of the character of the Mother with the pervasive ideology around asylum seekers in Australia. She aligns the market researchers who bombard her daily, with the threat of invasion; the mundane act of doing laundry with the danger of the sexualised, exotic Other:

Mother: Daily acts?

*She scratches the Lotto card furiously. Knocks are added to the phone ringing.*

Market researchers knocking on her door. Iraniansknocking on the door of, on the welcome mat of our own coastline!

*She backs away into a corner, folds clothes, sheets, etc.*

She sees their slender bodies. Iranians are tall, slender, dark-eyes, with penises that are thirteen inches long.

She fears for her daughter.

Daughter: Mummy, I’m in a nation full of Iranian men!

Mother: I’m in the laundry! You should have to apply from your own country before you come here. Apply. That would make sense (2004:15–16).

In both the previous verbatim and fictional examples, Ellis draws on mythical components of ideology whilst grounding the scene in the familiar and everyday, and ‘[t]he combination implies that eternal mythic truths and historical events are both essential components of our collective memory’ (Faris 1995:170). Further to this, the Mother’s manic and erratic behaviour draws into question her knowledge and beliefs. As a result, ‘The delineations between the “rational” existence of the family and “irrational” existence of the asylum seekers are thus completely destroyed’ (Payne 2005:344). This is a technique that Ellis employs throughout *These People*. In this case there is the imagined threat of asylum seekers, the mythical terror inhabiting the familiar environment of the domestic laundry and invading the safety of the family home. As such the play, ‘…demonstrates the extent to which the family’s life is similar to that of those they ridicule, and how easily their circumstances might place them in a similar plight’ (ibid).
Ellis’ examples demonstrate that magical realist theatre’s effectiveness as a tool of transformation comes from the simultaneous presence of the concrete and abstract registers.

It would seem obvious to align the magical with the abstract, and the realism with the concrete, but paradoxically, it appears the opposite model fits best. Magical realist theatre functions to make the meaning making processes overt, and thus the seamlessness of the concrete register, the real world as we know it, is brought into question by the abstract register that highlights the fictionality of both worlds or registers. The make-believe world functions as a cultural corrective, and in so doing, denies the closed systems of meaning making of dominant hegemony. The invisible, magical, or abstract register of the theatre space makes visible normalised hegemonic cultural forces at work in the real world. This has the effect, I argue, of generating the spatio-temporality of liminality (discussed further in this chapter).

The Ordinary Strange and the Strange Ordinary

The juxtaposition of the concrete and the abstract also manifests in magical realist theatre in the way that reality is often represented as stranger than fiction. The illusory nature of both fiction and reality are brought to attention. For example, in intervening in a historical event, *The Black Swan of Trespass* by Lally Katz, demonstrates the issues of Australian cultural representation, and the ongoing marginalisation of identities that do not conform to the dominant standard, for reasons of class, gender and ethnicity. This was especially pressing during the escalated tensions of World War II, evidenced by the enormous furore around the Ern Malley incident. ‘[M]agical realist texts are often written in the context of cultural crises, almost as if their magic is invoked when recourse to other, rational, methods have failed’ (Faris 2004:83). Katz addresses Australia’s identity crisis, at that time and today, by engaging with a historical moment in which many issues came to light (the repressive, traditional and aggressive hegemony at work in Australian cultural production), and others remained hidden (women’s rights, Australia’s cultural elitism). Importantly, Katz engages with history as though it is highly malleable, and
creates a fictional life with the conviction of historical truth. This suggests history’s inherent lies. In addition:

…the factual depiction of the manifestly fictional…also functions as a device that mimics and mocks the authority of the realist discourse, which discursively constructs and simultaneously sanctions those partisan recreations of historical reality (Takolander 2007:223).

The Black Swan of Trespass dismantles the assumed relationship between history and truth by suggesting the impact the fictional person of Ern Malley had on history. In giving Ern life, Katz aligns fiction and history as one and the same and advocates the legitimacy of both in the formation of cultural identity.

As an example of this, in the final minutes of the play, Ern reaches out and is finally able to touch the previously unreachable Princess. As a character in one of his poems, and presented as a figment of his imagination in the script, Princess has been a conduit between the real world historical events of the time the play is set, and the fantasy world of Ern’s imagination. She is also a symbol of Australia at the time of WWII, losing her innocence at the hands of the charismatic and brutal American soldiers:

Ern: I’m touching you. You’re letting me touch you.

Princess: Australia is in transition. We are trying to be somebody. I want to be somebody other than who I am….

Ern: Stay you. Please stay you. (He begins to grope the Princess and force himself upon her). Oh let me. Please let me.

She smiles at him.


At this moment, both Ern and the Princess start bleeding. In being permitted contact with his fantasy, whom also represents the real world outside of Ern’s room, Ern starts to quickly unravel. The collision of the real and the imagined impacts and infects both realms. This reflects the real life events of the Ern Malley Affair, which to this day continue to inform Australian cultural identity.
A further example of the strange juxtaposition of the magical and the real is the incident surrounding Olley’s impregnation by the giant octopus in Kit Lazaroo’s *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*:

*Olley appears in a puddle of light. She holds a bowl of seawater, with a gelatinous tentacled creature floating inside it.*

*Olley:* Mrs Morris? Please? Oh God what have I done? He just slid out of me. I thought it was something I’d eaten. Please Mrs Morris. I don’t feel well. I can see his heart. Beating inside his head. His little mouth sucks. It looks just like mine. What’s to become of us?

*Olley starts to stagger – the bowl is in danger of slipping out of her hands – Dido gets up and snatches it from her, she looks into it in amazement.*

*Dido walks towards the audience with the bowl.*

*Dido:* Look at the creature. He’s all made of jelly.

*The men come closer to look but then turn away queasily.*

*Dido:* You can see his heart. He’s looking at me with his big black eyes. He’s stirring his curly little limbs. Oh. Look at you!

*The men peep into the bowl.*

*Plank:* Eight arms with little suckers. You can see his brain pumping water in and out.

*Dougal:* Poor lorn thing.

*Plank:* This turns the world on its head. Man and beast mingled. In the body of a girl. I must make a theory out of this.

In this example, ‘The ex-centric perspective not only naturalises the magical, but at the same time super-naturalises the real’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:202). Olley defies the laws of nature, and as such her magical ability to produce life with, and love the Kraken makes her ex-centric to the dominant scientific and cultural codes of her environment. The two opposing realms, the empirically verifiable and those that exceed reason, serve to defamiliarise one another. This occurs because two conflicting meaning making modes, the mythical and the scientific are rendered valid at the level of the text generating a malleable and changeable liminal space.
The strange or magical is naturalised when Olley presents the kraken to Dido and Dr Plank. They take the kraken from Olley and immediately begin experimenting on it, having no doubt that it is a wonderful scientific discovery. Yet, their desperate and flawed search for a rational-scientific explanation of the creature renders it invalid and it dies. It is a creature that can exist only in the world from which it is born, and Olley knows that it must be returned to the sea. It is an external manifestation, a symbol, of Olley’s transformational journey. It survives only, as Olley well understands, in the liminal space of her own body (her own journey under the sea positioning her between life and death), or the liminal site of the ocean from which it came. The following example attests to Olley’s liminality, perhaps because she is in fact already a ghost47. As Dido examines Olley after the birth of the baby kraken, she fails to ‘find’ her:

Dido: Why would I lie down?
Olley: Because it be like a tunnel. Didn't your mammy teach you what a great tunnel it is?
Dido: I know what it be like.
Olley: So prepare yourself. It be a great distance.

*Olley stands up on a chair. With great reluctance, Dido begins to lie down on the floor.*

Olley: Not chair. The table.

*Dido gets up onto the table. She lies down on her back.*

Olley: Other way.

*Dido rolls over and lies on her tummy.*

Olley: Now lift your face up.

*Dido lifts her face up and sure enough, her face is at the right height to study Olley's private anatomy. Olley lifts up her skirt - she has breeches on.*

Olley: How does it look.

Dido: Looks all back to normal. Clean and tidy.

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47 This idea of Olley as ghost is supported in the idea that she disrupts the ordinary logic of empirical reality. As Zamora states, the presence of ghosts in magical realism, ‘...is inherently oppositional because they represent an assault on the scientific and materialist assumptions of Western modernity’ (1995:498).
Olley:    Now you have to feel it. You have to put your hand right inside.

Dido:    I know that.

*Dido puts her hand out and sneaks it up under the hem of one of Olley's breeches. She is obviously feeling nothing more than Olley's knee.*

Dido:    Am I there yet?

Olley:    Go higher. Much higher. Maybe best if I show you.

Dido:    No. I know where to find it. *(Stretches up and we see her hand emerge up over the top of Olley's breeches – she has located the belly button.)*

*Oh! Here we are!*

Olley:    I think it come out a bit lower.

This investigation, in addition to the baby kraken’s untimely demise at the hands of Dr Plank and Dido, undermines Olley’s story, not because her story is fabricated or that the creature is not real, but because empirical reality, the epistemological way of knowing the world, has no place in Olley’s adventures under the sea. Olley cannot be known by the ordinary laws of the universe.

The split subjectivities, both colonised and coloniser, between the real and the magical, of Dido and Dr Plank, however, allow them to believe in the realness of the kraken, even if they cannot see the value of saving its life by returning it to the sea. They align themselves with the rational, empirical perspective of the dominant centre and place value in the creature only as to what it can tell them scientifically. A broader reading of this suggests that Dido and Dr Plank, as agents of the colonising power, negate the life of Olley’s baby, and of Olley herself. In aligning their perspective with the dominant, they render Olley’s truth invalid. It is a cruel irony then, that they are later rejected as charlatans by the scientific establishment of Europe. In the centre, they are no more than naïve subjects of a far-flung colony. In attempting to align themselves with a dominant centre that will not have them they further split their subjectivities. They are trapped, betwixt and between. They suffer the condition of the colonised subject of being neither this nor that.
True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea also functions to make the ordinary strange. In the following exchange between Dido and Dr Plank, who has been brought to the colony to undertake an autopsy, scientific thought is made to seem magical and strange. In this isolated colony, religion rather than science is the dominant hegemony. As such, to be in the presence of Plank is for Dido like being in the presence of a god. The unfamiliarity of science to the people of the colony means their exposure to it now in the form of Dr Plank is magical. Dido recounts her discovery of Plank’s published monograph:

Dido: \(\text{(Softly) Does it follow. (Trying to remember) What did it say? Does it follow that the imago will be injured also?}\)

Plank straightens up, amazed. He turns to watch her. She is in a trance, channelling words from the past.

Dido: If you inflict injury upon the larvae, does it follow that the imago will be injured also? \(\text{(Flooded by words) Or in dissolving its former carnation does it dissolve also all trace of injury?}\)

Plank: What did you say?

Dido: Seven studies on dragonflies, from egg through to nymph through to adult.

Plank: Where did you come across that?

Dido: A book the size of my hand with a clasp of red leather. Washed up on our beach when I were twelve…I memberised the first page before my Daddy burnt it….All like a poem, hard at first and then suddenly beautiful. Daddy threw it in fire with a roar of disgust. Filthy pictures of what goes on inside a butterfly’s egg. An insult to Goddy. Never rummage. Never rummage. But I want so bad to know, does it follow that the imago will be injured also?

Positioning the play in the historical time of 1853, and locating it in a nameless colony, generates a liminal space betwixt and between the real and the imagined. Through a distancing frame, which actually draws this critique into present time, a critique of colonisation and the treatment of women, and the normalising force of religion is made possible.

In occupying an imaginary future time in The Joy before Thinking this distancing frame is also employed rendering the ordinary strange, and critiquing otherwise unnoticed aspects
of contemporary society. For example, the use of mobile phones by the government as measuring devices of individuals suggests a naïve acceptance in contemporary society of whatever technology is hoisted upon us. In addition, reframing the mobile phone as sinister object de-naturalises its place as part of the everyday. It is made to seem strange and unknown. The effect of this is a critique of the inability of contemporary ‘advanced’ Western technological society to find tools of cultural communication and human connection.

Apparent in the relationship between Lally and Turlough, the bureaucratic characters in Asylum by Kit Lazaroo, is the paradoxical co-existence of the everyday and the extraordinary. Their relationship operates on both magical and mundane realms. Turlough first appears to Lally through a hole in her kitchen table as she eats dinner:

Lally:  
Turlough: I’m an assistant to the Minister.
Lally:  What Minister?
Turlough: The Minister who heads my Department.
Lally:  Which Department?
Turlough: The Department of the Office of the Cabinet of the Minister of the Treasury of Human Existence inclusive of Life and Death. I’ve got a memorandum. (Pause) You know what would be good with those? Mustard.
Lally:  You’ll find my brother in his room. Third door on the left.
Turlough: This one’s for you. A warning. Regarding a fork in the road.
Lally:  This is a private residence. I’m trying to eat my dinner.
Turlough: This won’t take a minute. One day a fly is drowning and it calls out to a passing man for help. The man replies he will not waste his effort on a creature whose life is so brief. The fly says, Too bad, now you must live without my gratitude. Was the man wise, or a fool?
Lally:  I’m sorry?
Turlough: Of all the four-legged creatures who walk over grass, who lives the longest? (Pause) (2008:7–8).
She does not respond to the method of his visit, but rather that he is interrupting her meal. In a further intermingling of the real and the magical in their relationship, in a later scene, Turlough asks Lally to be his doctor. She refuses but soon afterwards he thanks her for the little blue pills she gave him that have made all the difference to him. As this scene also attests to, the foolishness of both these characters in this scene suggests a clown-like and liminal quality. As Lazaroo offers, ‘I do think of my characters as clowns, and that probably ties into the liminality thing that a clown doesn’t really belong to the adult world but it’s still trying to make a comment about the adult world’ (2005).

The Liminal

Turner states that the liminal is separate from mundane life and is characterised by ‘…ambiguous ideas, monstrous images, sacred symbols, ordeals, humiliations, esoteric and paradoxical instructions, the emergence of “symbolic types” represented by maskers and clowns, gender reversals, anonymity…’ (1990:11). Magical realist theatre is marked by these aspects, at different times and places, with the resultant commingling of the mundane and the divine, the magical and the real, the known and the unknown. Whilst theatre in general can claim to occupy the liminal (as a result of occupying two registers at the same time, the abstract and the concrete), my suggestion is that magical realist theatre in particular actualises the liminal through an intentional and contrary commingling of these two competing registers. The impact of this is the manifestation of the liminal as a potential site of transformation, for, ‘Liminality offers an escape from the current structures of society, or at least from one’s place in them’ (Daly 1990:71). The magical realist plays considered here do not adhere to the logical laws of causality, rendering the ordinary rules of reality void. Through the use of ghosts, apparitions, mad characters, child and child-like characters, and altered states of consciousness in addition to the elements listed by Turner above, the play texts investigate the liminal as a transformational zone.

Liminality, as Turner states, is ‘…a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities, not by any means a random assemblage but a striving after new forms and structure…It is what goes on in nature in the fertilized egg…’ (1990:12). Turnbull states,
‘…the liminal state is an “other” condition of that is coexistent with the state of which we are normally conscious. But we can not be aware of it, know it, or understand it as long as we restrict ourselves to the rational, objective, analytical…’ (1990:80). The plays, as demonstrated in the following, undermine ordinary laws of cause and effect, privileging unreliable characters as their storytellers and parodying the reasonable and logical, which locates them in-between what is and what may come to pass.

A magical component locating *Asylum* betwixt and between is the use of puppets. The puppets appear as Siying’s family in China, a tortoise that visits Lally and a disembodied stump that haunts Smudge. They occupy the liminal in that they can travel freely through time and space and provide Siying, and the other characters, with information and support. Their liminality affords them greater power and insight than the human characters, who are bound by the limits of empirical reality. In particular, Uncle Upside Down and Uncle Right Way Up come to Siying, like shamanic journeyers, in her time of greatest need and attempt to counsel her. The impact these puppets have on the action of the play is equal to that of the embodied characters, thus affording them equal semantic status. Their occupation of liminal space, however, marks them as magical and powerful, even if they are impotent to alleviate Siying’s suffering in the end. This is particularly true of the tortoise that Lally finds shuffling across her office floor:

Lally: I see writing.
Tortoise: There are names engraved on my back. The names of those who have shown me mercy.
Lally: Smudge. I see Smudge.
Tortoise: Look for your own name, Lally. Where is it? You must find it or I won’t know you in your moment of need. Quickly, quickly Lally Black.
Lally: I can’t see it! Show me where it is!

These puppet apparitions seed the notion of the impossible made manifest, and this is indeed Siying’s quest as she fights to stay in Australia. All the puppet characters call upon the embodied characters to transform. They perform as Shamanic tricksters
demanding transformation through their presence, which pushes the action of the play into the liminal zone.

Lazaroo engages with transformation of consciousness via the use of dreams, the presence of ghosts, apparitions and madness, elements not normally assigned value in Western empirical reality, but which function to undermine reality in magical realism. As Zamora states, ‘Magical realist texts ask us to look beyond the limits of the knowable, and ghosts are often our guides’ (1995:498). Asylum begins with the recounting of a premonition offered by Siying, whom I argue is a probable ghost. It is my contention that Siying may already be dead from the start of the play and is haunting those who did not assist her in life. This is evidenced by her apparition-like appearances, and the negative capability of time and space throughout the play:

_Siying addresses the audience and from time to time there is the faraway howling of wind._

_Siying:_ I dream we live in the village where I was born. I am asleep in my bed and then one of my uncles shakes me awake. He says quick you must leave here, you must run for your life while it is still dark because when first light breaks in the east we will all get up from our beds and stone you to death while you sleep. Your mother your father your brother your auntsies the whole village and even I will have a stone in my hand and pound you to death for the shame you have brought on us all. And so while my mother is sleeping I get up from my bed and I run from the house, down the path towards the gate but beyond the gate I cannot see anything but the howling darkness. I think, maybe my uncle has made a mistake, and I look back at the house and already they are climbing out of their beds and coming after me, and each one holds a stone. I know once I am through the gate I will never see them again. *(The wind cuts out and she glances at Lally)* (2008:1–2).

Immediately, the audience is presented with a world that is not governed by empirical reality, but rather the commingling of the magical and the divine. Faris contends that ‘…all magical realism embodies a mode of discourse that suggests the integration of a world of the spirits into ordinary reality…an enactment of contact with a different realm
serves as an efficacious form of counterdiscourse’ (2004:154-155). This is also demonstrated by the way in which Lally receives her wisdom and advice from the non-human elements of the play including the puppet tortoise and Siying’s puppet family, encouraging her to have more compassion and insight into Siying’s situation.

An example of the integration of the world of spirits into the everyday, which functions as a counterdiscourse, is the ‘disevolvement’ of children in *The Joy before Thinking*. The children are evacuating in direct response to stifling government control and elimination of the H Factor (standing equally for hope, humanity, happiness or heart). Their bodies undertake a revolutionary act, and in so doing they collapse the space between the world of spirits and the world of the everyday. This functions as a counterdiscourse to the dominant hegemony of fear and the normalisation of behaviour, expanding the bounds of the recognisable world to accept the magical and the mythical. This is also apparent in Turlough’s experience of Siying’s presence in his house:

Turlough: This Chinese girl. She comes into my office, she stamps her foot and harangues me and even assaults me and gives me no reason to feel sympathy for her, but at the end of the day she haunts me. I go home and there she is. I’m cooking dinner, I turn around to grab the salt and by Jesus, there she is, sitting in the corner, eyes fixed on me like darts. In the middle of the night I turn over in bed, and she’s standing at the foot of the bed. I get up in the morning, jump under the shower, and Christ! She’s there! Staring at me through the screen. Palm of her hand pressed against the glass. I could see her lifeline, and doctor, it was cut short (2008:15).

Turlough is haunted by Siying. He presents his experience without question. This also supports my suggestion that she is already dead but accepted by the other characters as a paradox of both spirit and flesh.

As has been evidenced in this chapter, the paradoxical engagement with the abstract and concrete registers, and as a result the generating of liminality, underpins all aspects of the discussion of magical realist theatre. This is because magical realist theatre, and in particular the plays under consideration here, as I have argued, are in keeping with

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48 Faris makes this statement especially in regards to post-colonial society, which fits my contention of Australia as post-colonial nation.
Turner’s contention of liminality, ‘…suspensions of quotidian reality, occupying privileged spaces where people are allowed to think about how they think’ (1986:102). The frame of liminality, ‘encompasses a special combination of primary and secondary processes and this is likely to precipitate paradox’ (Turner 1986:107), and as such the connotative and denotative meanings are open to reinscription and reframing. This coexistence generates the unique and transformative space of magical realist theatre. In the following chapter this discussion is extended through an analysis of the functioning of time, space and history in the playtexts. In particular, the paradoxical coexistence permitted by liminality, as Turner suggests, is investigated through magical realist theatre’s strange treatment of time and space.
Pip Edwards as Sarah and Simon Morrison-Baldwin as Eve

The Joy before Thinking by Ricci-Jane Adams

Image: Stephen Nicolazzo

Little Ones Theatre Collective at Theatreworks, Melbourne, October 2008
Caroline Craig as Tania and Paul Reichstein as Phil

_Falling Petals_ by Ben Ellis

Image: Jeff Busby

Playbox Theatre at C.U.B Malthouse, Melbourne, July 2003
Geraldine Turner as Mother

These People by Ben Ellis

Image: Heidrun Lohr

Sydney Theatre Company at Wharf 2 Theatre, Sydney, September 2003
Luke Mullins as Abalone and Kathrine Tonkin as Gerture

*The Eisteddfod* by Lally Katz

Image: Brett Boardman

B Sharp Downstairs, Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney, June 2007
Chris Brown as Ern Malley and Katie Keady as Ethel Malley

*The Black Swan of Trespass* by Lally Katz

Image: Brett Boardman

Stuck Pigs Squealing Theatre Company at a secret location on Queensberry Street, North Melbourne, September 2003
Lliam Amor as Dougal, Fanny Hanusin as Olley and Julia Zemiro as Dido

*True Adventures of a Soul lost at Sea* by Kit Lazaroo

Image: Ponch Hawkes

Old Council Chambers at Trades Hall, Melbourne November 2004
Tom Considine as Turlogh and Glynis Angell as Lally

*Asylum* by Kit Lazaroo

Image: Ponch Hawkes

La Mama, Melbourne March 2007
CHAPTER FIVE. THE SECOND ELEMENT: SUBVERSION OF SPACE, TIME AND HISTORY

Theatre is inherently a paradox, a doubling of space and time, as is evidenced by the co-existence of the abstract and concrete registers. This doubling occurs, as Gilbert states, because, ‘In performative genres, unlike in literary modes of representation, narratives unfold in space as well as through time’ (1998:15). In this chapter I argue that magical realist theatre engages with this doubled spatiality and temporality to disorient dramatic realism. This chapter contends that the physical space/time of the theatrical event actualises the conceptual ideas of space/time in literary magical realism. In the theatrical form the conceptual can be rendered physically, and explored through subversion of cause and effect. Juschka states, ‘The technique of diminishing hegemonic power is achieved by the simple act of calling into question the concept of causality’ (2003:94). This occurs both thematically and formally in magical realist theatre. As Wilson states, ‘The magicalness of magical realism lies in the way it makes explicit (that is, unfolds) what seems to have always been present. Thus the world interpenetration, the dual worldhood, the plural worldhoods even, of magical realism are no more than an explicit foregrounding of a kind of fictional space that is perhaps more difficult to suppress than to express’ (1995:226). This chapter evidences this argument through examples from the six plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo, (with additional examples from The Joy before Thinking).

Space in Theme and Form

Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo engage with space in unique and varied ways, but all with the result of the magification of the form and theme of space as a challenge to empirical reality. Ellis, for example, occupies the thematic sphere of the exterior in his writing. His plays are concerned with reinscribing the narrative of Australian identity and history. As Ellis argues, ‘We don't just have “the history wars” if you like, but also an unspoken “future war” that is dominated by powerful people in the wealthier suburbs (who refuse
to name themselves as powerful) against a series of people who are disenfranchised by the assumptions of these “where things will lead” stories’ (2006). Ellis speaks specifically of refugees in Australia, and their lack of access to English classes, for example, as well as the discrimination against drug users when resources for rehabilitation are diminished. The ‘where will things lead’ stories are, in Ellis’ opinion, self-fulfilling prophecies set up by those in positions of power to ensure the ongoing marginalisation of groups of people not in a position to determine their own stories. Ellis’ texts deal with the demonisation and marginalisation of the Other within the cultural construction of identity in Australia. Ellis states of *Falling Petals* and *These People*:

Both deal with exclusions, the boundaries of things – I’ve always liked the word “liminal” (and believe that sometimes a demand for “three-dimensional characters” is in fact an unconscious strategy for removing the capacity of characters to operate in a liminal zone). Both find ways to internalise, either through the body or the language that the body speaks, these boundaries (2006).

Ellis’ manipulation of the idea of border protection in both *Falling Petals* and *These People* makes magical the operation of space, to highlight the abuses inherent in Australia’s imprisonment of asylum seekers.

As an example of this, *Falling Petals* presents the idea of ever increasing border control in Australia, in which even those that were formerly included are now excluded for the greater good. This is realised in the play through the devastation of children’s bodies by the Hollow disease. The borders become narrower to permit even fewer. In spite of their Anglo-Celtic origins, the children lose their status as valuable members of society and are sacrificed to the voracious disease that represents border control gone mad. Phil’s parents, having attempted a perfect life in a rural idyll, now turn against their son and plot their escape back to the city. They watch as the remainder of the town’s adults attack the home of a sick child:

**John:** Crowd’s at number eleven, now. [*Laughing*] Think I see the Deputy Mayor’s wife. Good for her.

**Gayle:** I don’t understand it. John, are you saying that it’s all right to terrorise people who are dying?
Don’t judge people, Gayle.

So what am I allowed to do?

They’re sending the bulldozers in on the primary school tomorrow. What do you think I want to do?

The point is, you’re not doing it.

Are you speaking like this outside the house? (2003:46).

The play suggests that the process of attempting to contain and detain creates a ‘superbug’ of a detention policy, which operates as a critique of the governmental policy on refugees, and Australia’s more general racist culture of exclusion. The disease is the ultimate act of border transgression and cannot be stopped by any physical check-point.

Ellis’ satirical and magical rendering draws attention to the idea that ‘…things that appear to exist in time and space, such as national border, are both real and imaginary – real in that authorized persons with guns can shoot you if you cross over outside of the rules, but imaginary in that the border did not exist and could not exist for four and half billion years’ (Juschka 2003:99). Ellis’ parodying of imaginary, politicised space demonstrates, as Juschka states, the power of the imagined and the fictional to construct reality. The imaginary line can still kill if crossed, for as Ellis states, ‘It’s the application of the imagination that’s the issue’ (2006).

The issue of border protection in These People appears not as a crisis in national security, but rather, national identity. As the character of the Mother cries:

The whole country needs its stomach stapled. Too many people. It’s bursting with struggles and languages and obesity. That’s what border protection is about. A national diet. We were unhappy…maybe we still are – but thanks to border protection we are more confident. Smaller (2004:22).

The Mother implies the danger of population explosion via the image of the obese body (which is perhaps a far more real danger to Australian society than the propaganda surrounding asylum seekers). Yet, as Payne states, ‘Border protection is thus linked with “rationality” and the “natural” need to downsize. In this context the asylum seekers are portrayed as irrational and selfish’ (Payne 2005:341). Here, too, is demonstrated the danger of the magical capacities of the imagination to actually manufacture reality. The
Mother’s fears are realised because she is so efficient at conjuring them from her imagination, fed as it is by relentless images from the media and contemporary society.

Both of Ellis’ texts inhabit the Australian landscape: rural, urban and, in the case of the detention centres, liminal zones. The relationship between the environment and its abuse by the white Australian population is evident in all these settings. Ellis states:

I have no idea who I am these days when politicians (of both sides) talk of Australian values. Australia is an urban nation, a devotedly suburban nation at the least, and yet it culturally preys on a rural landscape for self-definition. Only Luxembourg is more urbanised. (I also happen to believe that unless the Left starts accepting this, instead of relying on myths of popular social justice credentials coloured by a nation of innocent, good hearted Dad 'n' Dave types, Australia will become more and more of a cultural desert…’) (2006).

This concern is played out in *Falling Petals*, through the devastation of the country town of Hollow. But the child-ridding disease is only the final straw in a long series of events (referenced in the text and reflecting the real-world situation of rural Australia) including the drought, withdrawal of services to rural regions, unemployment and as a result, community decay. The quarantined town of Hollow functions as a liminal space accentuating and exaggerating many issues experienced in Australia under the Howard Government – the feeling of powerlessness and paralysis of Australians in the face of a ‘big brother’ culture, a right-wing government and a nameless invisible ‘war’ that cautions against hysteria but actually encourages it. This is evidenced in the student’s treatment of one another, and the account of the townspeople’s treatment of the sick child they are discussing:

Sally: You’re not even sorry for his mum? All the threats? People ringing up the house and bastards over the phone?

Phil: They’re just the town of Hollow’s Fuck Knuckles squad. Fuck Knuckles do Fuck Knuckly Stuff.

Sally: But to the mum of a sick kid? A dying kid?

Tania: I heard he was a real shit, played it for sympathy (2003:2).
In framing the recognisable world in such a heightened manner, Ellis undermines the
dominant empirical view of reality. Ellis’ magical realist approach to this subject matter
affords the freedom to expose and delineate these issues:

…Freedom is potentialized by simultaneously holding in one hand dystopia (ill-
place) and utopia (non-place) to establish a hybrid, dis-place (other place) or
“heterotopia”. In magical realism the everyday is the marvilloso found in the
intricacies and drama of living a desperate life. It is the desperate living that
formulates a desperate history making the visible the potential for society not to
be this way (Juschka 2003:93).

*Falling Petals* is an alternative representation of Australian society. Hollow is the
extreme version of regional Australia’s recent history. Illustrating a dystopia by focussing
on desperate living, Ellis critiques the current societal and cultural climate of Australia,
made manifest through the characters desperate actions. It is the hopelessness of this
dystopia combined with the disorientation of space Ellis engages that generates the
hybrid Other place – the liminal. This location is the imagined reality that permits change
and correction of otherwise unchecked ‘invisible’ acts of power.

In a dominant image of *Falling Petals*, which demonstrates the relationship of the
physical space with the magical space, the play takes place under a Sakura (a Japanese
Blossom tree) that is flowering and dropping petals at the wrong time. The tree, planted
by Phil’s former-hippy mother when the family first moved to their ‘rural idyll’,
functions as a motif in accordance with Gunew’s statement: ‘The narrative of ‘Australia’
as it pertains to cultural and literary history is dominated by a cluster of organic images
comprising, inevitably, new branches springing lustily from old family trees…A further
rhetorical turn roots these growths in the land itself for what, after all, differentiates a
post-colonial Anglophone national culture if not ‘the’ land, the uniqueness of landscape’
(Gunew 1990:99). The land, a drought stricken hobby farm, occupied now by the
disenfranchised students and owned by a city man who has only been there once (just
long enough to kill all the sheep) is soon to be the toxic waste dump for the children’s
dead bodies. Read through Gunew’s statement, the image of the tree, itself a foreigner in
the ground, suggests white Australia’s lack of connection or belonging to the land. The
white Australian history is one of imposing itself onto a landscape, literally and
metaphorically, but of which, in reality, it has failed to become a part. Within the play itself, the land that the students sit upon has not welcomed them or its white owners (Phil’s parents were unable to make a go of it), and now threatens to undo them completely through both drought and disease. As Tania says of the child-ridding disease, ‘Sucked up too much dirt and got some Abo curse, I reckon’ (Ellis 2003:23). Phil later adds, ‘It’s Hollow’s fault. Something about the place’ (2003:26). The narrative of Australia, as represented in this play, is drought ridden, diseased and dangerous, inhabited by a superstitious indigenous culture.

Lally Katz’s particular concern is the space of the interior. Both *The Eisteddfod* and *The Black Swan of Trespass* are set in small, dark, interior spaces, closed off from the rest of the world, and functioning outside of empirical notions of time. These spaces exist separate to the activity of the world. Katz’s engagement with representations of the female subject align with this interior reading of the space of her writing, as women have been historically confined to the domestic sphere, omitted from the narrative constructions of nationhood. However, the admission of the female subject counters this at the level of cultural representation in Katz’s play. As Fensham and Varney suggest, ‘The long-term effects of a female-inclusive Australian theatre is that “narratives of nation” are now told from a female, if not feminist perspective and that the masculine hegemony in Australian theatre has been broken up and dispersed among new artists and subjects’ (Fensham & Varney 2005 329). This is demonstrated in both *The Eisteddfod* though the character of Gerture, and *The Black Swan of Trespass* through the character of Ethel. But Katz also employs the Ern Malley Affair to reinscribe the sickly, unfulfilled, house-bound Ern, affording him an opportunity to tell his own story, as embodied, rather than just imagined spectre of other men’s lives. Katz preferences the interior spaces present in her plays through investing them with a magical, other-worldly air. From Ethel’s stuffy basement, and Gerture and Abalone’s stagnant childhood bedroom, magical journeys through time and space, are undertaken in the liminal.

The most effective turn in subverting space in these two plays is realised through the *mise en scène*. The claustrophobic worlds of both plays are extended from the intimate stage
space to the equally intimate audience space. In the original Stuck Pigs Squealing production of *The Black Swan of Trespass*, staged in the director’s own home, the audience are in Ern’s basement. The tiny, low-ceilinged room is a real basement in a real house in Melbourne’s inner city north. It is old and musty and disturbingly intimate. Not separate from the setting, the audience form part of Ern’s world, completely inhabiting his space, unable to exit the basement unless they are willing to traverse the performance space just centimetres from them. The space the performers have to play their parts is the same cramped space that the audience occupy. The resultant implication of this is that the audience are a product of Ern’s imagination, as much as he is of ours. The original production of *The Eisteddfod* performed at the Store Room, an intimate performance space housed above a pub, induces the same claustrophobic effect as *The Black Swan of Trespass*. The audience are dangerously close to the miniature world of the children’s bedroom. However, in this play, director Chris Kohn frames the performance space through the use of a stage within a stage. The children’s world is not the audience’s world, and yet the danger lies in the constant fear of the actors falling from their tiny perch. In the original production the actors never step off their little platform (or fumble in their highly choreographed moves), until the curtain call. But so precise are their actions in such a small space that the audience are kept rigidly glued to their seats in anticipation of disaster. Once again, exiting the performance space early would mean implicating oneself in the action of the play, for there is so little space between the framed spaces.

The staging of Lazaroo’s play, *Asylum* suggests the space of the in-between. Siying’s world has been displaced and, as an asylum seeker is she is outside the normal action of time and place. She cannot move forward and she cannot move back. The cramped and enclosed performance space, dominated by the overwhelming stack of office filing cabinets reflects this. But the dark prison-like space represents not only Siying’s imprisonment. All the characters are forced to occupy this space, and are forced into narrower and narrower spaces as the play unfolds. They are contained and constrained by the situation they are attempting to control, evidenced particularly through the characters of Lally and Turlough. The audience share this confinement in the tiny seating area of La
Mama Theatre, squashed into Siying’s rapidly decreasing world. In addition to this, as critic Tony Reck states, ‘…the audience cannot help but ponder the bureaucratic wall confronting us…When psychiatrist Lally Black enters, she is dwarfed by the data of those wishing to flee persecution’ (2007). Reck goes on to suggest that the placement of the enormous filing cabinets constructs the issue of asylum as one, unavoidably, confronting us all. The lighting states further reduce the space, framing characters in corridors of light or focussing on a single body part. In addition, the obvious use of the space to suggest Siying’s rapidly decreasing world, the staging also evokes the subverted movement of time in the play. The pace of the play becomes a furious race and the time available appears rapidly shrinking as Siying approaches her inevitable deportation from Australia, and her probable death. Reflecting this, it is no surprise that by the final moments of the play she is housed in a coffin like space from which there is no escape. By now, time has stopped altogether for Siying, and all her hurried waiting to attain asylum has led to nothing. It is at this moment that the Uncles Upside-Down and Right-Way-Up can address her directly, for she is betwixt and between, no longer bound by ordinary causality. She is, as the puppet characters always are, occupying the liminal.

_The Joy before Thinking_ uses both the form and the content of the play to suggest the liminal as the space in which the action unfolds. As the curfew grips the country, the four women find themselves isolated on a rooftop garden, forty storeys above the city. Both the distance from the ground, and the fact that all the action takes place outside, suggest a connection to unseen forces. The space set apart from the day to day activity of the world below, also encourages a sense of transcendence. This is further suggested in the fact that the rooftop is a lookout post for the missing children, a place between heaven and earth from which contact might be possible (and indeed this is the case). The visitors to Lilith’s rooftop, Sarah, Eve and Mary, all undergo a transformation of one kind or another further indicating the magicalness of the site. It is a location outside of time and space, in which the characters are able to literally get a bigger picture glimpse of the world and expand the bounds of their preconceived notions of reality.
Taking the action to an even higher level, so to speak, Mary and Lilith both occupy a nest-like space set above the rooftop on one of the overlooking walls. This spatial advantage suggests the characters even closer contact with the disevolved children and the magical elements of the world they inhabit, and indeed Mary actually undergoes her own disevolvement, the only adult at that point to have ever done so. Lilith is immediately imbued with a sense of magic in that this is her rooftop garden and in one way or another, all the characters are there for her or by her actions. The sense of other worldliness is translated into the *mise en scène* of the performance text through the use of a rostrum, which lifts the action of the play above the ground, and separates the performance from the immediate space of the audience. The scenes that occur off stage, namely Scene One at the Disevolved Children’s Social Service Office, and Scene Four, in which Lilith directs Mary to the rooftop garden, are grounded in the mundane reality of the real world. The action of these scenes, however, is what motivates the characters to seek out the sacred space of the rooftop. The sense of separateness created by the raised platform of the performance space indicates a sacred space, both in terms of the action of the play, and as signal to the audience that this is the not-not not space of theatrical event.

**Time**

The plays considered here engage with time as an elastic and transformable element, as opposed to a pre-determined imperative. For example, the heightened state of emergency in Ellis’ *Falling Petals* suggests a not-too-distant future moment by drawing on a familiar reality but then unleashing an unbelievable child-riding disease; Lazaroo’s *Asylum* offers images of Australia’s recent political past and a more distant past of the 60s and 70s, both of which inform the current moment of the play; *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea* echoes a time of long ago whilst repeatedly undermining that historical moment through a sense of mythic timelessness; Katz’s *The Eisteddfod* refuses to name anytime, presenting the character’s childhoods and adulthoods simultaneously, speeding time up so a day passes in a flash; *The Black Swan of Trespass* locates itself in an exact historical moment that never was, always existing outside of history, whilst also inscribing it.

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49 As suggested in the following chapter, this also indicates the fictionality of the performance by framing the event. The stage within a stage approach indicates the constructed nature of the performance space.
Finally, in Ellis’ play *These People*, the narrative unfolds in the life of one family over the course of one day, yet extends the length and breadth of Australia and reports far more than can be lived in such a short expanse of time. In contrast to this, the lives of the asylum seekers depicted in the play, demonstrate the cruelty of time, in the way in which days turn into months, which turn into years, without any change occurring in their circumstances at all.

Time operates as a cosmic force beyond the characters control in Lazaroo’s *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*. It functions as a theme in dismantling dominant hegemony, especially in the collapse in the distance between past and present, the living and the dead. As an extension of this there is a revisioning of historical events through a critique of the fallibility of memory. When the body of Olley’s father is found shortly after Olley’s return from the fatal boat ride, Dido demands an autopsy to establish the cause of death. An autopsy is an unknown event in this place, not only because of the colony’s isolation but because of the historical setting of the play, which functions to defamiliarise the autopsy. In other words, just like the ice brought to Macondo for the first time in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, the autopsy is not just a medical procedure, it is magical and taboo. Without geographical specificity, but with enough historical accuracy for the audience to sustain the viability of the setting, the non-realist events generate a sense of defamiliarisation, an ‘erasing of familiarity’. The *mise en scène* of Lazaroo’s *Asylum* is old fashioned and intentionally dated. Lally and Turlough communicate via the written word, and Siying’s pursuit is for a letter that will offer her a little more time. Lally and Turlough carry binders with their notes in them, and visits are made in person to pass on messages rather than via the use of the phone or email suggesting an Australia of the 1970s or 80s, rather than the current day. And yet Siying’s

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50 As this is a slippery and much employed term, I utilise Lopez’s sense of the term here. Lopez asks, “What exactly is this ‘defamiliarization’- what can we say is its *referrent*? Its prefix ‘de-signifies reversal, an undoing of the root word. This is clearly not the same, then, as simply being *un*-familiar with a given object; the words very structure, then, denotes a reversal-more an erasing of familiarity or knowledge’. (2001:155).
contraction of HIV implies a more recent time. In this, attention is drawn to the archaic Australian governmental attitude towards asylum seekers\textsuperscript{51}.

In the following scene excerpt from Katz’s play \textit{The Eisteddfod}, Gerture recognises that Abalone is drawing out the date of the Eisteddfod to keep Gerture with him. Even though the event is depicted as really happening in the world outside their bedroom, opposed to just another fantasy manifested inside their bedroom, Gerture is able to force Abalone to agree to the time and place at which it will occur, and this makes it immediately so:

\begin{quote}
Gerture: The Eisteddfod is on tonight.
Abalone: No it’s not. It’s not on for another two weeks. I have to check the dates. But I’m pretty sure it’s two weeks.
Gerture: The Eisteddfod is on tonight.
Abalone: Oh, didn’t you hear? The gym burnt down.
Gerture: They transferred it to the Parish Hall.
Abalone: There’s been an outbreak of whooping cough.
Gerture: The Eisteddfod is on tonight (2008:48).
\end{quote}

Not only does Gerture finally actualise her power as a woman through a magical manipulation of time, she is able to undermine the laws of time to free herself from Abalone’s control. She no longer adheres to his version of reality but manufactures her own. Most importantly here, Gerture starts time moving again, after the years of stagnation and co-dependence with Abalone, which has left them stranded between childhood and adulthood. Gerture activates the movement of time, and completes her metamorphosis into womanhood.

\textsuperscript{51} In accordance with this dated \textit{mise en scène}, writing is of central import to \textit{Asylum} as much as it is to \textit{True Adventures}, in that the attainment of a hand-written letter from Lally to Turlough will give Siying the pass that she requires in order to secure her place in Australia, and the magical nature and power of language; that a single word may kill or cure.
History as Subversion of Time and Space

Takolander states, ‘History…provides a regularly encoded reference point that must be acknowledged in order to understand the point behind magical realist fiction’s depictions of the magical as real’ (2007:192). The engagement with historical narratives by the writers included here suggests the importance of reinscribing these narratives as a way of understanding the present. Takolander and Faris are both suggesting, I believe, that the magical events of magical realist texts are functioning as a corrective to (or at the very least a commentary on) the historical events depicted. As Hegerfeldt states, ‘Historiography’s claim to objectivity again is critically examined in texts that probe the possibilities of accurately knowing the past in the first place, drawing attention to the gaps in historical knowledge and the way these are filled through interpretation and reconstruction’ (2005:63). In the following examples, Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo reinscribe historical events, both real and fictional, to draw attention to the gaps, silences and omissions of contemporary Australian culture.

Lally Katz’s *The Black Swan of Trespass* depicts the historical moment of the Ern Malley Affair yielding insight into how and why modern Australian identity came into being. WWII forms the backdrop to the historical context of the Affair, and in particular the war as a major factor in forging Australian cultural identity. ‘The war had been interpreted not merely as a military challenge but as a challenge to Australia’s culture or “civilisation”…What had white Australia achieved, after all, to justify its continued existence? What had it contributed to the store of civilisation? Had it proved itself as a nation?’ (Bennett/Carter 2001:12). The events around the Ern Malley Affair reflect this – a new country striving to forge (and force) a cultural identity built around the imagery and action of war. The war was in many senses, a relief from the dark times that had preceded it in Australia. As Heyward asserts, ‘Thanks to the depression, the old dream of a workingman’s paradise had gone sour…somewhere between a quarter and a third of able-bodied Australians could not find work. This was a pinched, puritan world, washed over by sunlight and surf’ (1993:4–5). It was a time when the best Australian minds were fleeing its shores and censorship reigned, with thousands of books banned (Heyward 1993:5–6). But the war galvanised Australia’s commitment to Britain, with thousands,
without hesitancy, signing up for the war in Europe. It was in this context, that Ern Malley would be conceived, and would die. The life concocted for him by the hoaxers Harold Stewart and James McAuley, ended on July 23, 1943 (Heyward 1993:9), implicating him, imaginary poet, more than any other literary or cultural figure, as the centre piece of Australia’s cultural debate and more urgently, the very essence of how Australia was defined and represented.

Heyward states, ‘…that the cultural life of Australians was haunted by their distance from the centre, from London, Paris, New York, or some other fabled city’ (1993:13). For Max Harris, the young, shining poet and major proponent of Modernism in Australia, and the recipient and staunch advocate of the Ern Malley poems, the centre was, ‘…elsewhere…indifferent to Australia. This provincial isolation was the breeding ground of cultural cringe…the assumption that local art of any kind had to receive accolades overseas before Australians would acknowledge it as worthy to be called their own’ (Heyward 1993:13). It was a time of impassioned debate about how Australian culture should proceed. ‘The arguments about art and culture in Australia in the thirties and during the war are legendary not for their originality or even coherence but for their sheer ferocity’ (Heyward 1993:13). It is out of this context that Stewart and McAuley concocted Ern Malley and penned his poems in an attempt to shame Max Harris and the project of modernism as a whole. They were keen to demonstrate the pomposity and hollowness of modernist poetry, and those that were so committed to it. The debate that raged in the wake of discovery of the hoax that was The Ern Malley Affair was to permanently alter the Australian cultural landscape, a far greater outcome than the hoaxers had intended, and one which has never been eclipsed in Australia. All of this could come about at this time, for, ‘The generation that reached adulthood during the war was the first in Australia to believe in its own modernity, to assume its right to comprehend new ideas in literature, art and politics’ (Heyward 1993:43).

Ern Malley’s persistence in contemporary Australian culture is played on by Katz, as she reinscribes this potent historical moment into the present. What is suggested, in part, by *The Black Swan of Trespass* is that Ern’s failures as a human, poet and lover (indeed his
very failure to be) reflects the play’s vision of contemporary Australian society – impotent, maligned and fashioned on false representations and empty identities, and most importantly, illusory just as Ern was himself. For, ‘All of it – Ethel, Ern, the poems, the life, everything – was a hoax, of course, the biggest literary hoax of the century’ (Heyward 1993:81). Why then does a contemporary theatre company engage once again with the Ern Malley Affair in the current day? The importance of it emerges from the notion that history claims to represent truth and reality, and yet, as the Ern Malley Affair demonstrates it is no more than a narrative constructed from the memory. Reinscribing historical events allows for critique of dominant representations of contemporary reality, for as Takolander suggests, ‘History is inseparable from the realist genre. The realist premise that narrative accurately captures reality is crucial to history’ (Takolander 2007:224). Katz and Kohn’s specific engagement with this historical moment in Australian history, I maintain, is because Australian cultural identity has always been haunted by, ‘The idea that Australians lived in a fake culture, the ‘hollowest of shams’, defenders of the butt-end of Europe in a land they did not understand…’ (Heyward 1993:15–16). In addressing this event many decades after it occurred, Katz is able to contribute to the debate in and of Australian cultural identity and critique the elements that have historically informed the formation of the sign Australia.

_The Black Swan of Trespass_ addresses Australia’s changing imperialist master. Gilbert contends that addressing imperialism as it impacts Australian culture is a central contemporary concern of Australian theatre, stating that ‘While the discourses of European invasion and settlement remain key sites of interrogation for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal dramatists, other forms of imperialism have become increasingly topical subjects’ (Gilbert 1998:185). The transition from Britain as colonising master, to the USA as cultural imperialist dictator, began around the time of the events depicted in the play. As Heyward states, ‘The threat of invasion and the arrival of American troops transformed Australia’s cities’ (1993:7). In including the rape of Princess, Ern’s ultimate fantasy woman, by an American soldier in _Black Swan_, Katz is foreshadowing the neo-imperialist force of America on Australia. The image of Princesses’ attack appears to be drawn directly from historical fact:
In Melbourne Albert Tucker, a painter in his early thirties, scored canvases with images of leering belles pursued by men through aquamarine streets, of victory girls in the savage caress of their soldiers. The public fascination with violence and danger turned into terror in the month of May 1942, when three women were strangled and abandoned semi-naked in the suburbs of Melbourne. An American soldier, Corporal Eddie Leonski, was arrested, and the suspicions of many were confirmed. The Americans might be saviours, but they were strangers too (Heyward 1993:8).

This event importantly shifts the focus of the Ern Malley affair from the elitist cultural war that dominated the headlines, to the untold and unheard victims of history, in this case specifically women, and the sexual abuse perpetrated upon them. As Takolander states, ‘…magical realist literature is not solely about deconstructing realism and reality in order to expose the lies of history. Magical realist fiction also often attempts to reconstruct realism in order to reveal the truth about the past’ (Takolander 2007:228–29). Magical realist theatre engages with the real world, often to ‘…seek to change it, by addressing historical issues critically and thereby attempting to heal historical wounds’ (Faris 2004:138). Staging the Ern Malley Affair sixty-three years after the original incident addresses the impact of the patriarchal society upon women, articulated in the play through the characters of both Ethel and Princess. Not only the abuse, but the limited choices expressed through the patriarchal archetypes imposed on women, the spinster crone or the virgin/whore is demonstrated via the two female characters presented in Katz’s play.

*Black Swan*’s most effective feminist turn lies in affording Ethel Malley a life, no matter how drab and banal. Ethel is Ern’s uneducated and homely sister, concocted by the hoaxers to lend weight and legitimacy to their creation. She is the one who sends Max Harris the poems. The letter she writes accompanying the poems marks her as unimaginative and dull, and incapable of forming an opinion about the nature of the poems herself. She is domestic servant, unloved by any man, and nurse to Ern in his dying days. Whilst Katz does not attempt to revolutionise her in this script, she is afforded a place as a legitimate and integral part of Ern’s journey, and as a person in her own right. Indeed, she has had experiences and she is wise enough to know the difference between love and mere companionship. The location of the play is Ethel’s home, bringing the domestic sphere centre stage, as occurs also in *The Eisteddfod*. In locating the play
here and in giving Ethel life, Katz legitimises and presents women, particularly of this historical generation, as valuable enough to occupy the stage. In reviving the modernist myth of Ern Malley\textsuperscript{52} at this postmodern time, Katz and Kohn actualise magical realism in dissolving the boundaries between historical periods, artistic movements and the categorisation of invented theoretical boundaries. Magical realism is the perfect tool by which to do this, as Faris’ argument sustains, for magical realism, ‘has its roots in modernism and its branches and leaves in postmodernism’ (Faris 2004:30)\textsuperscript{53}.

Ellis disorients conceptual notions of Australian space and place as it relates to historical and cultural representation. As the play *Falling Petals* unfolds, the town is quarantined off from the rest of Australia and the children drop like flies: a sickness that is everywhere but must be fixed to some imaginary geography or people in order to absolve the remainder of the population of its responsibility. As Ellis states:

> There seems to be a number of powerful geo-political sites which determine the narratives of how others live…when you get deterministic governments, you’re stuck in the stories they tell about you, and they’ll legislate to keep you there. (An obvious example is the withdrawal of English language classes for temporary protection refugee visas) (2006).

The rural geography of *Falling Petals*, so lovingly mythologised and appropriated in the construction of national identity, is here reshaped, as the once idealised country town is excised from the body of Australia for the good of the whole, drawing obvious comparisons with the geo-political sites of detention centres. ‘In this country town (and by implication across the non-fictional country towns of Australia) minds are closed, expedience rules, fear of the unknown is pandemic and leads to moral bankruptcy’ (Glow 2007:87). It is not difficult to expand this notion to include all of Australia as it functioned under Howard’s right-wing government.

\textsuperscript{52} Even though he was created as an antithesis of modernism the hoaxers failed in this task, and instead cemented the very tasks of modernism to critique and query dominant culture.

\textsuperscript{53} Further conflating the modern and postmodern both in this play and in magical realism, is that, ‘With sublime prescience, Angry Penguins published the modernist writers from overseas - Dylan Thomas, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, James Dickey’ (http://www.ernmalley.com/). Here, the grandfather of magical realism, is published in a modernist journal, a journal that is devoted to, ‘emancipating an Australian identity in literature’ (http://www.ernmalley.com).
In a further example, the local mayor compares life in the town of Hollow with the idyllic depiction of small town life in the Australian television program *Seachange*:\(^{54}\):

Mulvaney: The point I want to get across to people is that Hollow is still a bloody good place! There is no reason to associate us with this problem. And we’re working on it. Hollow is your average, fine, typical, relaxing, beautiful countryside town that you can still take the family to.  
*Sweeping an arm out* See? Even with the drought, it still possesses a stirring and striking Australian landscape. Think, people, of Hollow as like something out of *Seachange*, but cheaper, huge industrial potential, and with a picturesque river instead (2003:24).

Ellis highlights here the way Australian identity is constructed on stereotypes of the bush and romantic rural life. As White explains:

From the 1880s…a conscious attempt was made in Australia to create a distinctively national culture …In Australia this would result in a new image which was to prove more powerful than any other. It was essentially the city-dweller’s image of the bush, a sunlit landscape of faded blue hills, cloudless skies and noble gumtrees, peopled by idealised shearers and drovers. Australians were urged to respond to this image emotionally, as a test of their patriotism… (1981:85).

Ellis critiques this appropriation and pillaging of rural Australia as a trope held up as the Australian ideal, when most contemporary Australians live in urban centres and have no relationship to the land. As Ellis suggests, ‘Australia will become more and more of a cultural desert – push “salt of the earth” as the exemplar for too long and it’s a cultural as well as an agricultural salinity crisis we’ve got’ (2006). As Glow observes, this is played out in *Falling Petals*: ‘Ellis deconstructs the ‘stereotype’ of the community-minded country town by portraying the rampant individualism and self-interest which reveals itself when the disease becomes an epidemic’ (2007:86). A further irony lies in the absolute absence of aboriginality in this image. In appealing to the emotions rather than the intellect, this propaganda attempts to ensure white Australia invests itself in the image without rationalising the consequences for those not included. The environment of Hollow diseases and consumes the white children like human sacrifices to demonstrate its ultimate dominance over those who have attempted to name, tame and contain it.

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In *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*, the act of writing, of recording history, is conflated with truth and certainty. Writing is given prominence as a symbol of the play from the outset when Dido, Plank and Dougal sit writing. They talk to themselves as they write, but do not acknowledge one another. Olley is omitted from this scene and she spends the entirety of the play trying to convince Dido to give her the skills to be part of this privileged group. Writing represents not only access to truth but to history. It is an authenticating power. In the act of Olley’s story being written down it becomes the ‘true’ story. It also inscribes a history for Olley that had been omitted from officially sanctioned accounts (Dougal’s police report is the official story). Olley’s story is the story of all those that have been omitted from history and this establishes a dichotomy between stories and history in the play. Just as Olley’s story is omitted from the scientific evidence gathered by Dido and Dr Plank, her memory of surviving in the ocean is left out of Dougal’s police report. Without the ability to write down in her own hand her true adventures, she is left out of her own story. But it also further marks Olley as a liminal subject. Because Olley has been stripped of her former identity in the act of being taken by the sea, she is free to participate fully in the journey of her own transformation. She has been removed from her history. In lacking an identity and being at the mercy of Dido, she is, in her powerlessness as Schechner states it, able to be inscribed with her new identity and initiated into her new powers (2002:58).

*The Joy before Thinking* is located in a future time as a means by which to critique this historical moment in contemporary Australian society. In locating the play in the not too distant future I am able to heighten and radicalise the examples of the normalisation of behaviour and representation in the present time. For example, in Scene One, the character of Sarah is required to produce an Exemption from the Nuclear Family Pass, and is mocked for not having a husband and father for her child. This exchange parodies the dominant representation of Australian society, and the ever-increasing state control of individual lives. This future time location is also an attempt to satirise the fear of terrorism at this time in world history, and especially the manner in which this is used as a means of control and a reduction in freedom. In the play, the image of the mobile phone suggests the way in which this control has been so imbricated into everyday life, to the
point that it becomes an invisible prison, one in which the population readily submits to. The curfew and the TV commercials calling upon people to be ready with stocked pantries and bottled water are all too imaginable in contemporary society. The idea that mobile phones are not only tracking devices (already a reality with the advent of GPS in most phones), but a means by which the state can actually infect or eradicate certain aspects of human nature, functions to highlight the lack of control over their fates that individuals have in this age of the war on terror. The H Factor itself is eliminated in the population because it encourages individuality, free thinking, compassion and a sense of connectedness to others. The real horror in the action of the play lies in the ready acceptance of people to assist in its eradication, without even knowing what it is. The world as it is currently known is made unknown by framing contemporary society as a historical moment, and denaturalising the seemingly mundane and everyday.

As I have argued in this chapter, subversion of empirical reality, namely through the magification of time and space in both form and content, and a reinscription of history, undermines the audience’s ability to seamlessly make meaning out of reality. As Hegerfeldt states:

In combining the traditionally incombinable and simultaneously drawing attention to this fact, magical realism produces a certain amount of hesitation; its self-conscious transgression of literary, linguistic and cultural conventions renders these conventions visible, thereby offering them up for discussion and review (2002:80).

Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo create a space for critique and revisioning of the known world and the dominant ideologies that construct culture and society. This is the work of the theatre and, as I maintain, in particular magical realist theatre, for the liminal space generated via the theatrical event, affords a time out of time and space and, as such, a time and space for review and reinscription in which what is known becomes unknown. This is achieved through the disorientation in both content and form as has been evidenced through examples from the six plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo, and The Joy before Thinking. As Helen Gilbert states in Sightlines: Race, Gender and Nation in Australian Theatre, the ‘…movement away from a wholly illusionistic theatre can be
seen as part of a larger agenda to unsettle both the power relationships and the race and
gender hierarchies naturalised by history’s narratives’ (1998:14).

This unsettling occurs also in my play *A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light*. Whilst *The Joy before Thinking* is located in a future time, this play evokes both the
archaic and the contemporary. The play is a process of ever-increasing defamiliarisation
and disorientation with the specific intention of revealing gender hierarchies that have, as
Gilbert states, been naturalised by history’s narratives. In this play I am particularly
interested in playing with language and making metaphor real. It attempts to demonstrate
the way in which magical realism makes visual embedded hegemony and ideology
through a literalisation of language. In addition, an inversion of assumed knowledge
occurs in this play. Turnbull states:

> The two problems, subjectivity and modes of perception, are similarly related, for
> subjectivity is a mode of perception. The use of subjectivity, of total (including
> emotional, spiritual) participation, of other modes of perception and
> communication, is not at all unlike the use of the rational process by which we
> recognize without any discomfort that things are seldom, if ever, what they seem
to be, and set about arriving at a more accurate, more complete knowledge of
> what they are by reconsidering them in light of other information, from different
> perspectives, and so forth.55

Subjectivity, representation and the visualising capacity of language are the areas under
investigation in this play. I offer this play here as an introduction to the succeeding
chapters on the meta-theatrical, language and notions of the marginal (as the subject
position most often engaged with in magical realist theatre). In so doing, I hope to
suggest that the possibility of magical realism as a discourse of change resides in its
admission of the previously inadmissible. For the inclusion of the magical into the realm
of the everyday in the plays under consideration, is an attempt to expand the bounds of
what is permitted at the level of cultural, societal and political representation.

CHAPTER SIX. A SLOW AND STEADY DARKENING TOWARDS LIGHT
CAST

Boatgirl a young woman
Landkeeper an old seaman
Priest a woman of indeterminate age
Bride a young bride, Joe as a young boy, phone operator
Joe a man of twenty-five

SETTING

The play is set, today, on a remote and tiny island off the coast of Australia, somewhere north and humid with red clay soil. Upon it stands only one building, a small and basic church. The set consists of a trapeze, which hangs at all times above the stage, a large crucifix, which is actually a six foot broadsword, an altar and a small wooden row boat.
SCENE ONE

Boatgirl is standing on the shore. She has a large backpack, camera bag and small backpack. She is dressed for practical travel – sturdy walking boots, shorts, t-shirt. She has her mobile in her hand and dials a number. As she waits, she scans the shore, but she cannot find what she is looking for. The phone is ringing audibly. The Operator is heard as a voice-over. The Operator is never anything but sincerely helpful.

Operator: Good morning, NRMNARCVQ. How can I help you?
Boatgirl: Hi, I need some directions.
Operator: To or from your current destination?
Boatgirl: I’ve got as far as…

Boatgirl looks around, uncertain.

Operator: Yes?
Boatgirl: I was told there would be a boat to catch. A ferry. And a jetty. But I can’t see anything.
Operator: Directions to an island?
Boatgirl: Yes.
Operator: What name?
Boatgirl: It’s in a bay.
Operator: A bay island. Do you know the name?
Boatgirl: I had an itinerary and a map, but they’re gone.
Operator: Not local?
Boatgirl: No.
Operator: So, an island, somewhere in a bay?
Boatgirl: Yes, I’m standing on the shore.
Operator: Not much around you then?

Boatgirl: No. I know I haven’t given you much to go on.

Operator: We’ll figure it out together. One step at a time. Tell me what you see.

Boatgirl: There is an island in front of me, a distance out. It is green and looks unspoilt. At least that is what it looks like from here. It looks like it is raised on one side.

Operator: Raised?

Boatgirl: Yes, like a cliff. It is much higher on one side. There is something shimmering over there. I can’t make it out. It looks like when sunshine hits glass or water. It looks like it is moving. Erratically.

Operator: Anything else?

Boatgirl: Yes. The earth, where there is no greenery, is red, really dark red. And the water all around the island is really still. Over here it is choppy, but there, nothing is moving. It looks like a fog might be rolling in. But only around the island. And the clouds are low and dark. Over here I mean. There, it is sunshine.

Operator: Ok. I’m getting the picture. Any sand? Beaches? Can you spot any tourists?

Boatgirl: No, none at all. No sand. The trees come right down off the land and into the water. The trees are in the water, like a mangrove I suppose. And I can hear something. Buzzing. Like mosquitos. Lots and lots of them.

Operator: Right! I know exactly where you are. I know I have a timetable here somewhere.

**Rummaging can be heard, as though the Operator is going through her handbag.**

Operator: It was just here this morning…

_The voice and the rummaging fade out. Boatgirl waits a few moments and then realises that there is no one on the end of the line._
Boatgirl: Hello? Hello? Do you know where I should be? I have to get there. I have to be on that island!

The fog rolls in thick and fast. An enormous foghorn sounds, and then out of the mist a tiny little row boat appears. The Landkeeper is holding the oars, although they are out of the water. He is heavily bearded and dressed like a caricature of an old seadog. How old he is exactly, is hard to tell. Boatgirl avoids eye contact, and continues scanning the water for the ferry. The Landkeeper watches her without blinking. Eventually he breaks the silence.

Landkeeper: Come on then.

Boatgirl: Me?

Landkeeper: The ferry has arrived.

Boatgirl: Wow. Ok. Sorry, are you saying you are the ferry?

Landkeeper: Yes.

Boatgirl: Oh wow. This is really challenging my mental image of this situation. I had an expectation. I thought that this situation would look a certain way. A different way.

Landkeeper looks at her impassively.

Boatgirl: But hey, that’s my stuff. This is a nice boat. It is really nice for you to come and get me. Do you live on the island? Have you heard of the Blessing Place? I so need this, I can’t even tell you.

She picks up all her belongings and loads them awkwardly into the boat. She sits and waits in anticipation of finally being on her way.

Landkeeper: The Blessing Place. Yes. Are you sure you want to come with me?

Boatgirl: Oh yes. If you are the ferry I’m meant to be on. I really need this trip.

Landkeeper: You mentioned.

Boatgirl: I had an itinerary. I think a bird got it.
Landkeeper: You don’t need that now. We’re already on our way.

Boatgirl: Have you been there? To the Blessing Place? What does it look like?

*The Landkeeper climbs out of the boat, leaving the oars where they are, and pushes the boat along.*

Boatgirl: I had to do a lot of research to find it, but I knew there was something out there for me. I have always been looking for something of this…magnitude. The stories go back for centuries you know. I’m sure you know. You live here.

Landkeeper: I live on a boat.

Boatgirl: A houseboat! How lovely!

Landkeeper: I don’t dare spend too much time on the island. On that tainted land.

Boatgirl: Wow, does it have a really powerful energy? I know what that feels like. I once stepped into an amazing temple in India and I nearly passed out the energy was so strong.

Landkeeper: There is a church on the island.

Boatgirl: Is that it? Is that the place?

Landkeeper: It’s evil. It’s the only place left.

*Boatgirl misses his comment. Or chooses not to hear it.*

Boatgirl: Is it easy to find? The details about the geography of this island are so…

Landkeeper: Slippery.

Boatgirl: Yes! Do you know it well?

Landkeeper: Intimately. You might be our Saviour.

*Boatgirl laughs girlishly, flattered.*
Boatgirl: Is there a campground? I brought my tent.

Landkeeper: I don’t think you’ll need it. It’s hardly ever night.

Boatgirl: Oh.

Landkeeper: You should probably stop thinking so much. It won’t serve you very well here. We’re almost arrived.

Boatgirl nods. She gathers her things together. The Landkeeper stops pushing the boat. He climbs into the boat and looks at Boatgirl.

Boatgirl: Is there a problem?

Landkeeper: I think you should guide us the rest of the way.

Boatgirl: What?

Landkeeper: I don’t want to be responsible for anything that takes place.

Boatgirl: You already are.

Landkeeper: How so?

Boatgirl: You’ve brought me this far.

Landkeeper: But not on that land. I haven’t put you on that land.

Boatgirl: It’s a blessed place.

Landkeeper: The island is not blessed. Some small part if it may be this ‘blessed place’ but I have not found it.

Boatgirl: I would really appreciate it if you could take the boat to land. You can leave without getting out of the boat if you think that will help.

Landkeeper considers this. He is wrestling with himself.

Landkeeper: Have you considered all your options?
Boatgirl: Why won’t you let me just go to the island?

Landkeeper: I don’t care if you go.

Boatgirl: Then why try to stop me?

Landkeeper: I won’t stop you. I’d just like to know what you hope to find.

Boatgirl: The Blessing…

Landkeeper: But what is it? What do you do there?

Boatgirl: It is a healing place or so I’ve heard. Something like Lourdes but without all the tourists.

Landkeeper: What do you need healing from? Are you sick?

Boatgirl: No. I’m seeking.

Landkeeper: What? What can this place give you?

Boatgirl: It’s a state of mind. I can’t explain it if you don’t understand.

Landkeeper: But look at you. You’re perfect. Why do you want this trouble?

Boatgirl: What is life without a quest?

Landkeeper: Simple. (Pause) I don’t know if I am placing you in the right hands.

Boatgirl: That really is up to me to decide. Can you please make up your mind or at least point me in the right direction?

She stands.

Landkeeper: Sit down before you fall out.

She remains standing as he climbs out slowly. The boat wobbles as they move off. She lowers herself down.

Landkeeper: Whatever you do, hold onto this boat. Keep it with you.

Boatgirl: But it’s yours.
Landkeeper: There is a boat for every person that arrives. This is yours.

Boatgirl: Well, if you moor it for me when we get there…

Landkeeper: No, you have to keep it closer than that. Just in case you need it in a hurry.

Boatgirl: How am I supposed to do that?

Landkeeper: Leave it to me. I’ll make sure you know where it is at all times.

Boatgirl: Thank you.

Landkeeper: The pains will begin shortly.

Boatgirl: Sorry?

Landkeeper: Just remember to keep breathing.

Boatgirl: I’ll try.

Landkeeper: You can lose all sense of time in a situation like this. But breathe. It’ll bring you back to yourself.

He stops. Boatgirl stands. The trapeze, hanging above Boatgirl lights up. She does not see it.

Boatgirl: Thank you for your help.

Landkeeper: I do want to help you. But things are different on the land.

Boatgirl: No problem

Landkeeper: But for now, I’ll bring your things. And I’ll take you.

Boatgirl: To the Blessing Place?

Landkeeper: The gritty realism of the inside of the church. The only building left standing after the great flood.

Boatgirl: There was a recent flood?

Landkeeper: Noah.
Boatgirl: Oh.

Landkeeper: Why not the pokies? Or the pub? Or the bowls club? Or the mosque even. Just that bloody church. Gritty. Real. Too of this world if you know what I mean. The bowls club. That was different. Dark inside, cool, no windows, stale smoke and cold beer. Leave yourself at the door. Drown your sorrows and purge your soul with a $5 counter lunch. Real rock and roll but played low. Not about the music, about soothing the soul, easing the ache. Gentle lullaby of a seventies love ballad. But no pain. No longing, no wanting. Everything ready and waiting for a small fee. Subsidised, not by God. Open to anyone as long as you’re prepared to sign the guest book. No questions asked. No confession here. Heaven. (Pause) Heaven got washed away by the sea. And only that bloody building of brick and retribution left standing.

_Boatgirl remains standing awkwardly in the boat, uncertain what to do next. She attempts to step out but then hesitates._

Landkeeper: The land is as slippery as a snake. Nothing sticks. Slides right off like a well-oiled woman.

Boatgirl: And the church?

Landkeeper: Gritty. Too real.

Boatgirl: Where is it please?

Landkeeper: I’ll take you.

Boatgirl: Thank you.

Landkeeper: But first...a favour.

Boatgirl: What?

Landkeeper: It won’t cost you a thing.

Boatgirl: I’ll look for the church alone.


Boatgirl: Then how can you find it?
Landkeeper: I know which way the earth is moving.

Boatgirl: What do you want?

Landkeeper: You’ll have to come closer. Much, much closer.

Boatgirl moves cautiously to the Landkeeper. He turns his back to her and pats it, indicating she should jump up. She does so tentatively. The light on the trapeze goes out. Boatgirl wraps her arms and legs around him. He lets out a deep sigh.

Landkeeper: Ah, the weight of you. Weighing me down. What a load.

Boatgirl: I can get down.

Landkeeper: No! This is the price. This is it. The weight of you holding me down, keeping me pinned to the earth. No sliding and slipping today. I’ll take you there. You’ve no need to walk.

They exit this way with Boatgirl piggybacking on Landkeeper’s back.
SCENE TWO

Boatgirl is standing in the church. There is a large crucifix behind the altar. The trapeze hangs in the gloom. There is a heavy rope tied around Boatgirl’s waist, hanging behind her and out of sight. A woman dressed as a Catholic priest, is sitting cross legged on the altar. Her eyes are closed, but she sneaks a look at Boatgirl as she enters. She closes her eyes again and waves to indicate that Boatgirl should enter. She indicates that Boatgirl should sit. Boatgirl sits quietly. The Priest maintains her place but takes regular peeks at Boatgirl. After several moments, the Priest bursts off the altar.

Priest: Aha! A pilgrim! We haven’t had one in years. No need to confess your sins. The boat ride has washed them all away. Now is the time for progress, for forward looking. We’ll administer to the people. Make miracles and cures, which is like a miracle but slower. A very specific recipe to make a miracle. I have it here somewhere. Must follow every step, or else it isn’t counted. And no point making miracles if you don’t get something in return. Who brought you? No don’t tell me. I can guess. Did he ask you to lie upon him?

Boatgirl: In a way.

Priest: That’s a sin. That’s a new sin. We’ll need to wash that. The boat won’t have got that one.

Boatgirl: The boat has come with me.

Priest: What child?

Boatgirl: He attached it to me.

The Priest lifts the rope and follows it to its end, exiting. She enters again quickly.

Boatgirl: I don’t understand why I couldn’t just moor it.

Priest: He is a wicked man.

Boatgirl: Is he?

Priest: Couldn’t you tell? He’s mad.

Boatgirl: I didn’t think he was quite right.
Priest: No, this rope won’t do.

_The Priest and Boatgirl attempt to untie it but the rope is too tough and the knot won’t budge._

Boatgirl: But I’m a pilgrim! I’ve come to find the Blessing Place. I can hardly do that with this thing weighing me down.

Priest: My child, you’ve already found it!

Boatgirl: This is the Blessing Place?

Priest: The same such thing!

Boatgirl: Oh I am so glad!

Priest: Oh we all are! We are the lucky ones to have you here!

_They hug gleefully._

Priest: Welcome! Welcome to this most sacred of places.

Boatgirl: Oh thank you. Thank you. I can’t tell you what a journey it has been.

Priest: You are home now blessed one. And we have so much work to do together.

Boatgirl: We do?

Priest: Healing.

Boatgirl: Yes!

Priest: And awakening!

Boatgirl: Yes!

Priest: We will do it all!

Boatgirl: I feel I have so much to offer.
The Priest stops suddenly. She closes her eyes and raises her hands over Boatgirl. She grabs Boatgirl in a rough embrace.

Priest: You most certainly do. We should begin at once!

The Priest sits Boatgirl down and hands her pen and paper. She climbs onto the altar and begins her sermon at once.

Priest: First and this is most important. You are precious! You have been searching so long. There is life inside of you. You have it! You are looking for something. Meaning. Anything. Let us fill your yearning. Sublimate your will!

Boatgirl writes furiously and nods occasionally.

Priest: You are so real! So, the things you must know are this. There are good and bad forces, dark and light. We must be ever vigilant about what we allow into our consciousness. Sometimes one force can masquerade as the other. For example, angels are light. Babies are light but not all them stay that way. Mosquitos, flies, midgees, these are all dark forces. Souls punished if you will. Certain objects and shapes mask themselves as light, but they are not. Triangles and sunrises suggest goodness but they are not. Shadows and boxes hold the light inside of them and should be pursued. You must learn to read the world and make judgements of it.

We are the very consciousness out of which the universe is made. What we see, what we believe, we make it so. You are a true believer child, so you made it to us. So many people have such muddled sight and never find the holy grail.

The gift is in you child. You must dedicate your life to the enlightenment of others. You are special. You are above them all. You will be free of suffering and pain. You will not live an ordinary life.

Boatgirl: I want that so very much.

Priest: And I will give it to you.

The Priest jumps down from the altar. She walks carefully around Boatgirl, looking at her intently.
Priest: You have never felt like you were ‘home’, have you child?

Boatgirl: No! That is just it. I want to know where I belong.

Priest: Yes, yes. Go on.

Boatgirl: Ever since I was a small girl I have felt different you know and what I have always longed for is my people, do you know what I mean. A place to call home, where I knew I really belonged.

Priest: Of course, I understand.

Boatgirl: I thought I would be able to fit in and be like other people and find the right man and…

Priest: But you are unique!

Boatgirl: I am.

Priest: We are kindred child. You have found your place with me.

Boatgirl: I want to know so much.

Priest: And I am here to help. I know everything. I called you to me child and you heeded my call.

Boatgirl: I want to be free.

Priest: Then let us get to work! Just follow my lead. Surrender to me, and all this is yours.

_They exit._
SCENE THREE

Boatgirl is scrubbing the church floor with a bucket and brush. The Priest enters with a tiny baby in her arms.

Priest: Up! Up!

*Boatgirl stands dutifully. The Priest hands the baby to her. Boatgirl takes it awkwardly as the Priest starts blessing it by flicking large amounts of water at it.*

Priest: This one needs all the help it can get. Another orphan babe. More than our fair share for such an island.

Boatgirl: Where are they all from?

Priest: Brought here on the boat.

Boatgirl: But I have the boat.

Priest: There is more than one boat. There is a boat for every person, babe or no, who comes here. Course the ones for the infants are more like boxes. Like little floating coffins.

Boatgirl: What happened to this one?

Priest: The father wouldn’t lay claim. Denied all knowledge. As such, the mother has no rights. She might as well not exist. Her name won’t appear on the birth certificate.

Boatgirl: But she does exist?

Priest: Not to this baby.

Boatgirl: Do we name him?

Priest: Oh no. The father’s father will do that. Not that it matters too much. They all get changed when they get to their new families. Then there is no problem with history. Naming is a powerful thing.

Boatgirl: But the father doesn’t want to know. Why does his family..?

Priest: So that they have a story to tell. It normally goes like this. A babe was born unto our family, a great blessing from God. We named him Jacob. He
died at birth, God rest his soul. This one will be Joseph Ezekiel Augustus Malone the third. I know the family well.

Boatgirl: Shouldn’t you talk to them, then? Can’t they take him home?

Priest: They aren’t taking him home. Not on my island. This is the way it is. He’s worth far too much money to me.

Boatgirl: Money? Do the new families pay?

Priest: In a manner of speaking. They tithe to the church. If the market is a little slow, I call them up, in a manner of speaking, and they gladly tithe again. Such uniting of God and the people. Such important work. Keeps the heart of the community beating. And beating.

Boatgirl: But there is just you. And the Landkeeper.

Priest: As the phoenix rises from the ashes. As Noah found dry land. And even out little rock is enough for God to find us. Enough to rise again. This is just the tip of the iceberg. Below us is the island that once was, with people, my people, and trees and fields, and shops even. A Blockbuster, McDonalds, and the best fish and chips you ever tried. And a thousand smiling faces waiting on the word of the Lord.

Boatgirl: And you sell babies, to keep it all afloat?

Priest: All this I have done, you shall do and more. Hurry with that baby. Put him out the back. We’ve got a three o’clock.

Boatgirl: What is at three?

Priest: Wrath and retribution. You can feel the Lord All Mighty in your bones! Oh you are a good girl. You are learning so well.

Boatgirl: I didn’t expect this.

Priest: Expectation is a killer. Let go of everything you thought you knew.

_The rope around Boatgirl’s waist is being tugged. The Priest does not notice._

Boatgirl: I’ll take him out the back.

_The rope is tugged again. Boatgirl is pulled away, babe in arms._
SCENE FOUR

Landkeeper is sitting next to Boatgirl in her boat.

Landkeeper: Gritty realism. Nasty place.

Boatgirl: I won’t go back. I’m beginning to have my doubts about her teaching.


Boatgirl: She sells babies.

Landkeeper: Yes.

Boatgirl: It doesn’t bother you?

Landkeeper: There’d be an awful lot of them here if she didn’t. You must go back. She’s got it all in that sweaty little palm of hers.

Boatgirl: I don’t want to do the three o’clock.

Landkeeper: Ah yes. Had a few of them myself.

Boatgirl: I’m not her apprentice.

Landkeeper: You said that this is what you wanted.

Boatgirl: No. No, not this.

Landkeeper: She’s not letting you go.

Boatgirl: I should leave now. I have the boat.

Landkeeper: No. We need her. For food and water and shelter. It’s all in that church. I can’t go in there.

Boatgirl: Why don’t we just leave?

Landkeeper: We have nothing.

Boatgirl: We don’t need anything.
Landkeeper: Leaving is not like arriving. She knows you. You wanted to come. I asked you to think very carefully. Besides we’ll never find the shore to launch the boat. It’s all moved around. Please go back. Don’t make her mad.

Boatgirl: I don’t know what will happen to me.

Priest: *(offstage)* Two minutes to three!

Landkeeper: Listen to me. *(Pause)* She administers to ghosts. There is no body here but you and me and her.

Boatgirl: And the baby.

Landkeeper: Don’t fear what isn’t real. There is enough you can touch to be terrified of.

Boatgirl: So I should go to her? To get what we need? To get away from this place. Together.

Landkeeper: Yes. Together. Yes, of course. Be kind to her. Lull her. And when it gets dark take everything you can carry and run like hell. I’ll be waiting.

Boatgirl: And the baby?

Landkeeper: Just put it down somewhere. The birds will get it eventually.

Priest: *(offstage)* Pilgrim! Where are you child? We have so much important work to do. Girl! It’ll be the wrath of God upon your head, my girl, if you are lying upon that man!

Landkeeper: Give him to me.

Boatgirl: You’ll look after him?

Landkeeper: Yes.

*Boatgirl eyes him suspiciously.*

Landkeeper: I’ll look after your precious cargo!

*Boatgirl stands up.*
Boatgirl: If he isn’t just as I left him when I return then I will slit your throat whilst you sleep.

Landkeeper: Oh girl. You belong here all right.

*Boatgirl walks off stage. The boat slowly follows behind her.*
SCENE FIVE

Boatgirl is in the church, the rope still around her waist but no boat in sight. She is inside the church, the crucifix glowing in an eerie light. The Priest is kneeling before the altar facing away from Boatgirl. She stands and slowly turns, staring at Boatgirl.

Priest: Did he harm you?

Boatgirl: No.

Priest: Hurt you in anyway?

Boatgirl: No.

Priest: He is not a man to be trusted. He lies. He eats babies.

Boatgirl: What?

Priest: Every morning, as dawn approaches, I have to scan the shore for those little floating coffins to get to them before he does. If he catches one before I do, well, he eats like a king.

I can’t blame him really. I have the church, and he’s banned. I have all the food and the money and the love of my congregation. No way am I going to share a scrap of it with that bloody heathen. I have God Almighty, and he’s got nothing at all.

Boatgirl: You’ve seen him eat babies?

Priest: I’ve seen the evidence. That look in his eye, in his stomach, in his feet. He stands taller like he’s proud of what he has done, like the hunger has left him for a short time. Like he’s carrying my next pay check in his guts waiting to shit it out!

Boatgirl: But you’ve never seen him actually...

Priest: There are more ways of seeing than with the eyes young lady. I have sights you’ve never heard of. He’s pure evil. I see the curse of the Devil upon him. It glows from within; such a burning blue light, such heat it melts your bones. It shines and shimmers like a glorious fire from the depths of Hades. It beckons like lightning. It consumes without apology or prayer. It’s the work of the Devil for God would not be so cruel as to make something so delicious but that it would kill you with one touch.
Boatgirl: You see all this? Why don’t you order him in here for a little wrath and retribution? Cleanse him of what you see?

Priest: Oh no! No! It’s not possible.

Boatgirl: Call him in here. Trick him. Tell him you will lie upon him.

Priest: No! He is the Devil’s work.

Boatgirl: It’s your calling.

Priest: It isn’t what I am meant to do. I have communed with God.

Boatgirl: And God said?

Priest: He belongs out there, my child. If he were not out there, then you would not be in here. Do you understand?

Boatgirl: Not really.

Priest: Do not question God! There can be no good and holy and right, if the opposite does not exist.

Boatgirl: What would be that then? Heaven?

Priest: Good God child! He eats babies! We can’t have a baby eater in here!

Boatgirl: He doesn’t look like a baby eater.

Priest: Looks can be deceiving.

Boatgirl: He looks like a hungry man.


Boatgirl: Who are we wrathing today?

Priest: That’s not a word. Mrs. T. B. Jones. Had a baby and kept it as her own.

Boatgirl: And her sin?

Priest: Stealing from the church!

Boatgirl: But she’s married. Mrs Jones.
Priest: Was. Her husband died three days before she gave birth.

Boatgirl: So there is no crime.

Priest: A woman alone is no person at all.

Boatgirl: When will she get here?

Priest: She’s long dead.

Boatgirl: So...

Priest: Their souls my child. I administer to their souls. God keeps a watch even in purgatory.

Boatgirl: They are in purgatory?

Priest: Of course. None of them were properly prepared when they died; the flood came in so quick. Some tried to come to me in the final moments and begged me to read them the last rites. Hypocrites. But the church was on the highest part of the island that day and I couldn’t risk opening the doors in case the water came in. Oh, the screams were piercing. None as far as I can see, when I look under the waves on calm days, have made it any further than the dreaded in between. Fools. But I love them as my little sheep, despite their foolishness. Each day I pick another and I wipe the slate clean for them. And on they go, to heaven or to hell. Whatever is their calling.

Boatgirl: But the slate is clean.

Priest: Some are born bad child. It can’t be helped. Every new babe I hold in my arms in the two o’clocks, I can tell right there and then if they are good on the inside or bad. Others just go bad during their miserable little lifetimes, and they are the ones I can do something for.

Boatgirl: Mrs. Jones?

Priest: To look at her you would say she’s not a bad sort. But I say look again. (Bellowing) Mrs. T. B. Jones! Get your sorry little soul in here now! God has some words for you!

Boatgirl: Is she here?

Priest: Patience. She has further to come than most. The manner in which she died.
Boatgirl: She didn’t drown with the others?

Priest: No. Took her own life by jumping off the white Cliffs of Have Mercy. Other side of the island. After she lost the baby.

Boatgirl: Her baby and her husband, both lost?

Priest: In a manner of speaking.

Boatgirl: You didn’t take the child?

Priest: How can you take anything from someone who doesn’t exist. That isn’t a question.

_Suddenly, Boatgirl collapses on the floor._

Priest: Child!

_The Priest crouches down to check her. Boatgirl is lying still. When the Priest is in her face, Boatgirl grabs the Priest’s hair and bangs her head violently on the floor. The Priest is unconscious, face down on the floor. Boatgirl is up on her feet immediately._

Boatgirl: Landkeeper!

Landkeeper: _offstage_ I hear you.

Boatgirl: Hurry! Where are you?

Landkeeper: Outside.

Boatgirl: Come in. She isn’t moving.

Landkeeper: Is she breathing?

Boatgirl: I don’t know. Are you coming in?

Landkeeper: I shouldn’t.

Boatgirl: She can’t do anything to you. Come here! I need your help!

Landkeeper: I don’t think I should. She said she put a curse on me that’d combust me if I entered.
Boatgirl: She doesn’t have powers. She barely has sense.

Landkeeper: You’d think that. At first.

*Boatgirl pulls on the rope around her waist. As the Landkeeper talks, she drags the boat into view.*

Landkeeper: Mostly I just don’t like being indoors. It doesn’t feel right. Started way back in my childhood when my mother would lock me in the airing cupboard. Never liked enclosed spaces much.

*The Landkeeper appears next to Boatgirl, a young boy sitting next to him. He has black hair and blue eyes, and an eerie, intoxicating peace about him.*

Boatgirl: Who’s this?

Landkeeper: Your precious cargo.

*She looks at him, confused.*

Landkeeper: Island time.

Boatgirl: Things get faster?

Landkeeper: Some of the time. Sometimes not.

Boatgirl: You are Joseph?

Landkeeper: He prefers Joe.

*Joe stands.*

Boatgirl: It’s him, isn’t it? You didn’t eat him.

*He stares blankly at her. Then he surveys the church.*
Landkeeper: She’s done a lot with the place.

Boatgirl: You’ve been in here before?

Landkeeper: Oh yes. I used to be the...

Boatgirl: What?

Landkeeper: It was lifetimes ago. Before the Inquisition. When men were still allowed to be clergy. Before the death of the Divine Masculine. Oh, it was eons ago.

Boatgirl: You were a Priest?

Landkeeper: You’d never believe it to look at me now.

Boatgirl: I’d believe it.

Landkeeper: Joe. Go out the back and stick your little fingers into all the keyholes and pick the locks like I showed you.

*Joe runs off.*

Landkeeper: We’ll take all we can carry. Nice and heavy.

Boatgirl: And then what will do?

Landkeeper: The other side of the island. I know a beach with a freshwater stream running right into it, and bush turkeys so tame you can reach out and snap their necks without getting up from your seat. We can make a home there for Joe.

Boatgirl: You didn’t even want to hold him an hour ago.

Landkeeper: I’ve grown quite attached. Now that he’s talking. He asks questions and needs me to tie his laces. I feel closer to the earth every time I help him brush his teeth. He knows you’re not his real mummy, but he loves you all the same. And you can teach him the reading and the writing and the things that make a person real. Don’t leave me now Boatgirl. I need you. I really need you. I need your smile and your scent and your tender motherly ways. I mean Joe. He needs a mother.

Boatgirl: He has one. I’m not her.
Landkeeper: You’re worth a thousand of her.

Boatgirl: You know who she is?

Landkeeper: No! I mean, no. But she must be bad to have lost her child.

Boatgirl: Not from what I hear. I need some time.

_Boatgirl moves as far away from the boat as she can without pulling it behind her. It isn’t very far. Unseen by the Landkeeper she tries desperately to untie the rope._

Landkeeper: Boy!

_Joe appears, his arms loaded with shiny treasure._

Landkeeper: Good man. Put it all in here.

_Joe climbs into the boat and the items tumble out of his arms, clattering to the bottom of the boat. The noise startles Boatgirl from her attempt to free herself. She turns sharply._

Boatgirl: What are you doing! I’m trying to think. What have you got there?

_She goes to the boat and picks up the shiny trinkets._

Boatgirl: What are we supposed to do with this?

Landkeeper: Sell it. Make some cash.

Boatgirl: To whom? For what? We need fresh water and food supplies and protection from the elements.

Landkeeper: We’ve disappointed her, son.

Boatgirl: No you haven’t. You haven’t disappointed me, because I have nothing to do with you! Nothing!
Landkeeper: There is only us now.

Boatgirl: Here. Only us here. Other places at the end of this rope, at the end of a boat ride; the world is still going.

Landkeeper: Everything has been slipping and sliding so very much.

Boatgirl: Out! Get out of my boat. Now!

Joe and the Landkeeper reluctantly climb out.

Boatgirl: Go away! Take your trinkets and get out!

Landkeeper: And then what?

Boatgirl: Leave me alone.

The Landkeeper slowly picks all the items out the boat and passes them to Joe until he can carry no more. Boatgirl climbs into her boat.

Landkeeper: And what will you do about her?

He points to the unconscious Priest.

Boatgirl: I’ll tie her up. I’ll torture her in God’s name. I don’t know!

Landkeeper: Tie her nice and tight. She’s slippery. (Pause) There used to be a time, you know, when men and women walked with equal weight upon the earth.

Joe: There never was such a time. Life can only ever exist in the paradox of becoming or passing away. Life is a tension of birth and death. Balance is elusive.

Landkeeper: Yes, Joe. You’re right.

Joe and the Landkeeper exit. Boatgirl is left alone with her boat, the rope hanging limp beside her. She is despairing. She tries to work the heavy rope again. She looks around for a way to cut herself free. She spies the cross and clambers onto the altar. She takes the crucifix down and holds it horizontally. It is clear, in this position, that it is a large sword.
She begins sawing at the rope with the sword. It is difficult but it appears to be working. She is engrossed in the task. She does not notice the Priest rising slowly behind her. The Priest lifts herself slowly onto all fours and crawls to Boatgirl. She pulls herself up, and then lets out an almighty scream. Boatgirl drops the sword and it clatters to the ground.

Boatgirl: Finished.
SCENE SIX

Boatgirl is lying unconscious in her boat. The rope is now wrapped tight around her entire body. The Priest enters with some Brasso and a cloth and sets to work polishing the crucifix, which is returned to its original place above the altar. After a few moments she checks her watch and sets down her cloth. Candles burn around the church filling it with eerie shadows.

Priest:  *(Bellowing)* Four o’clock!

*Boatgirl awakes with a start. She sits up with great difficulty, quickly becoming aware of her predicament.*

Priest:  Rise and shine.

Boatgirl:  You’ve tied me up.

Priest:  A good sleep didn’t make you any brighter. Hurry now. Four o’clock.

Boatgirl:  How am I to hurry anywhere?

Priest:  Nor dulled your wicked wit you nasty child.

Boatgirl:  What am I supposed to have done?

Priest:  I can smell him upon you. You let him in. And another. A less pungent odour, but evil all the same.

Boatgirl:  I didn’t let anyone in.

Priest:  You stole from me.

Boatgirl:  I didn’t take anything.

Priest:  My baby?

Boatgirl:  He wasn’t yours.

Priest:  You took from the church.

Boatgirl:  I didn’t mean to.
Priest: You took the child without meaning to? Just up and carried him out without a thought?

Boatgirl: Yes. No. I thought I was saving him.

Priest: Where are they now?

Boatgirl: I don’t know.

Priest: God will find them. He sees all things. Now to business! It’s four o’clock.

Boatgirl: And this hour brings...

Priest: Sacrifice.

*Boatgirl tries to stand. A terrible pain rips through her body. She collapses into the boat. The Priest is now down off the altar and is busy polishing an object on the altar. She turns when she hears Boatgirl’s pain.*

Priest: I am taking it as ‘no’, you won’t be joining the cause.

*She looks to Boatgirl for a response, but Boatgirl is trying to establish what has happened to her body.*

Priest: I was meant to ask you one more time. Give you the chance to accept our offer. We really did want you here with us. We could have done so much.

Boatgirl: What has happened to me?

Priest: The real you has not been touched. Just the illusory self.

Boatgirl: I want to leave. Now.

Priest: But my child, you were so emphatic. ‘I have no home!’

Boatgirl: I didn’t mean that.

Priest: But the truth is you don’t, do you? None of us do. We have things. We surround ourselves with things and we hope that they say something about us, reflect well on us, give us a place. We make relationships, but we know in our heart that they are flimsy and too much time or distance can easily destroy them.
In the end we are, without. Except for the special few who are chosen, who are chosen to find the truth. And they are beacons unto the world, and they must be nurtured and encouraged and sent forth. You were one such.

Boatgirl: I am not one such anything to you.

Priest: Not anymore.

*The Priest holds up the jar she has been polishing so lovingly. It contains a body part in fluid. But what part it is exactly is indistinct.*

Boatgirl: What is that?

Priest: It is your future, my child.

Boatgirl: What is it?

Priest: A piece of you. The blessed part of you. But we will not have a non-believer ruining this place. Populating it with more disbelievers.

Boatgirl: What part of me?

Priest: Can’t you tell?

*Boatgirl places her hands over her lower abdomen, the part of her body that is causing her pain.*

Boatgirl: What have you done?

Priest: Nothing that I am not ordained to do.

Boatgirl: You have taken my…

Priest: I’ll untie you now. I don’t think you’ll be any trouble. After all, you are finished. You end here. You might have a few decades left in you. You might travel some more. Perhaps you will even meet a man, settle down, buy a house, build a house! But eventually conversation will turn to that subject, that terrible absence that you have been smiling so hard to forget. And in spite of your pretty dresses and freshly washed hair, you will have to say, ‘I am no woman’. And he will stand up and walk out of your nicely
cleaned house and make love to someone who can ensure his name will go on forever. Do you understand?

Boatgirl: I don’t believe you.

Priest: Why wouldn’t you? Have any of my threats been idle?

Boatgirl: You are trying to break my spirit so I will stay.

Priest: Your spirit, girl, means nothing to me now.

*The Priest finishes untying Boatgirl. Boatgirl tries to climb out of the boat but she is in too much pain.*

Priest: I’ll get some rubbing alcohol for your wound. I hardly need a nasty infection to contend with on top of everything else. You’ll feel better soon and then I’ll have lots for you to do.

*The Priest exits. Boatgirl stands gingerly, carefully. Slowly she steps out of the boat. She is bent over in pain. She lifts up her top. She has a big red X on her lower stomach like a treasure map X. She lets out a cry and then covers her mouth. She looks around for some way out. She tries to push her boat but it is far too heavy for her. The Priest re-enters. She has a bottle and 2 cups of tea on a tray. She sets it down on the altar.*

Priest: Why are you wavering child? This is your calling! You came to the island to take up your apprenticeship with me, hey? You were lost before, remember, and now you are found, aren’t you? Yes you are. You had nothing, but questions and doubt and empty seeking that time and time again came to nothing. And now? Now you have me. This is your work.

*The Priest surveys Boatgirl, panting, standing contorted in pain, in the middle of the room.*

Priest: You should be resting you know. Your stitches won’t heal. Such a fine job. You’ll have hardly a scar. He always had such a delicate hand.

Boatgirl: You did this to me!
Priest: No. It was my idea. Well, in truth it was Divine Intervention to save the pilgrim from herself.

Boatgirl: Who did this?

Priest: I’ve always been quite queasy with the inner workings. But a fisherman, he guts things all the time. And then there is the baby eating, which I wasn’t fair in describing before. He only does it when he is really desperate for food.

Boatgirl: He hates you, he hates this place. He and I are escaping.

The Priest laughs cruelly.

Boatgirl: He isn’t lying to me.

Priest: When you spend so much time seeking the answers my child, you often miss what is right before your eyes. Why didn’t you just stay home? You are beginning to be a thorn in my side.

Boatgirl: I wasn’t looking for you.

Priest: How do you know? You hadn’t found me yet!

Boatgirl: This isn’t the Blessing Place.

Priest: Then what is it? This is it my dear! This is your salvation. Let me put some of this on your wound.

Boatgirl: Don’t touch me.

Priest: I’m helping you child. You won’t see it, but I am.

The Priest calls out.

Priest: Enter! (Pause) Now!

The Landkeeper enters, his head bowed.
Boatgirl: I don’t believe he did this.

Priest: Did you cut the pretty girl open?

The Landkeeper nods.

Priest: There.

Boatgirl: He is terrified of you.

Priest: He is an honest man.

Landkeeper: I did as she says.

*Boatgirl looks confused for a moment and then hardens her face into blankness.*

Boatgirl: You brought me tea. I’ll have it now please. I need my strength. And the alcohol. I’ll put it on myself.

Priest: He can put the alcohol on your wound.

*Boatgirl says nothing as the Priest hands the alcohol to Landkeeper. The Priest then hands Boatgirl the tea. She takes Boatgirl’s face in her hands.*

Priest: Surrender to me. There is still time. And I have lived. I can tell you. There is nothing better than this.

*Boatgirl fixes her gaze. Suddenly the tea is in the Priest’s face. She stumbles backwards. The Landkeeper, seizing the opportunity, takes the lid off the alcohol and throws the bottle at the Priest. He grabs a candle from the altar and flings it in the direction of the Priest. Boatgirl looks at the Landkeeper for a moment, confused by his contradictory actions, and then she runs for her life, without a backward glance at the boat or the Landkeeper.*
SCENE SEVEN

It is dawn. The fire in the now razed church is smoking and smouldering. Joe, now a grown man, carries Boatgirl’s unconscious body into the church and lays her upon the altar. He lifts her shirt. He gently cleans her wound. He checks her, and then he leaves. The Trapeze hangs closer to the stage from this point onwards and remains dimly lit.
SCENE EIGHT

Boatgirl sits up slowly on the altar. She looks around her. The building is no longer smouldering. All is black and charred. She climbs down, realising that she is no longer in pain. She lifts her shirt. The scar is there but there is no bleeding. She looks around. She knows that a great deal of time must have passed. She walks to where her boat once was. A pile of ashes is all that remains. She runs her hand through the ashes and lifting her shirt she rubs the ash slowly and deliberately onto her skin. She turns to the altar and jumps up to retrieve the cross. She has it in her hand when the bride enters.

A bride in full white dress and veil, angry and overheated, enters the church and marches over to Boatgirl. The bride pauses, composes herself, and with a dazzling smile, addresses Boatgirl as though Boatgirl is a little slow. She does not acknowledge the sword in Boatgirl’s hand.

Bride: Excuse me. Have you seen the church?

Boatgirl: There is no church on this island.

Bride: I hate to disagree, but I believe there is.

Boatgirl: There has never been a church here. Not in living memory.

Bride: I don’t mean to be rude, but I organised this wedding entirely. And I know what I arranged. I booked it on the website. www.littlechurchofthereddirt.com. I called to confirm my deposit had been received. I spoke to the priest myself.

Boatgirl: You must have taken the wrong boat.

Bride: I know I took the right boat! We were met by a man and a boy on the other side of the island who said the church was right here.

Boatgirl: You can have your wedding here if you like.

Bride: I don’t like. The priest said that I would be totally unique, that my wedding would be the first wedding here, that no one would have a service like mine, that I would have the best photos because of the glorious midgee population. Have you heard of them? She said they are like tiny butterflies. I want that wedding. I don’t want to get married in this pile of rubble. This is not how my wedding will be!

Boatgirl: Maybe it’s God’s plan for you.
Bride: What in Christ’s name has God got to do with it?

Boatgirl: I just thought, you having a church wedding.

Bride: It was meant to look good in the pictures!

Boatgirl: This place has a lovely view of the water.

Bride: And who would marry us?

Boatgirl: I will. I’ve been trained for just this thing. Six o’clock! Weddings! Just in time for the glorious sunset. Special time of day around here. All the ‘butterflies’ come out in abundance. And some people say they have magical properties.

Bride: Really? How so?

Boatgirl: First, let me tell you a story. Sit for a moment. You have come such a long way. Such a journey from that moment you first gushed, ‘Yes!’

She sits the bride upon the altar. Boatgirl sets down the sword carefully. She removes the bride’s veil and starts fixing her hair. The bride obliges silently.

Boatgirl: In this story, there is a bride, like your self.

Bride: Oh good.

Boatgirl: On her wedding night, the bride is murdered in her bed.

Bride: Oh no.

Boatgirl: By her husband.

Bride: Oh dear.

Boatgirl: Her husband was caught and hanged for her murder.

Bride: I don’t know if you should go on.

Boatgirl: But that was ok. Because the bride then was free.

Bride: She was dead.

Boatgirl: She was dead in one kind of way. She came to the land of the boats.
Bride: It doesn’t sound like a very nice…

Boatgirl: Shush.

Bride: The bride quickly became a master boat maker for there was little else to do. She built herself a boat for every day that she lived, for she knew, that way she would never be trapped again, by a man or any other piece of land that might try to moor on her. Each dawn as she saw the colour change in the sky, and knowing she was free for another day, she would push a boat into the water to set some other person free.

Bride: I don’t know how to make a boat.

Boatgirl: No, not many of us do.

Bride: Do make sure my veil is on properly. I want to look my very, very, very best.

Boatgirl reattaches the bride’s veil. She carefully and kindly positions it and pulls it over to cover her face.

Boatgirl: There you are my girl. You’re perfect.

Bride: Really? I hope I don’t faint.

Boatgirl: You won’t faint. You’re more ready for this than you’ve ever been for anything in your life. You were made to do it.

Bride: You know, it really does feel that way. Thank you so much. You’ve been so kind. Come on then. My life begins today and I don’t want to waste another moment!

Boatgirl follows the bride out of the rubble.
SCENE NINE

Boatgirl arrives at the site of the church. There is almost no evidence of its existence except for the sword. Smoke billows lightly around the place. Boatgirl walks slowly through it then sits upon the altar. Unseen by Boatgirl, Joe emerges from behind the altar. He is now a fully-grown man, 25 years old, tall and strong. He comes and sits beside Boatgirl. She does not move. They sit in silence for several long moments.

Joe: You did this.

She does not reply.

Joe: It needed doing. Rise and fall. Rise and fall.
Boatgirl: I need to see the Landkeeper.
Joe: You won’t find him. Unless you’ve got that kind of sight.
Boatgirl: I don’t. What happened?
Joe: He died of a broken heart.
Boatgirl: For whom?
Joe: For her.
Boatgirl: Who?
Joe: The one that died in your fire.
Boatgirl: He didn’t love her. He was terrified of her.
Joe: Love can often look like that.
Boatgirl: No, he really hated her. And she hated him.
Joe: Yes. They couldn’t live without one another.
Boatgirl: I killed her?
Joe: Yes.
Boatgirl: So he killed himself?

Joe: Don’t beat yourself up about it. He had betrayed her in helping you and he couldn’t live with that.

Boatgirl: But I need him. He can help me out. We had planned our escape.

Joe: He was never going to escape. Or help you to. He wouldn’t know how.

Boatgirl: I suppose you’re Joe.

Joe: I am.

Boatgirl: Why are you still here?

Joe: I knew someone would have to tell you what had happened when you came looking.

Boatgirl: But I have taken two lives.

Joe: She wasn’t a very good priest. And he was a hopeless ferryman.

Boatgirl: I’m stuck here. My boat...I lost my boat in the fire.

Joe: We can find another one.

Boatgirl: No, he was very clear. One boat for each arrival.

Joe: We can throw something together.

Boatgirl: Where is yours? We can go on yours! Where did you put it when you arrived?

Joe: We have something we need to attend to. We need to lay them to rest.

Boatgirl: How did he die?

Joe: There is only one way to die on this island if it isn’t in the natural order of things.

Boatgirl: Not the...

Joe: White Cliffs of Have Mercy.

Boatgirl: Did you try to stop him?
Joe: How could I?

Boatgirl: Weightless.

Joe: What?

Boatgirl: In the end...no weight on him at all.

Joe: Except for the very end of course.

Boatgirl: Yes. I thought he would have asked you to crush him or something. Stand under a falling tree.

Joe: He tried. He was so old and frail at the end, it would have been easy. Bones like fine china.

Boatgirl: Will you be old soon, then?

Joe: Only if I stay here. But where else would I go?

Boatgirl: I shouldn’t have stopped her sending you away.

Joe: I’m glad you did.

Boatgirl: Do you know how to make a boat?

Joe: No.

Boatgirl: Then neither of us has anywhere to go.

Joe: You do. You’re free. You weren’t made from this island.

Boatgirl: I have no boat.

Joe: Come with me.

Boatgirl: Where?

Joe: I’ll take you. I can’t explain it. Besides it might have moved by now.

Boatgirl: I don’t know.

Joe: You don’t want to stay here.

Boatgirl: Don’t I?
Joe: Do you?

Boatgirl: No.

Joe: You’ll be pleased with this place. Come with me. You’ll feel pleased. The Blessing Place. I know where it is.

*Joe exits. Boatgirl pauses for a moment, not knowing if she can trust him. There is a noise behind her.*
This scene follows on directly from the last. The bride is standing on the trapeze. Boatgirl is standing below her.

Bride: You weren’t to know. You weren’t to know that I would stand next to my beloved and feel him drag a blade across my throat. It all felt...different. Wrong. I knew he’d kill me in a heartbeat if he had the chance. Love can feel like that. I couldn’t risk it. It would have been a beautiful wedding. I’m not so certain about the rest. This is an island of ghosts. I could feel them. Tugging at my dress. Saying, ‘Silly girl, what a silly dress. So impractical in all this red dirt.’ Look at it. Look at my dress. All covered in red earth. I’ll never get it out. If only brides could wear dark colours. But there is such a lot of expectation. Such a lot of wishing that the bride will wear white. Such an attachment to pure. No one is pure. We are born sinners.

Boatgirl: It seems that is what we are made for.

Bride: Life is such a struggle to be good. I can still feel the knife. All that promise, taken away from that woman.

Boatgirl: What woman?

Bride: From your story. She hoped for so much. Children, a home of her own, suburbs and leafy trees. All taken from her in her sleep. She couldn’t even fight.

Boatgirl: O, she fought.

Bride: Did she?

Boatgirl: Like a feral beast. The police reported that the murder scene looked like a slaughter house.

Bride: And did she hurt him?

Boatgirl: Oh yes. Despite her death, he bled the most. Her nails, neatly manicured for the big day, dug deep into his chubby flesh. That’s why he was so easy to track down. They followed the trail of his blood. He begged them to kill him so he wouldn’t have to hear her howling screams in his ears anymore. He was like a madman, they said.

Bride: When do the butterflies come out?
Boatgirl: There are none here. Only midgees and mossies and flies.

*Boatgirl sees the sword on the ground beside her. She picks it up.*

Bride: Nothing turns out the way you think it will. That bride, in your story. She didn’t go to the island of boats. She just died, didn’t she? She was just dead. The end.

Boatgirl: I...

Bride: No. Don’t tell me. It’s what I believe.

Boatgirl: Then that is the way it happened.

Bride: On second thoughts, I don’t think you should have told me.

Boatgirl: I needed to share it with someone.

Bride: Such burdensome things, words. I’m not sure I can take anymore. You already know what is going to happen next, don’t you?

Boatgirl: I can imagine.

Bride: Please don’t take it too personally.

*The bride lets go of the trapeze.*
SCENE ELEVEN

The dead bodies of Landkeeper and the Priest lie, with heads touching, on the ground. Joe and Boatgirl are standing above them. Boatgirl is carrying the sword.

Joe: You didn’t kill her. She made it out of the fire.

Boatgirl: But she’s dead.

Joe: She died, but not by you. Not by your fire. She died from a broken heart.

Boatgirl: For him?

Joe: Yes, for him.

Boatgirl: He’d already jumped?

Joe: No, but he was on his way. She went after him.

Boatgirl: Did she try to stop him?

Joe: She found him on the cliff top.

Boatgirl: And they jumped together?

Joe: Neither of them was good enough for that.

Boatgirl: Then what?

Joe: They fought. They laid eyes on one another and they fought like animals, screaming and kicking and blaming the other.

Boatgirl: You were watching?

Joe: Yes.

Boatgirl: Did you try to stop them?

Joe: Why would I do that? They were miserable creatures. She had the upper hand. She had him almost over, but he was clinging to her so desperately, loving and hating her with every touch.

Boatgirl: And then they fell?

Joe: Listen.
Boatgirl looks down, silenced.

Joe: I was watching from a good distance. I’d hardly seen her before, this monstrous woman. Only that time, when I was still a child, and she seemed small then, weak. I couldn’t understand what all the fuss was about. But her fighting was dark and venomous. I leant forward on the rock I was hiding behind and I gave myself away. She turned to me. Her eyes were full of fury, and something else. She recognised me. Her anger changed like she was melting. She was melting in front of me, softening. It was just enough for the Landkeeper to gain the upper hand. He wrenched her off the cliff, and they fell, as one, bodies entangled like they were fornicating in the air. I heard him yelling. He kept saying it again and again as they fell.

Boatgirl: What did he say?


Boatgirl looks intently into Joe's face.

Boatgirl: No.

Joe: You don’t believe me?

Boatgirl: I don’t believe it.

Joe: You didn’t believe they really loved one another?

Boatgirl: No. Do you?

Joe: I am the proof.

Boatgirl: She was going to sell you to strangers.

Joe: She believed it was God’s work.

Boatgirl: And he. He knew from the first moment I took you from the church.

Joe: They both knew.
Boatgirl: How did you get them here?

Joe: I climbed down. I dragged him up. And then I went back for her.

Boatgirl: Why?

Joe: They are my flesh.

Boatgirl: I can’t imagine them being parents. Lovers.

Joe: I try not to.

Boatgirl: But you are nothing like them.

Joe: No. I’m their perfect paradox. They were both weak, so I am strong. They were both full of rage so I am content.

Boatgirl: Do we need to bury them?

Joe: No. They’ll decompose. Or the birds will eat them first.

Boatgirl: You don’t mind?

Joe: I think it is fitting.

Boatgirl: Are you really content?

Joe: I’m not scared. They were scared of everything. This is an island full of ghosts.

Boatgirl: Am I?

Joe: No.

Boatgirl: Did I take a wrong turn?

Joe: No. I don’t think that is possible. You came here for something else. Perhaps, was it me?

He takes the sword from her hand and he holds it. He smiles a dazzling smile at her. She smiles back. He tries the sword in his hand. He holds onto it as he speaks. A storm is building on the horizon. The wind starts to blow wildly.

Joe: It’s going to flood.
Boatgirl: It’s just a storm.

Joe: The island is sinking. All that slipping and sliding. We’re adrift. The water level has been rising steadily.

Boatgirl: We’ll drown with all the rest.

Joe: Maybe.

Boatgirl: The boat is gone.

Joe: We have some time. We won’t sink straight away.

Boatgirl: Time for what? What is there to do? What can we do?

Joe: Everything here is perfection.

Boatgirl: You’ve got a plan?

Joe: Yes.

*He runs toward the cliff and flings the sword off. Boatgirl does not have time to react. Joe comes to Boatgirl and lifts her up, beneath the trapeze. She lifts her arms but does not hang from it. Joe places a stump of wood beneath her to take the weight. He climbs on the stump behind her and looks as if he is hanging also but he makes no contact with the trapeze. As he does so, the Priest and the Landkeeper sit up and watch. Boatgirl is unaware of this as she cannot turn around. Joe takes nervous glances at his parents throughout.*

Joe: We can wait for the rain here. Watch it as it washes over us. Enjoy every moment. I don’t know where to look.

Boatgirl: What are you looking for?

Joe: You. That thing in you. That thing. They could see it. They wanted it. They saw it.

Boatgirl: I don’t know what you mean.

Joe: No, you can’t know. It’s in you. It is you. If you saw it, it would be outside of you. We are all blind to ourselves.
He climbs down and walks around her, analysing her.

Boatgirl: Can I get down?

Joe: Let me look at you for a moment longer. I want to find it like they did.

Boatgirl: Well, if it is inside of me, she took it.

Joe: I have that sight.

Boatgirl: What sight?

Joe: Inside. She didn’t know, but I do. That thing she wanted from you cannot be taken with knives and butchery.

Boatgirl: I can smell the rain. It’s close.

Joe: We have all the time in the world.

Boatgirl: We could search the island for high ground.

Joe: We’d never find it. It’ll be on the move.

Boatgirl: We have some wood from the altar. We can take it apart.

Joe: We should stay here. Keep looking. That is our real hope.

Boatgirl: For what? Stop it! I need help.

Joe: I need this.

Boatgirl: You said you were perfect.

Joe: I said I was a paradox. That means I am nothing except what I am not. I’m empty.

Boatgirl: You’re not empty. But you’ll soon be dead if we don’t get moving.

Joe: You are brimming over. You have everything. The whole world inside of you. You are contained.

Boatgirl: I don’t feel it.

He laughs wildly.
Joe: You fill up the whole island. You chase away the ghosts. I want it. I want you.

Boatgirl: You can’t have me.

Joe: I want to…consume you.

He jumps up onto the stump, as though to kiss her, but he does not.

Joe: I want to fit you.

Boatgirl: The rain…

Joe: Die with you.

Boatgirl: Die?

Joe: Live inside you.

Boatgirl: Love me?

He wraps himself around her. She responds with a look of near relief. He holds her and she lets go of the trapeze. She wraps herself around him and they almost kiss. Very slowly, climbing off the stump, he lays down with her above him, and she is almost upon him but raised slightly above his body. These two writhing bodies move in stylised, slow lovemaking.

Then, Boatgirl tries to kiss him and he breaks away. He flicks her over and he is on top of her, pinning her down violently. The love is gone. Boatgirl kicks him hard and he rolls off her. She jumps up and swings herself onto the trapeze without a second thought. Time stops for Joe as Boatgirl makes contact with the trapeze for the first time.

Boatgirl: I write down the question, what am I doing here? I look at me looking at me hanging from a trapeze, arms extended. I look back at me, writing this question, stretching me on the rack of my inside pieces. I am inside and out. I am not contained. I cannot be consumed for there is no way to stuff all of me inside you. I am inside and out. I am watching me thinking, watching me spinning. I fill the margin of the page, the page from which I hang with questions for me. What am I doing here? I am as lost as myself. I am inside my mind and out of it. I put my body out, I stretch it out, it is
outside, long and feeling, touching, holding, grasping. I put my body where my mind cannot go. I feel strong. I feel capable. I feel ready. I can spin and spin and lift and hold. I am in control. Inside is my mind and she is restless. She wants control, she wants to be free, she wants to hang out with my body. But my body is the master and the slave is the mind. The mind can never be present. The mind does not feel the kiss, the cold, the rain, the pain. There are no pain receptors in the brain. Not a one. The mind cannot be touched. Not by anyone but me.

But my body. My hanging body. My falling body. My body is vulnerable. My body is brave and masterful and strong. But it is outside. And outside is a dangerous place. In the wind and the rain and the kiss. The body is soft. The mind cannot die even when you try to kill it. The body is dead at the drop of a hat.

I am not special. I am not unique. I am no more than you. I am nothing but the same as you.

_Boatgirl becomes conscious of being on the trapeze and falls hard onto the ground. She stands quickly. Joe is still crouched on the ground. Time begins again. He looks up at her. He leaps at her and attempts to push her down. For a moment he succeeds. But she bites and he leaps off her. They struggle but suddenly they are equally matched. Perfectly weighted. It is a battle but neither can dominate the other. Joe lunges to kiss her. She slaps him. He spits and steps back. He knows he cannot win this way._

Joe: What is wrong with you?

Boatgirl: Me?

Joe: I just want to hold you, know you…

Boatgirl: Love me?

_Joe looks away, repelled by her words._

Boatgirl: I can make it off.

Joe: I know you can’t.

Boatgirl: We can both leave here.

Joe: I’ll await my fate with calm.
Boatgirl: You're not full of calm. You're not their paradox! You're their negative. You're nothing. You can't feel anything. What's the point of living at all if you sit and wait for death to come? (Pointing at the Priest) I'd prefer to live and die with her fury than live empty like you!

Joe stares at her.

Boatgirl: Well? Well?

Joe: Can you hear that? It's the water. It's coming.

Boatgirl: You deserve this watery grave.

Joe: There is very little between love and hate.

Boatgirl: I don't love you because I don't hate you.

Joe: Don't you?

Boatgirl: You are alone now. That's your only flesh there behind you. You are alone. And now, you are even more alone.

Boatgirl exits.

Joe: Are you sure this is the way?

Landkeeper: It's the only way.

Priest: She'll see soon enough.
SCENE TWELVE

Boatgirl is in the remnants of the church. She is busy hammering away at an awful mess of wood and nails, the remains of the altar. She is trying to build her boat but it is clear that she has no idea what she is doing. She talks feverishly to herself as she works. As she mutters, the trapeze above her head glows in a gentle light.

Boatgirl: No pokies, no beer for the bar, no people to drink at the bar, no church, no God in this place, no flood, no passion, no justice, nobody sane, no bloody ferry for me, no way off, no idea how I got here, no reason for it, no peace, no calm, no reason for being, no tourists, no wedding, no good stories to tell, no ghosts, nobody’s touch, no sleeping sound at night, no sleeping at all, no roots, no paradox, no kindness, no reason, no death, no way out, no way in, no way off, no one to talk to, no place for a woman, no man is an island, no man’s woman.

*She stands, and speaks out loudly, although still to herself.*

No good can come of this!

*She kicks the pieces of wood and random tools in front of her. She exits. Joe enters. He immediately sets to work with the wood, and seemingly magically fits all the pieces together without much effort. When he is done, he stands back to survey his creation. It is a coffin, not a boat. Boatgirl enters.*

Boatgirl: What have you done?
Joe: Just what you wanted. A way out.
Boatgirl: You can build a coffin, but not a boat?
Joe: Very different. This is all straight lines. Boats are all curves.
Boatgirl: You’ve used everything I need for my boat. There’s nothing left.
Joe: At least when the flood comes you can lie down in peace, awaiting your end.
Boatgirl: This is not my end! You lie down in it!
Joe: I’ve already made my own. We can join them together if you like. We can hold hands and talk as the water rises.

Boatgirl: No! No more talking. No more crazy talk with crazy people on a crazy island that I never chose to come to.

Joe: As you wish.

Boatgirl: Don’t take that tone with me!

Joe: Anything you say.

Boatgirl lunges at Joe with a plank of wood. He narrowly ducks a blow to the head. They stare at one another, breathless, for several silent moments. Joe turns to leave. Boatgirl lunges again and whacks him behind the knees. He falls hard to the ground. She drops the wood and jumps on top of him, biting and kicking. Suddenly, he is fighting her, pulling her hair and trying to pin her down. They fight, viciously, for several moments. Knowing she cannot beat him, Boatgirl jumps back. Now they are panting, glaring, angry.

Joe: Eight o’clock. Funerals.

Boatgirl: Not mine.

Joe: You came here to die.

Boatgirl: Not me.

Joe: You came here to die because that is what all people who come here do.

Boatgirl: You were born here.

Joe: And I will die here. And you were born to die. That is the price of the trip. You can cling to any false imagining you like. It is the only way off the island.

Boatgirl: I’ll swim before I give in.

Joe: The sharks will get you.

Boatgirl: The sharks can have me, as long as this island doesn’t get me.

Joe: We could do it nicely for one another, before the flood comes. Gently.
Boatgirl: I’ll gladly kill you. This island has made me a killer.

Joe: You haven’t killed anyone.

Boatgirl: I killed your mother.

Joe: She escaped the fire.

Boatgirl: I killed a bride with my words.

Joe: She fell to her death at her own choosing.

Boatgirl: I killed your father by breaking his heart.

Joe: But not for you.

Boatgirl: I’m killing you. I kept you here. Any hour now you’ll be old and dying.

Joe: If the water doesn’t get me first.

Boatgirl: I made you angry enough to try and kill me.

Joe: I wasn’t going to kill you.

Boatgirl: You just offered!

Joe: I’m not finished talking to you.

Boatgirl: Then you’ll kill me?

Joe: If you want me to.

Boatgirl: I don’t want you to.

Joe: You make it sound like clinging desperately to life is the only option.

She looks at him in despair. She picks up a spare plank of wood slowly and deliberately.

Boatgirl: I have work to do.

Joe: Maybe the coffin was a bad idea. Maybe you would prefer a funeral pyre. That’s defiance, hey? Fire in the face of all that black water.
Boatgirl does her best to ignore him and attempts to dismantle the coffin.

Joe: Everyone here has worked so hard for you, and this is how you repay them? Even that boat weighing you down, gone. Noah and the Ark. King James Version, edited and briefly amended.

As Joe speaks, Boatgirl works furiously on pulling apart the coffin.

Joe: GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch. And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.

And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every sort shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep them alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

And Noah did according unto all that the LORD commanded him.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

Then God remembered Noah floating out there when all else was dead. And Noah thought it must be about time, so he sent forth the dove out of the ark; and the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth was a butterfly: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth. Then just when they thought they were all saved, they hit a rogue island, nothing more than a rock really and all on board perished. After some time life went on all the same. Because it always does.
Boatgirl: That’s not what happened.

Joe: It is now. Who’s going to argue different?

Boatgirl: It wasn’t a butterfly. It was an olive branch.

Joe: Why did the olive tree survive and not the butterfly?

Boatgirl: The dove would have eaten the butterfly.

Joe: Yes, it is our nature. The flood waters coming. Can you feel it lapping at your feet?

Boatgirl: Yes I feel it. I am real. Can you?

Joe: It fills me with peace. When you have travelled full circle, you will come back to Me, the source of everything, and you will be one with Me as you are in the beginning.

Boatgirl: This is an island of ghosts. Look, your coffin is sinking.

Joe: I can’t be shaken.

Boatgirl: The waters rising. It swirls around my knees. Are you ready?

Joe: I am always ready.

Boatgirl: It’s cold and black. I bet you didn’t expect that.

Joe: Nothing surprises me.

Boatgirl leans forward and kisses Joe, quick and hard, on the lips. He is taken by surprise. From behind her she pulls the jar containing her unnamed body part. She smacks Joe in the head with it. He slumps to the floor. He is dead. His body is beneath the trapeze, which is now glowing. Boatgirl sees it, as if for the first time. She places the jar, which she is still holding, gently on the ground. She digs the earth, a hole big enough for the jar, and she empties the contents into the ground. She covers the hole with earth.

Boatgirl: Bless this place.

She climbs, in one movement, onto Joe’s lifeless back, and mounts the trapeze. She stands on it and looks out at all she sees. Blackout.
CHAPTER SEVEN. THE THIRD ELEMENT: THE META-THEATRICAL AND THE ENACTMENT OF LANGUAGE

“But how do they do it?” Chamcha wanted to know.

“They describe us,” the other whispered solemnly. “That's all. They have the power of description, and we succumb to the pictures they construct.”

This chapter will argue that magical realist theatre employs strategies of the meta-theatrical with the purpose of undermining hegemony embedded in dramatic realism. Meta-theatre, “…calls attention to the ways in which any performance stages the necessary provisionality of all representation’ (Gilbert 1998:25). Meta-theatrical techniques in both form and content are employed to draw attention to the frame of the text. I will demonstrate, through examples from the plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo, that this is done through a subversive engagement with mise en scéne, language, including the use of irony, and in referencing real world events. Through these techniques, attention is drawn to the fictionality of the theatrical event, whilst maintaining the illusion of the play world so that new representations and new ideologies may be inscribed and validated. As Takolander states, ‘Even as magical realist fiction subverts the old realist lie and its lies about reality, it concurrently and contradictorily attempts to revive realism in order to reassert the truth’ (2007:179). In this chapter I expand the discussion on the six plays to include analysis of the performance text alongside the thematic and content of the playtext (whilst also applying this analysis to my own play A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light).

Mise en scéne

In literary magical realism, ‘Vision is often a theme, as well as a narrative strategy; magical realist texts conflate sight and insight and thus collapse the literal and figurative meanings of “vision”’ (Parkinson Zamora 2002:22). As such, the mise en scéne of the magical realist theatrical production is one of the most significant means by which to

rupture the seamless narrative of mimetic dramatic realism, for it is the visualising capacity of theatre that expands magical realism’s literary form. Magical realist theatre employs the *mise en scène* in anti-illusionary ways to conflate sight with insight, a strategy that separates magical realism from realism.

In *These People*, Ellis draws attention to the theatrical frame of the event by having the four family members slip into other roles throughout the play in a highly theatricalised and overt way, often rapidly and without much external signposting. In the following example Ellis employs both form and content meta-theatrically as the multiple identities of the Son collide. The Son goes to a detention centre, or an’ immigration reception and processing centre’ with a woman he would like to have as his girlfriend. Throughout the play he has been coming down from drugs, and smokes a joint before arriving at the detention centre. Just before entering, however, he starts to perform the persona of Captain Amazing:

*Captain Amazing is brought into casualty for registration, struggling slightly, by two nurses. Met by a registrar.*

Registrar: Name?

Captain: The Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous affairs.

Registrar: Any ID?

Nurse Two: They found him like this outside Villawood.

Nurse One: Detention Centre. Shouting at people through the fences.

Registrar: Villawood?

Captain: I apologise for the delay in responding!

Registrar: I just need your name.

Captain: All unauthorized arrivals must be detained and, unless they are granted permission to remain, are required to be removed as soon as reasonably practicable (2004:48–49).
This multiple layering of identity – the Son playing Captain Amazing playing the
Minister – reveals the Other as an aspect of the self. In addition, the role playing of the
performer is revealed rather than concealed. Ellis satirises the extraordinariness of the
Australian Government policy regarding refugees through the outlandish delusions of the
Son, who believes himself to be the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural and
Indigenous Affairs. Less extraordinary than the psychosis of the son, are the words he is
uttering in his drug-induced state. That which is held up as a narrative to protect and
secure Australia is made to seem inhuman and nonsensical.

Later in These People, as the play concludes, the Daughter is still retching up fish for her
family’s dinner, unable to rid herself of the penguin refugee she embodied in order to
write her essay. The Daughter has concocted the idea of Australia being invaded by
penguins from Antarctica:

*The Penguin announces its arrival again. She steps back and clears her throat.*

Daughter: Claiming sanctuary? Did you bring your documents?

*The Penguin makes another ‘mek-mek’ sound.*

Why didn’t you come by air?

*The Penguin is angry and frightened.*

Well, this is no good Pingu. You’ll have to be taken for processing – in
an appropriate place, like the desert – while we work through these

This metamorphosis, as well as that of the Son into the Minister and the Mother into the
detention centre psychologist, mirrors a situation ‘in which the being is perpetually
“other” than itself’ (Smith Allen 1999:3). It is a literalisation of absence and presence,
something in a state either of becoming or un-becoming. It suggests the dual occupation
of a single space. The characters’ transgressions demarcate a highly volatile space that
does not hide the illusion of either its form or content. The characters’ slippage in and out
of various roles, from which none are able to totally release themselves, serves to
contaminate the binary oppositional structure, especially of self/other and belonging/not
belonging. The character’s incomplete metamorphosis to and from the various roles
suggests the impossibility of closure, whether of their individual identities or of a seamless national identity.

Katz too reveals a fictional world that interrogates dominant representations of reality via the *mise en scène*. David Williams says of *The Eisteddfod*:

No matter how strange the world's that Katz’s language evokes, the performers inhabit them with gusto, and Kohn's shaping of the ever shifting stage worlds within worlds is always inventive, and regularly startling (ibid).

Kohn employs the *mise en scène* to critique and highlight the double space of theatre as both real and fictional. In the original Stuck Pigs Squealing production of *The Black Swan of Trespass*, the audience are led to a real basement through a maze of back alleys in inner-city Melbourne, after meeting on a street corner outside a pub. Afterwards, they are delivered onto a main street through the front door of a house they do not recognise having entered. The production sets up a visceral and metaphoric journey, which implicates the audience in the meaning-making process of the performance. They are active participants and their physicality, their being-present-ness informs the unfolding of the production as much as that of the actors. In creating a literal journey for the audience, Katz and Kohn actualise a transformation of reality and challenge the frame. At what point does the play world begin, and the real world end?

In both of Katz’s plays, especially *The Eisteddfod*, the set design is a stage within a stage, miniaturised and finished with minute attention to detail that creates a hyper-realism. Kohn utilises the form of his plays to demonstrate their inherent fictionality. This is further enhanced by the use of puppets in *The Black Swan of Trespass* and *The Eisteddfod*, discussed in the next section. *The Eisteddfod* takes place in a tiny bedroom, the stifling space enacted in the production by a small raised platform upon which all the action takes place. In this miniature room, every move is choreographed like a dance so that the two actors don’t bang into one another or the miniature props – tiny bed, chair,

57 Williams adds, ‘It’s a very light and fun game to begin with. Lally Katz's command of zany cartoonish absurdity is near-absolute, and the dialogue is witty, sharp, and continuously sparkling. Complementing the text, the direction (Chris Kohn) and the performers (Luke Mullins and Katherine Tonkin) are absolutely precise, completely disciplined, and always compelling’ (2007).
desk, and chalkboard. But even in this space within a space, the coexistence of the real and the unreal goes even further. By placing on a pair of oversized sunglasses (the only prop in the production that is bigger rather than smaller), Gerture enters her sacred space. This is a place that Abalone cannot enter, in which Gerture is a school teacher, the parallel world that might have been had Gerture’s life turned out differently.

Kohn further employs the framing device. *Black Swan* opens with projected credits, referencing the filmic genre. The credits draw attention to the artifice of the play. They also function to distance the audience from the performance-as-real, as there is a visual statement that this play has been manufactured, contradicting the live-ness of the theatrical event. Paradoxically, however, the credits also have the effect of drawing the audience further into the play world, in much the same way a film at a movie theatre becomes totally absorbing. In addition to this, *Black Swan* uses song as a framing device, a non-naturalistic moment that ruptures the reality of the unfolding story. Once again, the irony of this technique is that the use of song actually engages and engrosses the audience in the play world (the dominance of musical theatre in contemporary culture attests to this). On the one hand, Katz and Kohn beckon the audience in with a richly crafted, entertaining and playful narrative, whilst on the other hand continually draw attention to the frame of their production, pointing to its illusory nature, its constructed-ness, its effort and work. The audience are not passive receivers of a well-made play.

Another meta-theatrical device engaged with by Katz to draw attention to the frame is the use of role-playing. Gilbert suggests that the subversive potential of theatre as employed by women is extended via role-playing as ‘a way of countervailing imperial history’s strictures and/or refusing its characteristic roles’ (Gilbert 1998:170). In an example of this, Abalone has asked Gerture to play Lady Macbeth to his Macbeth in the local eisteddfod:

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Abalone: Are you having problems with Ian?

Gerture: Yes. Problems.

Abalone: Problems? What do you mean?
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Gerture: He doesn’t love me anymore.

Abalone: That can’t be true.

Gerture: We’ll see.

Abalone: Do you want to talk about it?

Gerture: In the morning

Abalone: Sure. You know what, I think playing Lady Macbeth will really help you right now. She’s a pretty strong woman.

Gerture: I’d rather Ophelia.

Abalone: Wrong play.


Neither character breaks the suspension of disbelief that forms the basis of the sibling’s relationship. Yet, in suggesting that Gerture may find strength in playing Lady Macbeth, Abalone is drawing attention to the fictionality of the roles that he and Gerture already play out, and also to the power of fiction to influence reality. This paradox is demonstrated by Gerture’s desire to actually play Ophelia. In using these well-known theatrical characters, Katz draws attention not only to the power of fiction, but highlights some of the most notable depictions of female madness in theatre. In the very act of articulating the names Lady Macbeth and Ophelia, Katz is placing these representations before our eyes, filling the space with their presence and necessarily juxtaposing Gerture’s madness with their own. Yet in highlighting the fictionality of all the roles Gerture plays, and the ways in which Gerture has been cast in these roles by her male counterpart, Katz is also re-casting these famous examples of feminine madness.

The mise en scène of Asylum continues the reinscription of female identity. This play functions symbolically to represent, in particular, Siying’s Otherness. The stage is grey with one red wall and several red boxes on top of the filing cabinets. Siying’s case file is red and the clothing that she wears for most of the play is red. This obviously represents China, but it also Siying’s exotic-ness and femininity, which is an important aspect in the way she is represented as Other. The dominance of the colour red also represents blood.
Siying has contracted HIV during her time in Australia fighting for protection, and as such her blood is the enemy within her own body and alienates her from her environment. She is dangerous to and within the cultural norm of Australian identity.

*The Joy before Thinking* also encourages a reinscription of female identity through the *mise en scène*. The casting of the most overtly feminine character as a man works to undermine preconceived notions of female-ness and prescriptive female identity. In the 2008 Theatreworks production this character is also played by an openly gay man. No attempt is made to conceal his sexual orientation, and whilst the direction is for the actor to play the part ‘straight’ (as in as a woman), it is impossible to conceal the camp-ness inherent to the performer. As such there is a disorientation of both notions of femininity and homosexuality. The performance of femininity by sections of the gay population is used as a frame to critique the embedded hegemony of the assumed role of women at a societal, cultural, political and biological level. The casting functions as a way to conflate the performance of the feminine with the ideology of patriarchy. In so doing, an attempt is made to reinscribe and recast both.

**Visualisation of Language**

A further meta-theatrical device is the way in which language is rendered visually in magical realist theatre, making metaphor real. There is the presence of ‘…the linguistic nature of experience’ (Faris 1995:176), a ‘…verbal magic closing of the gap between words and the world’ (ibid). The connotative and denotative are collapsed drawing the literal and figurative together, as is demonstrated in *A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light*. The play critiques the hegemonic force of patriarchy through the literalisation of the metaphors of patriarchal force. This is seen in particular through the female character’s bodies. Boatgirl has her uterus violently cut out from her body by the Priest. Although played by a woman, the character of the Priest possesses all the tropes of masculine power and is violent and aggressive. The Priest’s attempts to extract Boatgirl’s uterus suggests her desire to own the inherent power of the female body, that is, to nurture new life. The Priest is attempting to attain the mystery of the female body, one that does not reside in her own because she has so far aligned herself with the masculine.
But in removing the uterus from its source, it becomes a dead thing. The Priest is attempting to control Boatgirl’s body because its ability to create life is magical. Faris states, ‘Many of the magically real bodies we have encountered in magical realism are literally inscribed with their social, political, cultural and geographical coordinates’ (2004:188). The Priest is the figure of the sacred and yet possesses none of the magic or sense of the divine she sees in Boatgirl. Boatgirl is whole as she arrives on the island, and the patriarchal force of the Priest tears Boatgirl’s body apart. Her body is inscribed with the political and cultural force of patriarchy (which has often been asserted via the institution of religion, whatever name it goes by). Boatgirl is able to reclaim her uterus, however, and whilst she cannot return it to her body, she gives it to the earth and in so doing blesses the island in her ability to overcome the patriarchal force. In reclaiming her uterus, Boatgirl acts as blessing to the entire environment she inhabits, having a far greater impact in asserting the power of the feminine, than if the organ had remained in her body. In subverting notions of the sacred and the profane, in overturning the Priest, and in connecting to the power of her own embodiment, Boatgirl is freed from the pervasive hegemony that set to destroy her.

The literalisation of metaphor is further attested to in this example from *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea* by Kit Lazaroo:

Olley: He was right. Constable Morris. You got a good way with words. I never met no-one else who makes them so. Learn the alphabet and words come flocking to you like birds to a saint. Dido Morris. Full of clues. You catch people’s ears better than a hook catches fish. I want to do that. Open up my mouth and it all swarms out. Then I put the swarm down on a page to last for eternity. You show me just one letter a day. That won't hardly interrupt your soldiering.

Dido: What do you want the alphabet for? That's a terrible can of worms. You be better off without. Believe me.

Attention is drawn to the way in which language contains within it power structures that are then revealed and challenged. In magical realist theatre rendering language visually allows the inherent ideology to be made manifest *before our eyes* as this example from *True Adventures* suggests:
Olley:    Still writing my report?
Dougal:   Best make things watertight. So there be no argument.

Olley:    Where does it say, Olley Fletcher.
Dougal:   Olley Fletcher.
Olley:    Where does it say, York Fletcher.
Dougal:   York Fletcher.
Olley:    Read whole thing out again.
Dougal:   Found this morning by Growling Head, Olley Fletcher, missing thought
dead since the storms of tenth of July. Still missing thought dead, her
father York Fletcher. Miss Fletcher have no members of ordeal. There be
no suspicion of interference by any man, signed Police Sergeant Dougal
Morris.

Olley:    Found this morning by Growling Head. Show me word growling.
Dougal:   It's called growling because sometimes you can hear a faraway growling
in the air. And it’s called head because the land is like a head, you see,
looking out to see where growling comes from.

Olley:    Write it again. Write growling. Write it on a blank part.

As Hegerfeldt states, ‘In its reification of language, magic realist fiction can be seen to
undertake a re-evaluation of a Western tradition which, since the early days of modernity,
has tried to demarcate sharply between the realm of words and the realm of things’
(2005:260). Olley’s unfamiliarity with written language closes the gap between the world
and the word, literalising, that is making visual, the signifiers embedded in language.

Despite Dido’s ability with language it is Olley, paradoxically, who has the greatest
narrative authority. Her authority, or power, arises in that it is her story that sets the
course for all the other characters. It is her transformation from life to death and a return
to life that forces change upon all those around her. Her faith in the power of language,
and the manner by which it is actualised in her own experience serves to further increase
her linguistic potency; the authority possessed by those who have access to language is
not merely a concept to Olley. Magical realism suggests that ‘reality is not merely a
matter of the physical senses and empirical observation, but that other, non-material factors such as language and belief also enter into human constructions of the world, and must therefore be acknowledged’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:279). The following exchange between Olley and Dougal the policeman evidences this. Olley enters a trance-like state as she sounds out the letters. She experiences bodily the power that language has to transform:

_Dougal shows Olley words in a book._

Dougal: Follow it with your finger and speak it aloud at the same time, that's the best way to learn.

Olley: A is for apple, N is for net, G is for gate, U is for umbrella, I is for ink, S is for squid, H is for horse.

Dougal: Well done. There's nothing slow about you. You'll know more than me faster than a cat shakes his tail. All you do now is join the letters up and you speak the word. You speak it with your mouth and then you see it in your head. It's wonderful when it first starts to happen. (Pause) Is it happening?

Olley: Yes.

Dougal: You can see it inside your head?

Olley: (From faraway) Yes. Inside my head.

Dougal: Like dreams, isn't it? Like visions. Are there visions, Olley? Olley! Are you alright?

Olley’s newness to written words serves to defamiliarise language for the audience. Her fascination with language makes it strange and extraordinary. The space between the signified and the signifier is collapsed, suggesting the visualising capacities of language. In addition, this example evidences the way in which ‘Magic realist fiction re-opens the question of what is real by tracing the profound influence that fictions (in the broadest possible sense) exert upon people’s lives’ (Hegerfeldt 2005:57).

As a further example of this, the primary motif in Ellis’ *Falling Petals*, the disease, functions as a critique of economic rationalism. Ellis inscribes it visually on the bodies of the children of the town. It plays out in a generational battle that pits the students against
the teachers and their own parents, through the language and actions of economic rationalism. Payne evidences this; ‘Falling Petals…deals with the extent of the infiltration of the mindset of economic rationalism…The townsfolk’s conservatism is linked to their economic rationalist mindsets’ (Payne 2005:333). In the following example Phil argues with his father, the local primary school teacher, about the closure of the high school after the students start dying:

Phil: No ambition, no future, no bigger picture, that’s why they’re dying. Worthless deaths—that’s not a tragedy! You talk all you like about the value of their lives and forget about me, then. I’ve got to get my ticket: it’s called the university entrance.

John: You’re stressed. You don’t mean that…

Phil: Are they still paying your wages?

John: Don’t talk like this. Phil. What have I brought you up to believe in?

Phil: Get fucked.

John leaves.

Every problem is not a problem. It’s a challenge. This is a challenge. A challenge that shall make the end result all the sweeter. A challenge is an opportunity. Lie of Success.

He goes to the stereo and turns on a tape.


Payne observes, ‘While there is bigotry in Falling Petals, what is clear throughout is that almost all (if not all) of the country town’s small-minded bigotry and lack of ambition is linked at some point in the play…to the unproblematic acceptance by members of the town of the rhetoric of economic rationalism’ (2005:336). The imaginative realm of ideology is rendered visually. The narrative authority of those in positions of power in the town of Hollow (and by extension, Australia as a whole), manufactures the illness that kills the children off. This is evidenced in the following scene in which Phil is talking to one of the last remaining teaches at the school, begging to be allowed to sit his final exams:
Phil: Why don’t you do something about the circumstances? You’re in the position, now.

Lawrence: Next year. If anything opens, you can do your Year Twelve at the TAFE…

Phil: What?! What about meeting my needs this year?


The imaginative realm of the ideology of authority – teachers, parents, local government, the media – is enacted on the flesh of the children, demonstrating that mere words, in this case culturally constructed narratives, are not empty but terrifyingly real. Payne suggests, ‘While the children in the play are hardly likeable characters, then, the play indicates that they are the victims of an older generation that has left them little scope for any genuine rebellion. They are, for all their rebellion, merely reflections of the shallow selfish greed of their parents’ (Payne 2005:338). The students are fulfilling the broken and damaged narratives of the unsatisfied and unfulfilled previous generation. Further to this, Ellis contends:

Part of the thing that kills the kids in *Falling Petals* is the assumption made by the adults that these kids are all just going to drop off anyway. It’s an exaggeration of my experience at high schools in Bairnsdale and Drouin, but I saw friends’ lives ruined by teachers who expected a certain story from them – that is, do badly in exams, get pregnant, have horrible life (2006).

In an early scene of *Falling Petals*, Phil mimics his teacher:

Phil: Look, I have to find kids jobs in supermarkets, service individual pathways, and if they want to do well in the supermarkets, then they ought to think about the local TAFE. What’s your name again – Phil – why haven’t you put down a TAFE choice? You’re cutting your own legs off. That won’t help you walk down your pathway, cutting your own legs off (2003:4).

This is particularly apt for young people from rural towns, but suggests more than lack of career options. The disease that wipes out the youth of Hollow acts as a metaphor for the once optimistic and golden image of rural Australia, an image that Australian nationhood
is built on. Today, rural Australia is in the grip of a massive drought, with ever increasing numbers of farmers walking away from their farms, or more tragically suiciding. Youth suicide rates in rural Australia are amongst the highest in the world and the gap between urban and country services and education is ever increasing\textsuperscript{58}. Ellis, a country boy himself, unleashes the image of the Hollow disease as a critique of a total system failure, which is still heralded as the quintessential Australian image – the wide, brown lands, the fertile soil, salt of the earth, the Aussie Battler. These images are indeed now hollow. This is an example of how ‘word-objects as metaphors…take on a special sort of textual life, reappearing over and over again until the weight of their verbal reality more than equals that of their referential function’ (Faris 1995:170-171).

A later scene in \textit{Falling Petals} plays further on the hollowness of the diseased town. Phil’s parents quickly turn from grieving the imminent death of their son to celebrating the possibilities of their own future, speculating what new child may be sponsored or adopted like a new product to replace the old, faulty and ultimately disappointing one:

\begin{quote}
  John: As soon as Phil dies we find a way out…

  Yes. (Pause.) I’ll call in favours from outside. I still know people in the city who’ll be able to help…We’ll adopt. Foster first, then adopt. Or sponsor.

  Gayle: Yes.

  John: I can’t wait, can you?

  Gayle: No.

\end{quote}

Whilst excessively cruel and seemingly improbable, this scene highlights and magnifies the power structures inherent in Australian society, and the generational gap that Ellis

perceives as the baby-boomer generation having abandoned their ideals and dreams for an easy and less problematic existence. Ellis’ invocation of a real, readily recognisable Australia, and realist use of language, evokes Warnes’ call for the engagement of magical realism:

Rejecting the hermeneutic of vagueness in both its pragmatic and its idealist forms, using a materialist point of departure similar to that of Marxism, but allowing the insights of cultural relativity and of post-structuralism to loosen rationalism’s claims to know with any finality what is real, literary criticism can begin properly to exploit magical realism as a useful tool in literary and cultural exegesis (2005:11).

Ellis is particularly scathing of capitalism and the economic rationalism of contemporary Western society, instituted at a governmental level, and suggests this as the foundation for humanity’s terrible behaviour. Brennan states, ‘Nations…are imaginary constructs that depend for their existence on an apparatus of cultural fictions’ (1990:49). Ellis seeks to investigate the narrative of nation, revealing the stories that construct identity and generate national representation at an ideological level.

Conversely, cultural products, in this case magical realist theatre, can be unleashed to highlight propaganda in nation forming rhetoric. Zaroulia states, ‘…theatre and performance as cultural practices might offer insight into notions of the nation and contest the established vision of national identity as a natural and stable condition’ (2007:69). Ellis is a proponent of this idea:

The problem in our time is that the powerful cannot see their own storytelling as pure invention. They stop injecting rooms because of concerns for ‘where that will lead us’. How do they know? Who’s doing the storytelling? They tell themselves that this is the way it is, and this is the way it goes, and if they’re wrong, then they’ll make sure it goes that way. It seems to me that we have no equality of narrative in Australia; or no equality of narrative of Australia (2006).

Theatre theorist Hilary Glow draws attention to the critique of national identity in her discussion of Ellis stating that he, ‘…provides a critical re-reading of national myths and constructs a picture of the nation as morally bankrupt and self-deceiving…the hegemonic signifiers of Australian-ness are stripped bare in his work’ (2007:91).
The economically based ruthlessness of Tania and Phil, the year twelve students trying desperately and hopelessly to sit their final exams in *Falling Petals*, further reflects this. As Phil and Tania study for their economics exam, in denial of the devastation that awaits them, Tania has sex with Phil as a way of, as she puts it, ‘…aligning economic theory with what I like’ (2003:43). As their ‘exchange’ unfolds, Phil spouts economic theory. As she climaxes, she asks:

Tania: Did I get everything I need for the exam?
Phil: What else are you having trouble with?
Tania: Non-accelerating inflation rate of unemployment.
Phil: Ah, NAIRU.
Tania: What?
Phil: The capital letters.
Tania: How does it work?
Phil: I’m sure I’m still a virgin. Technically.
Tania: Okay.

*She starts fucking him again* (2003:44).

Glow says of this scene, ‘The teenagers are blind to the irony of clinging to the apparently unassailable logic of an economic system that has profoundly failed them…they are…desperate to make it ‘out there’ in the very system that oppresses them’ (2007:88). This scene also reflects the profound lack of sacredness in social rites of passage (such as becoming a sexually active adult) in contemporary Western society. Secularisation of culture through the valuing of economic rationalism over humanity is yet another symptom of the decay of society that Ellis points to in *Falling Petals*.

The Daughter in *These People* reflects this ruthlessness. An abiding faith in economics is the source of all her aspiration. Obsessed with media financial guru Paul Clitheroe, she spends her time fantasising about future investments and managed funds. With a school
assignment to complete on ‘The Effects of the Policy’ (refugee policy), she becomes frustrated at having to look at both sides of the argument. Her aspiration to financially succeed above all else is juxtaposed with the aspiration-less existence of the asylum seeker. She is not interested in engaging with that unpleasant reality:

**Daughter:** An essay. To weigh. How heavy is an Arab? Their weight will force her down – when there’s clothes to wear and money to cherish. And she knows more than her teachers about both. Forget balance. This world needs turning upside down (2004:10).

In a starker example of this quarantining of difference in *Falling Petals*, the local doctor describes the effects of the Hollow Syndrome on the young people it annihilates:

**Franz:** The organs of the body stop working for the body…but what seems to happen is that the organs do enough to make themselves function…Well, they’re part of a system. You can’t have kidneys just purifying the blood for the kidneys. They have to do it for the body (2003:14).

Just as the organs of the bodies of the children work to the exclusion of one another, the events that unfold in the story mirror this, and this in turn mirrors the image of rural decay – parents forcing their children from their homes to protect their businesses; mobs throwing stones at the houses harbouring sick children; police looking on and laughing; the burning of the children’s bodies at the pyre farm with the ashes of the young raining down upon the people of Hollow in place of the rain that never comes. Glow suggests that the disease is, ‘…a metaphoric reading of individualism as a spreading and contagious disease which, in the end, destroys society’ (2007:86). All the elements, or organs of the society, work only for self-gain, ultimately and short-sightedly determining the ruin of the whole. The system falters and breaks down, and in accordance with the economic theory that Phil, the student most desperate to escape his small-town life, is so fond of spouting throughout *Falling Petals*, life becomes a survival game in which the weakest members of society are expelled.

This functions as a metaphor for Australia as a nation and as Glow argues this, ‘…produces individuals who are frightened of difference, and who learn that the most expedient strategy in difficult times is to look out, not for one another, but for
oneself’ (2007:147). Glow applies this to both the families in *Falling Petals* and *These People*. As an example of this level of self-absorption, the Father in *These People* says, ‘It’s torture, English classes, learning to use public transport in ways which slow us down—...It’s more P-Plates on the road. And the road is blocked because of the fires some demented teen starts for attention. On the National Wankfest Network. Hears of drownings at sea. Again. The ship is capsized...One hundred and fifty children kept floating up. For attention’ (2003:12). The desensitization to the suffering of others is evidenced here, the lack of humanity symptomatic of the contemporary age of media ‘spin’ and the overwhelming accessibility to news images.

Lally Katz employs an extravagant and unruly use of language in a direct attempt to highlight the limitations and restraints of realism, exploiting the possibility of Takolander’s contention that ‘...magical realism (rather than being in the nature of margins) is in the nature of writing’ (2007:225). Katz’s employment of magical realist theatre aids the performance’s departure from mimetic representations of reality. Her formal experimentation, alongside the content, broadens what is admissible on the Australian stage. She does this in particular through reinscribing representations of women. Re-entering the historical event of *Black Swan* Katz genders the event. Fensham and Varney state that ‘...a gendered reading of culture is a ‘truer’ reading that leads to a more productive and complex knowledge of the lived culture’ (2005:20–21). The character of Princess illustrates one of the ways in which women have been represented in patriarchal culture. The Princess archetype is that of the untouchable, pure, perfect and pretty girl, whose position is to support her masculine counterpart through her adoring and beautiful presence. As a product of Ern’s imagination she cannot give into Ern, as she states, ‘You are the very one I can never, ever let my guard down with. Not if I want to be remembered with beauty. Clarity is overrated. I’m taking fate and history into my own hands’ (2008:75). The fact that she is then brutalised at the hands of an American soldier, according to Ern’s logic, is her fault for acting impurely, for becoming a sexual being. But Princess is not without power entirely. She is able to demonstrate that Ern’s representation is fiction by drawing attention to this fact (the blue blood of the ink that made her, for example). In this way, she calls into question the constructed-ness of her
identity and the male hand that has drawn her into life, not to show her as a fully realised woman, but to control her as an innocent naïve construction of Ern’s own fantasy life:

Ern: Princess? It’s warm. And wet.
Princess: Blood. It’s happening Ern.
Ern: Blue. Like ink.
Princess: Blue blood from a princess. It’s all unravelling. I’m emptying out Ern. So are you.
Ern: No. We can just stay here. And everything will be the same. If we just stay here (2008:97).

The blue blood suggests Ern’s own creation of Princess, just as he was manufactured by the hoaxers. In drawing attention to the fact that she is a construct of Ern’s imagination, Princess disempowers and ‘empties out’ Ern’s inscription of her identity, rendering him powerless and inert.

**Irony as Meta-Theatrical Device**

It is the paradoxical juxtaposition of the mimetic and the anti-mimetic techniques that serves to defamiliarise representation in Katz’s plays and, in particular, this is played out through the use of irony. In Katz’s writing there is an overt consciousness of the fictionality of the theatrical event\(^{59}\). *The Eisteddfod* and *The Black Swan of Trespass* unsettle grand narratives functioning both intertextually, incorporating canonical texts in *The Eisteddfod*, and extra-textually, referencing real world events in *Black Swan*. The tone of both plays is established in concurrence with Takolander’s observation that ‘…the

\(^{59}\) As critic Alison Croggon states, ‘The theatrical realisation of these complexities is often enchanting. Chris Kohn employs music, stylised performance and projected text as well as an ingeniously surreal design to create a show that works on multiple levels, and which seeks to express the pathos and irony of both Malley's unstable existence and his writings. Characters which are imaginary even in Ern's reality - Anopholes (Gavan O'Leary), a kind of mosquito-muse/narrator, and Princess (Jacklyn Bassanelli), his Keatsian love object - thicken the texture further. There are moments in this show - most often when Malley says his own poems - when all these complexities fold together into a shimmering, vital present’ (theatrenotes).
marvellous occurrences that magical realist texts represent are often narrated with a self-consciously ironic or even blatantly comic tone…the entire narrative strategy of magical realist fiction, which involves the representation of the unreal, perceived precisely as such, as though it is real, is almost paradigmatically ironic’ (Takolander 2007:199).

Croggon writes, ‘The irony of Malley's situation as a poet who does not exist is not lost on him. As a theatrical creation, he is uneasily aware, as in fact any conscious writer must be, that his language is at best only partly his own and may be, in fact, writing him, that his writerly self is a fiction that trespasses hesitantly on the "alien waters" of reality’ (2005).

In a further example, Katz regularly includes herself, as the writer into the action of The Eisteddfod. In fact, the play begins and ends with her voice. In a pre-recorded segment she welcomes the audience:

Hi everyone, thank you for coming to see the Eisteddfod tonight. I'm Lally Katz and I wrote it.

Now I’lI keep this brief because a. I don’t want you to think I’m an egomaniac who just likes the sound of her own voice. And b. if I help out too much then my friends here are never going to learn to stand on their own two feet.

So anyway, I’ll just give you a bit of background information and introduce you to the main characters.

Once upon a time, there was a little boy named Abalone (2008:1).60

Croggon says this ‘…serves to destabilise the already deranged theatrical realities even further’ (theatrenotes 2004). In addition to this, ‘As the various layers of performance within the play - the Eisteddfod, the siblings' games, a puppet show - ripple inwards towards emptiness, so the idea that all human behaviour is performance ripples out into

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60 In an earlier version of the script Lally’s speech here was even more self-referential. ‘Just for your personal interest, here are a few facts about myself. I am currently living in London and working as a waitress. I am twenty-five years old and I really enjoy writing plays and riding my bike. My star sign is Sagittarius and I'm originally from New Jersey, but I've been living in Australia for the past seventeen years, so I'm actually a dual citizen. Anyway, I'll keep it brief so we can get on with the show, but if you want to know any more details about my life, please feel free to email me on lallykatz@hotmail.com. No questions are too personal’.
reality’ (theatrenotes 2004). This is emphasised in the following example. Halfway through the play the character of Lally Puppet appears:

Abalone: Who are you? You don't live here.
Lally Puppet: Abalone, I'm Lally Katz.
Abalone: Who?
Lally Puppet: Look, if you don't know, then it's probably best we don't go into it tonight. Now why the long face Abalone?
Abalone: I can't make her come back.
Lally Puppet: I think it's my fault. I've been so busy waitressing. It's just so hard to stay financially afloat in London. But I've neglected you guys and there's no excuse for that. I do feel really terrible. Do you think I'm a bad person Abalone? Let me hug you (2004).61

It is Katz who gets the last word as the play concludes, as she wonders where her characters are now. This leaves the audience teetering precariously between the real and the imagined worlds. She is the unreliable and transparent narrator, whose presence necessarily draws the audience’s attention to the fictionality of the story being told, and yet her faith in the realness of her characters binds the audience strangely to her creations as real. Katz generates simultaneous realities that the audience must traverse in order to engage with the story of the play.

The Black Swan of Trespass compounds the irony to give life to a character that was manufactured to be a ruse, a grain of sand, in the reality of modernism. The following scene demonstrates this:

Ern is watching the Princess. She has her legs crossed like a good girl and is smoking. Ern takes notes as he watches her.

Ern: You’re perfect. Perfect. But you shouldn’t smoke, should you?
Princess: All the girls do. The soldiers taught us how.
Ern: The American soldiers?
Princess: Yes. The Americans.

61 This scene comes from an earlier unpublished version of the play.
Ern: Culture forsooth! Albert get my gun!

Princess: It was innocent. Like teaching children.

Ern: Promise me you’ll never grow up. Promise me you’ll always wear your lips like not quite ripe strawberries.

Princess: What have you got against change?

Ern: It’s dirty, isn’t it? Little girls growing up into women, they get all dirty. Don’t change Princess. I don’t. I want to cry at my own funeral. Would you hold my hand if I sat there, next to you, weeping?

Princess: It depends where and when touch is appropriate. (2008:74–75).

This ironic tone is continued in the use of puppets in both plays. The puppets suggest absence and the impossibility of total embodiment. As Croggon offers, ‘Ern Malley is summoned by Stewart and McAuley, who are represented by comically grotesque puppets - a chicken and a cat - on either side of the stage, and Ern himself…stands before us, tall, rangy, surreally Australian, all his suburban pathos framed in the velvet curtains of a puppet theatre’ (2005). The puppets are the narrators/creators in both of Katz’s plays. This also suggests the death of the author, through the not ‘-ness’ of the narrator characters. The creative product alone is what stands as real, to which both Ern, and Abalone and Gerture attest (although the presence of Stewart and McAuley, as well as Katz herself, paradoxically subverts this). Lally’s relationship to her ‘children’ in The Eisteddfod demonstrates the way in which the creation is independent of the creator:

Gerture sent me a postcard once, it was a picture of frozen water lilies and a very small duckling. She wrote on it that she has never felt so close by. She didn’t send a return address. I look for early scenes of them in my laptop and on disc. It makes me feel so nostalgic that they might have been anything, once (2008:59).

Likewise, Lehman comments, ‘…Ern Malley escaped the control of his creators and enjoyed an autonomous existence beyond, and at odds with, the critical and satirical intentions of McAuley and Stewart’ (Lehman 2002). The Black Swan of Trespass sets the hoaxers as the puppets, although in the actual events they were the puppeteers. Representing the hoaxers as puppets in the play suggests that the event has become much bigger than the high jinks they dreamt up. In revisiting the historical moment, Katz and
Kohn are co-opting the story for their own devices, making the affair their creative fodder, and all the cast involved their own puppets. This suggests the malleability of historical narrative as truth.

It is an interesting and ironic reversal then, that the hoaxers are disembodied, imaginary beings in this play, whilst Ern and Ethel, the phantoms of the hoax, are the embodied beings occupying the stage space. Katz affords this embodiment to those that had previously been the butt of the joke. The following scene demonstrates this:

Ern and Ethel sit watching the trains at Flinders Street Station.

Ethel:    An outing Ern?
Ern:    I wanted to see what the people do.
Ethel:    This is what they do. Where is this again?
Ern:    Flinders Street Station. Come and go. Come and go.
Ethel:    There are an awful lot of people, aren’t there Ern?
Ern:    Yes Ethel. There are.
Ethel:    And there’s a chill in the air. I’m glad I brought my shawl.
Ern:    Yes.
Ethel:    Ern. All these people…There’s so many of them. All moving. Catching trains. I feel left behind.

Finally though, it is Ern’s own poetry that best articulates the meta-theatrical dimension, whilst also articulating the disquieting turn that the co-existence of the real and imagined can render at the level of representation and identity:

And in conclusion:

There is a moment when the pelvis
Explodes like a grenade. I
Who have lived in the shadow that each act
Casts on the next act now emerge

As loyal as the thistle that in session

Puffs its full seed upon the indicative air.

I have split the infinite. Beyond is anything.

ERN braces himself for oblivion and infinity.

Light up for a moment on COCK and CAT.

Lights down (2008:100).

Ironically, this is the voice of the original hoaxers, and it is a powerful twist that these contemporary hoaxers (Katz and Kohn) ultimately give the last word to the originals, perhaps as a nod to their unintentional genius. This is reflected in this stage directions also, which call for the two puppets who play the real life hoaxers, to be illuminated. This is the final image the audience sees. In this way, Katz and Kohn suggest the fictionality of all representation and identity, and that the line between the imaginary and the real is often impossible to determine.

In *A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light* the ironic reversal is played in the characters of the Priest and the Landkeeper. The Priest is cruel, violent, aggressive and controlling, the character traits associated with the most negative aspects of masculinity. The Landkeeper on the other hand is soft and kind, living in nature and spending most of the time on the water. He is in tune with his environment stating that he knows which way the slippery island is moving. As such he is identifiable with the feminine aspects of the binary structure. My attempt in reversing this dichotomy of masculine and feminine is to draw attention to the power structure in the male/female binary, and to demonstrate the hegemony of patriarchy. The Landkeeper even references a time before the Divine Masculine was destroyed at the hands of women. In employing this reversal, my intention is that the irony (and even humour) produced by this exchange highlights the invisible ideological structure of contemporary Western thought.

In engaging meta-theatrical techniques with the intention of subverting dominant paradigms of how meaning is made – language, modes of perception, ways of seeing –
Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo are able to contribute to critiques of cultural and societal norms that work for the benefit of some and not others. The inherent power structures of language, identity and representation are politicised via admission of the inadmissible and occupation of the liminal, which affords the space for dismantling ideology. Drawing attention to the framing devices between the real and the imaginary, the intertextual and extratextual, these writers engage the full potency of the theatrical event as a potential site of change, whilst simultaneously reflecting back onto an imperfect reality. As such, a dialogue is opened between what is and what may be, and in this fluid liminality, the door is opened to the possibility of transformation at a cultural and societal level. In the following chapter, I address the subject position most frequently engaged with in magical realist theatre – the marginal. In particular, I demonstrate the ways in which magical realism subverts the relationship between the margin and the centre. I contend that this is often achieved through the way in which the marginalised perspective is privileged as a subject position of great insight, wisdom and access to the unseen forces of the universe.
CHAPTER EIGHT. THE FOURTH ELEMENT: REINSRIPTION OF THE MARGINAL

In this chapter I argue that magical realist theatre demonstrates a particular tendency to represent marginalised positions. The representations that dominate magical realist theatre are not marginal necessarily because of the author’s position (although this can be the case), but because the political perspective and ideological, cultural and social position of the characters diverges from rational-empirical hegemony of the Western world. This chapter would argue that in magical realism non-dominant perspectives, ideas and places are afforded representation in the dramatic realm, opening a way to representation at a more general societal level. As Hegerfeldt states, ‘Magical realist texts can be seen to speak from the margin…by exploring and presenting world-views that diverge from the rational-empirical outlook prevalent in the Western world’ (2005:117).

This chapter demonstrates that thematically, the six plays, (and the two creative component plays) are concerned with geo-political borders, refugees, asylum seekers, homelessness, placelessness, nationhood, representation and identity, rights of women, environmental destruction and human rights abuses. Through consideration of terms including belonging and exile, metamorphosis, madness and faith, I suggest these elements as strategies in magical realism’s reinscription of the relationship between margin and centre. This reinscription can take place, in part, through engagement with Dolan’s utopian performatives, which, ‘…in their doings, make palable an affective vision of how the world might be better’ (2005: 6). This is applied in particular in the last part of this chapter on notions of faith.

Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo represent the margins in their plays, to expose the processes of ideological domination that attempt to normalise racism, sexism and dehumanisation. I contend that the writers are concerned with representing marginality in its myriad forms because of their position as contemporary Australian subjects. This is because, as Helen Gilbert states, ‘…writing by subjects ambivalently positioned within and between the binary opposites of colonizer and colonized tends to adopt specific kinds of resistance, and to exert its own particular leverage on the ways in which social and cultural
interactions can be conceptualized' (1998:98). Further to this, it is not a prerequisite that Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo have been marginalised in the dominant system of representation, but rather that they carry an awareness of the limiting effects of hegemony. As Takolander states, ‘…marginal authors from around the world produce magical realist texts not because they dwell in a world of fantasy but because they have been made acutely conscious of the delusory capacities of realism and the hallucinatory nature of reality largely as a result of the lies and projections of a hegemonic centre’ (2007:195).

The plays, through various approaches, address what is omitted from Australian culture, representation and identity politics, for ‘To study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conceptual object itself’ (Bhabha 1990:3). In re-imagining the dominant representation of Australia, the plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo contribute to the alteration and expansion of what is permitted conceptually as Australian at the level of representation. Fensham and Varney state, ‘…The mainstream discourse of nation that claims inclusion, history and reason as its justification incorporates many contradictions and aims to silence its detractors’ (2005:47). The plays work against this normalisation and silencing force to reveal the marginalised positions that have been previously omitted from the dominant discourse of nation forming. As Hegerfeldt states:

In presenting the marginalized perspective not as a substitute, but as a complement, magic realist fiction does not simply reverse the positions of centre and margin, but counters acts and levels the hierarchy between the two, a goal also pursued by postcolonial theory (2005:118).

The inclusion of marginalised subjects as heroes and heroines of the play texts under consideration has the effect of counteracting the hierarchy between margin and centre, as is demonstrated in this chapter.

**Notions of Belonging and Exile in Australia**

The contextualising of magical realism to Australian cultural production, in this case - theatre, is complicated by Australia’s already complex relationship to postcolonialism.
White Australia is both a colonising power and a colonised nation. In Nico Israel’s book *Outlandish: Writing between Exile and Diaspora*, he defines the postcolonial in a global sense:

I refer instead to a condition of global material and social relations – including the movement of labor, products, and economic and cultural capital – that locates the postcolonial moment at home, in Rwanda and Belgium, Singapore and Sweden, as well as throughout North America, as advanced technologies reaches developing countries (2000:128).

But as Kershaw states, ‘This has been part of a paradoxical global trend in which the appearance of new freedoms in the expression of difference is fostered under a cross-cultural flag of encroaching conformism’ (1999:32). It is essential not to romanticise the transgressing of boundaries, for this freer exchange of political, material, cultural and social elements still favours those holding the positions of power and the systems of representation. As Bhabha states, ‘Postcolonial criticism bears witness to the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order’ (1994:171). In the context of this argument, this includes those marginalised for reasons of race, politics, geography, gender, age and class. My argument for the inclusion of these plays in a postcolonial discussion is not to simplify the complexity around the culturally marginalised position I claim for Australia. As Minwalla states:

This is not to say something simplistic like “we are all post-colonial,” or to allow rhetorical tropes to overwhelm the material conditions within which such confrontations are wrought. To turn the violence of power into a convenient metaphor ultimately would fail to apprehend how bodies fight and are crippled, live and die. It is rather to suggest that the at times melodramatic, at times farcical convergences of those profoundly artificial domains, East and West, deserve better denouements than those currently enacted in places as different and as similar as Argentina, Australia, Afghanistan, and Algeria (2003:42).

Israel goes on to say that the postcolonial ‘…disturbs the very foundation of the distinction between East and West by showing their conceptual and political imbrication’ (Israel 2000:128). This takes on particular potency in regard to Australia’s postcolonial status. A Western nation in an eastern region, we struggle to define ourselves in relationship either to imaginary/symbolic or to actual borders. Fensham and Eckersall delineate the complexity around issues of cultural identity stating, ‘…they are less about
questions of national identity and more concerned with competing discourses of identity formation, whether religious, political, ethnic or sexual' (Fensham and Eckersall 1999:6–7). This is evident in the consideration of the six case studies. All plays, in one form or another disseminate the myth of a totalising national identity through inscribing characters, ideas and situations outside of the dominant representation. Thus, the myth of an Australian type is subverted by representations of Other ways of being, and of behaving, in and of Australia.

Una Chaudhuri locates the question of identity geographically, stating ‘…the new version of “Who am I?” is firmly anchored in a new form of “Where am I?”’ (1995:4). In Chaudhuri’s theorisation, the primary focus of drama since the nineteenth century ‘…is above else drama about place, and more specifically about place as understood through, around and beyond the figure of home’ (1995:27). Home, complicated as it is for most of the contemporary world with issues such as migration, refugees and maligned indigenous populations, is the double edge of belonging and exile. This is particularly pertinent to white Australia as it ‘…has always been riddled with anxious cultural debates concerning its national identity’ (Gunew 1990:103). This is in part because of non-indigenous Australia’s make-up of a historically exiled, and then emigrant, population. In addition to this, ongoing governmental policy (the government itself a reflection of a very narrow section of Australian society) has ignored or abused the rights of the indigenous population, aligning itself with Britain as homeland. As Tompkins offers, ‘The national identity that has generally been used to define Australians for most of the twentieth century suggests that Australians share an Anglo-Celtic ethnicity almost exclusively, a heritage which conveniently forgets that Australia has never been just an Anglo-Celtic nation’ (1998:117). As such, the society and culture of Australia has remained in a state of exile from its physical place, forced to contain more than one contradictory mode of being at once, a hybrid of belonging and exile. Magical realist theatre productively engages with this, ‘Since theatre culture is an immediate and reflexive site of struggle over these issues of hybridity’ (Fensham and Eckersall 1999:7).
For Gilbert, ‘…dramatic texts amplify the splitting and hybridization of dominant discourses’ (1998:87) in that the paradoxical space of the theatrical event, as well as the presence of both audience and performers, concentrates and magnifies the critique of dominant discourses. It is through splitting and hybridization that new forms, new subjects and new responses emerge. According to Chaudhuri, theatre and drama mirror the notions of belonging and exile, in being an insistent opposition between the visible and invisible (1995:27). It is not difficult to see then how theatre, the form that enacts space, makes such a fitting model for the investigation of Australian magical realism. For Gilbert, ‘Space is often the central feature of dramatised images of the landscape, which is a key site of struggle and anxiety in postcolonial narratives in Australia and in other settler nations such as Canada, New Zealand, and the United States’ (1998:15–16). This is due to the postcolonial condition of belonging and not belonging. In Australia, this condition is accentuated for at an ideological level and a policy making level, the European occupation of Australia is ignored, neglected or rationalised so that Australian nationhood is formed on the unstable shifting surface of what it is not.

It is who and what Australia classes as the Other that says the most about the centralised and dominant identity. Zaroulia states, ‘…contextualising the reception of “the Other” might enhance the understanding of “the self”’ (2007:70). Australia’s culture of denial and exclusion is explored in Ellis’ writing in an overt and subversive manner, evidenced in an example from These People. The Daughter becomes the subject of her essay regarding the effects of government policy. Parodying Australia’s policy on immigration and asylum seekers, she imagines a ‘Black and White Peril’ from the South, namely penguins from Antarctica, and towards the end of the play actually becomes one of the

62 In particular, the historical government policy of multiculturalism has attempted to sanction and censor rather than embrace and permit racial and ethnic diversity. In regards to white Australia’s relationship to postcolonialism and Aboriginal culture, ‘Multiculturalism will only function as a useful expression of difference when it is seen as including Anglo-Celts’ (Gunew 1990:115). Juschka argues of multiculturalism that: ‘Difference is allowed only insofar as it works toward empowering hegemony. In this manner, multiculturalism is seen to enrich the state in its body (culture seen in food, colour, or literature), but it is never present in terms of its head (operative governmental power, economic power, or epistemological power)’. (2003:89). Difference has been co-opted at a policy-making level and neutralised to work for the dominant hegemony, rather than actually encouraging and engaging difference as a productive aspect of cultural production.
‘refugees’ of whom she is so dismissive. When a guard orders the Daughter/Penguin to remove her penguin suit, underneath is a woman in Islamic purdah:

*The Daughter is in a Penguin costume. She tries to write notes on a piece of paper, then discards the paper. She gets an empty food-tray (as in a canteen); approaches a Guard.*

Guard: You. Take it off.

Silence.

Didn’t you hear me? If you want your filthy pilchards: Take. It. Off.

*A pause. The Penguin/Daughter hands over the tray. The body of the Penguin is unzipped first of all. Underneath is a flowing robe.*

I said, all of it!

*A pause. The Penguin takes off its head costume; it is now clear that underneath is a woman in Islamic purdah (2003:50).*

The implication here is clear: the ‘threat’ is exactly whomsoever it is imagined to be. The Daughter’s imagination has conjured the ‘black and white peril’, in the same way that the Australian imagination (in conjunction with the majority of the Western world) has manufactured the contemporary ‘Islamic peril’. The subject of this imagining is arbitrary. The threat remains always something that is Other to the (dominant) representation of self. In Ellis’ play, contemporary social conditions, and indeed social narratives, are forced to yield their inherent peculiarity and unnaturalness through a process of defamiliarisation. As Ellis states, ‘John Romeril once said in a speech that sometimes the problem with people is too much imagination, turning, for example, Jews into rats, rather than a lack of imagination. It’s the application of the imagination that’s the issue’ (2006).

This overt application of the imagination is apparent in both of Ellis’ plays around the issue of asylum seekers, a motif Ellis engages with to investigate issues of belonging and exile in contemporary Australia. The dominant hegemony attempts to deny that the people that are incarcerated in detention centres are anything to do with ‘us’. ‘They’ are hidden from view, in remote inhospitable (at least to white Australians) locations in an attempt to deny them their humanity. ‘They’ are not like ‘us’; we do not need to feel
compassion for them as if they were one of us. This is the scenario that Ellis sets up in *Falling Petals*. The quarantining of the town of Hollow, and especially of its children is dehumanising, because the healthy residents, and those outside of Hollow are so readily able to agree that those students have nothing to do with them, even when they are their own children. This is apparent in the final moments of the play as Gayle, Phil’s mother, exits. Turning away from the ugly scene she is witnessing of Phil and Sally painfully and slowly dying, she says, ‘Don’t ask me for anything. I told you…You kids brought it on yourselves’ (2003:64). Gayle has returned for one final glimpse of the Sakura tree she planted and the hobby farm she and her husband had bought many years earlier, hoping to embrace an idealised rural existence. Instead, she finds the scene of death and dying, including her own child, and the fires of the piles of burning children’s bodies.63

Both *Falling Petals* and *These People* share the image of detention and quarantining, the ultimate act of Othering, articulated in very different ways. In *Falling Petals* the enforced quarantining of the town of Hollow reinforces the sense of Australia as a penal colony (an image deployed by David Ireland also). As Gunew states, ‘Self-styled legitimate residents to this country…located their national origins in institutions which are incarnations of legitimacy: namely the prison, the penal colony, the biblical fallen…The boundaries of the penal colony had been internalized by its inhabitants to constitute procedures of normalization’ (1990:111). Ellis masterfully exploits this anxiety to great dramatic effect, with the productive result of revealing and delineating the inherent racism and narrow-mindedness of governmental policy that acts to divide and polarise national identity, to maintain an inherently ‘white’ notion of Australia. As Gunew states, since the Bicentennial celebrations it, ‘…was felt, national identity might benefit from acknowledging the realities of cultural diversity – but only within strict limits’ (1990:103). Ellis explores this in *These People*, in which the ordinary suburban

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63 This image also suggests the impact of the current damage to the environment and natural resources that has been scientifically proven to be leading the human race towards an inevitable crash point, in which, at the very least, the oil will run out, and at the worst, complete environmental devastation, rendering the planet uninhabitable. Ellis is able to suggest both these enormous events in the image of the quarantined children, and whilst specifically an allegory for Australia, the events echo the impact of dehumanisation for financial gain throughout the world.
family appear to work from an assumption of belonging. They are the installed subjects of Australia – white, middle class, urban, nuclear. The refugees that attempt to disrupt their clearly demarcated and safe world are not afforded the same status as the urban family:

_The Mother is in the washing machine._

Mother: It’s only guilt she’s feeling. Nothing real.
Nothing to do with her. She didn’t lock them up personally.
Just needs a holiday.
A wash is as good as a holiday.

_She grabs the washing powder and pours it into the machine._

Clean me.
Forgive me.

This scene, in the concluding moments of the text, plays on the stereotypical image of refugees as unclean (for religious and cultural reasons), and not belonging in Australia because of their non-whiteness. In spite of the Mother’s attempts to separate herself from the refugees, including spending the majority of the play locked in the laundry in her washing machine, she cannot wash away the guilt of her apathy and racism. This is because, as her boat-like washing machine alludes to, white Australians are also refugees. Gunew contends that the:

...the _emigrants_, who at some mystic Neptune’s line became _immigrants_, had to be made aware that they were crossing boundaries and that, indeed, they would be crossing boundaries all their lives. By definition, to be a _new_ Australian was to be a boundary crosser, a transgressor, in the eyes of those who like think that they had already been there (1990:111).
A culture of denial and exclusion always, as Ireland, Ellis and, in the following quote, playwright Stephen Sewell argue, reveals more than it conceals\(^\text{64}\):

> When the Federal Government started locking up refugees, it wasn’t just refugees being locked up, it was all of us; and when Australian audiences started being deprived of the opportunity to see theatre about refugees, it wasn’t just the cause of the refugees that suffered, it was Australia (Sewell 2006).

An American review of the New York production of *Falling Petals* remarked, ‘Theatregoers familiar with Australia and its recent struggle with a rise in right-wing politics and troubles with Asian asylum seekers and Aboriginal reconciliation will find *Falling Petals* especially intriguing’ (Harrah 2005). In *Falling Petals* the entire town of Hollow is quarantined for the national good and the bodies of the children burnt on pyres at the toxic-waste dump. A few children sacrificed does not seem too high a price to pay to keep the economy afloat and the nation safe from an unknown threat. As Ellis states, ‘I was writing *Falling Petals* when Tampa then September 11 happened, and I wasn’t surprised by the fascistic impulsive reactions of the society around me – it just gave me a few more images (black ashes from the UK foot-and-mouth cow-burning pyres; white concrete dust; angry attacks on perceived outsiders and subsequent denial)’ (2006).

**Metamorphosis and Madness**

The occurrence of metamorphosis (which is a further literalisation of metaphor\(^\text{65}\)) in magical realist texts suggest the contamination of identity. Metamorphosis is employed to critique the margin/centre dichotomy. ‘They embody in the realm of organisms a collision of two different worlds’ (Faris 1995:178). Metamorphosis is a resistance to the purity of the binary oppositional structure. In magical realism metamorphosis is often used with irony, humour and of course, subversion, to merge and contaminate one half of

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\(^{64}\) Evident in the above is Ireland’s view of Australia as penal colony, and that the boundaries of belonging and not-belonging are imaginary. Being border-crossers themselves, the original white inhabitants of Australia legitimised their presence by imposing this policy of institutionalisation on Others. Rather than rejecting that to which Australian convicts were once subjected, Australian identity has been founded on the premise of a mental and physical prison, in which all shall be incarcerated, either as the guards or the inmates.

\(^{65}\) Faris states, ‘The literal metamorphoses and magical bodily movements in magical realism contrast with the way characters in realistic novels, rise, fall, or transform metaphorically in response to social and psychological forces’ (2004:138).
the oppositional structure with the other, undermining that structure as a result. As an extension of this, the act of metamorphosis suggests contact with unseen, magical forces:

The propensity of magical realist texts to admit a plurality of worlds means that they often situate themselves on liminal territory between or among those worlds - in phenomenal and spiritual regions where transformation, metamorphosis, dissolution are common, where magic is a branch of naturalism, or pragmatism (Zamora and Faris 95:6).

The characters of Olley and Dido in *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*, are engaged in a metamorphic battle throughout the play. Olley is attempting to merge her identity with Dido’s, an act which Dido violently rejects. The dichotomous relationship of Olley and Dido plays out the magical realist subversion of margin and centre. Dido’s resistance to transforming her identity through enmeshment with Olley’s is evidenced in the following example. Dido is placed into a position of powerlessness on the doomed tour of Europe with the kraken. But instead of moving into a new state and transforming her identity Dido returns to the colony as an even more brutal and vicious persecutor of Olley. She has deepened her alliance to the imperialist centre, even in the face of having been shamed and rejected by it. She calls for Olley’s death, supposedly for having murdered her father at sea, but actually for having turned Dido into the thing she most feared becoming:

Dido: Fraud! Me, fraudulent? My life be a battle against fraud. Be a preacher's daughter and a policeman's wife. I told them that but they wouldn't believe me. Why does a modest woman traipse around Europe in company of a charlatan? I told them till I be blue in face, was my belief. Who be I to know mine own eyes might deceive me? Look at me. Do I seem a hard hearted trickster?

The veracity of what can be known by ‘mine own eyes’ is drawn into doubt. It becomes apparent that truth is a far more malleable concept: that witnessing is not a pure act, and that the truth of the title is an intentional red herring. This statement from Dido is the other half of Olley’s opening speech:

Olley: The strange adventures of a soul lost at sea. By Olley Fletcher. Orphan. Dear reader, as you peruse these pages, I beg you to consider this thing.
How could I, a poor motherless unlearned girl, born and raised in ignorance, come to know of all these wonders, if not through the witness of mine own eyes. It is clear that Olley operates from a place of faith and wonder, witnessing through her child-like perspective, those things that an adult mind would more readily dismiss. Olley also claims and defines her marginalised subjectivity here, as the very reason she can bear witness to the extraordinary events of her story. Dido’s speech, in contrast to this, is the ultimate moment of separation between the two female characters. Dido rejects all that Olley’s subjectivity offered and attempts to wipe out any trace of her.

This penultimate moment of the play demonstrates the apparent failure of the transformation of their individual subjectivities to come about for either Olley or Dido. Dido has been shunned and rejected by the dominant, imperialist centre. Her subjectivity has been labelled fraudulent; her value reduced to naught. Yet still Dido rejects what Olley offers – the chance to reclaim her agency, not by aligning herself with Olley’s apparent Otherness, but by witnessing the world through an alternative system of representation that would afford Dido a whole self, no longer betwixt and between. Dido is unable to respond to this and instead sets out to ensure that the mark of fraudulent subjectivity falls upon Olley.

In the end, however, in the prison cell on the night before Olley’s execution, Olley’s unyielding faith in their imbricated subjectivity wins out and Dido takes on Olley’s voice, recording her story. It is at this moment, no matter whether Olley’s story is real or imagined, that it becomes true, for in the act of written down it is authenticated. As Olley tells her story, there is the moment in which she is hanged and Dido becomes both scribe and narrator taking over the telling of the story:

I’ve forgotten how it goes. The beast is gentle? Help me. Go back to the beginning. Hello? Help me! (Pause) Come nightfall. They slept gently rocking in a darkness different from anything she’d ever known. (Corrects herself) We slept gently rocking in a darkness different from any night I’d ever known. For that I owe him every thanks. And this is why I set down this story in such haste. If I, an ignorant and unlearned

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66 This is not unlike Jeanette Winterson’s plea, ‘I’m telling you stories. Trust me’ (2004:160).
Dido is contaminated with Olley’s voice, and despite her best efforts their split subjectivity is merged into one body. In this way, the transformation for both Olley and Dido is made complete.

*A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light* continues the magical realist theme of the paradoxical coexistence of two things at the same time – male and female, magic and mundane, light and dark, good and evil, life and death. Metamorphosis functions as critique of the binary oppositional structure by allowing the coexistence of two things at once. My suggestion is that the island itself is the organism that houses this contrary coexistence, trapped in a state of incomplete metamorphosis between one state of being and the other. Within the bounds of this space reside all the paradoxes of the human condition. Boatgirl’s arrival on the island is what causes the collision between the positive and negative forces, and begins again the stalled process of the island’s transformation. The island is trapped in time and space, between the living and the dead, because of the Priest’s ghostly inhabitance. Zamora states, ‘Because ghosts make absence present, they foreground magical realism’s most basic concern – the nature and limits of the knowable’ (1995:498). Boatgirl’s journey of moving from the known to the unknown, is mirrored in her relationship with the other-worldly Priest. There are several references throughout the play to the inhabitants of the island being ghosts, whilst Boatgirl is a living being. The collision of the two realms, living and dead, causes the necessary energy for the island to continue its metamorphosis.

Further to this, Boatgirl embodies the image of metamorphosis. She is on a journey of freedom when she becomes entangled in the Priest’s plan. The Priest, and then Joe, function as Boatgirl’s counterpoint, containing within them all that she is not. It is Boatgirl’s naïve attempt to deny the aspects of herself represented by the Priest that cause her violent confrontation with them. Both have been seeking within the Other what resides within themselves. In fact, all the characters function as a mirror to one another of the dichotomy of themselves: the Priest and the Landkeeper, Joe and Boatgirl, the Bride
and Boatgirl. Boatgirl must confront these elements and embody them in order to continue her own metamorphosis to integrate her identity. In so doing she must plunge into the depths of their madness to find her way out of it.

The presentation of madness is a further example of the privileging of the marginal position in magical realist theatre. In *Asylum* by Kit Lazaroo, ‘all four characters…are going stark raving mad’ (2007), suggesting a ‘…collective madness residing among politicians, bureaucrats and the general public too as we wrestle with current government policy on asylum seekers’ (ibid). All characters in this play are in the process of transition from one state of being to another, and incomplete metamorphosis, which permits them access to the transformative site of the liminal. Lally and Turlough are infected with Siying’s apparent madness, even as they work to expel her from Australia. At one moment, Turlough accuses Siying of being, ‘…barking mad’ (2007:24). Moments later he reveals that his nickname is Turlough Barking Dando.

Madness is a motif often engaged with in magical realism suggesting the blurring of the real and the imagined, and also a heightened state of awareness and connection to magic or divine forces. Madness is suggested in Lazaroo’s plays as a privileged state of being, even if it makes life more difficult for those that experience it. Siying’s madness is often expressed as part of her magical ability, including that of being able to appear seemingly out of thin air, including as a pair of disembodied feet. She transforms time and space through her apparition-like appearances, undermining the laws of the universe by appearing instantly in different locations. As such, Smudge’s affinity with Siying implicates him in her madness, and privileges him as a wiser character. Lally and Turlough’s inability to make sense of Siying, on the other hand, marks them as dense and lacking magic and intuition. They are not privy to the unseen forces at work in the play. But despite this privileging brought about by the magic Siying possesses, it does not make her attempts to stay in Australia any easier. In fact, Siying’s case is built upon, proving she is sane and does not suffer from delusions and madness. The bureaucratic system Siying is trying to win over only reads madness as a negative force. In *Asylum*, Lally and Turlough are the proponents of this and, as such, they are unable to access the
magic that Siying possesses, even though they are momentarily touched by this divine
madness in positive ways.

For example, Turlough has a revelatory moment, connecting him to the unity of humanity
as he sits at his kitchen table:

Turlough: For every door we must close there are ten doors we can open. For every
man we must imprison there are a hundred to set free. For every reason
that we must hate there are a thousand why we must love. (Jumps up
from chair and opens the door) Who is it? Come in! Make yourself at
home! Help yourselves! I’ve got plenty! (Sits down) It’s that simple.
There must be some kind of formula for it. The Minister’s an intelligent
man. He’ll take to this like a duck to water. One loaf of bread bought by
one man contains twenty slices of bread. (He writes it down) This is a
wonderful breakthrough. I mustn’t lose it. We’ll turn the system on its
head! (Lets his head fall down sleepily, then sits up.) No! I mustn’t go to
sleep. If I go to sleep I might lose it. (Goes back to his loaf of bread.)
One loaf contains twenty slices. At least twenty slices and sometimes
more! (Counts the slices, placing them in a pile. He laughs happily like a

Here, the suggestion that Turlough is temporarily insane is what affords this
transformation. In addition, Lazaroo writes in the stage directions that he is like a child at
play, a further category privileged in magical realism by children’s apparent access to
unseen magical forces. Ultimately, this magic is fleeting and Turlough returns to his old
way of being, remaining untransformed by the potential Siying offers.

Asylum functions as a meditation on the dual aspects of the word asylum, suggesting that
the hope for refuge and the idea of madness (as both a means by which to undermine
dominant representations of reality, and a side effect of attempting to live within that
hegemony) are often present in the same place at the same time, especially in the face of
the ineffectuality and apathy of Australian policy towards asylum seekers. As an
extension of this representation of madness, this play draws to light the malleability of
notions of real and imagined, true and false, self and other to undermine dichotomous
thought.
Faith as Transformation

I see and write about performance with the hope for what it can mean politically, but also affectively, through my faith that emotions might move us to social action (Dolan 2005:15).

Madness and faith are ideas and images interconnected not infrequently in magical realism. Magical realism suggests that reality is made up of both the empirical world we can know through epistemology and quantifiable fact, and the more slippery concept of a space that forms our ontological investigations. The admission of faith suggests an expansion of the normalising force of empirical reality on identity, society and culture. Magical realism functions in:

…tracing the various strategies by which individuals and communities try – and have always tried – to make sense of the world, magical realist fiction shows how rationalism and science alone cannot adequately account for the human experience of the world (Hegerfeldt 2002:64).

The bridge between the real place and intangible space that constitutes the human experience of constructing meaning out of reality can be called faith. ‘Central to magical realism is the validity of interior worlds of faith which blossom in everyday realities and coexist with other available realities’ (Foreman 1995:296). Not only is faith required for ontological exploration of the self, faith is what encourages the belief that there is a point to envisioning something other than the current state of affairs. In Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo’s writing (as well as my own) there is an awareness of a need to look beyond the dominant and normalising representations of reality. ‘The imagination plays a powerful role both in escaping the cruel realities of racial discrimination, for example, and in creating the possibility of overturning those conditions’ (Chamberlain 1986:15). Faith is the act of the exploring new ways of engaging with language and narrative to open up new spaces in writing, to imagine new possibilities and to more accurately portray the complexity of our lived experience. Magical realism is ‘the description of the mystery of reality’…and is ‘considered by critic Lucia-Ines Mena as a way of acquiring a deeper understanding of reality’ (Chanady 1985:25). In this way, ‘the common and the everyday are transformed into the awesome and the unreal’ (Chanady 1985:27). It is an act of defamiliarisation that brings to attention the previously hidden or neglected parts of
society and culture. As the critic Robert Scholes states, ‘reality is too subtle for realism to catch it. It cannot be transcribed directly. But by invention, fabulation, we may open a way toward reality that will come as close to it as human ingenuity may come’ (qtd. in Simpkins 1988:149).

*A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light* deals with the positive and negative aspects of faith. The image of the sacred island, and Boatgirl’s search for the Blessing Place, something like Lourdes but with fewer tourists, and the central location of the church, suggest recognisable images of contemporary faith. Boatgirl’s quest is one grounded in faith, and her pilgrimage to the island further encourages identification with a religious, faith based quest. However, it becomes apparent that the play engages with these images in order to question dogmatic thought (as well as patriarchy) invested in religion. This functions as an allegory for hegemony at a more general level. It was not my intention to locate this critique strictly around institutionalised religion. Rather, Boatgirl’s quest is meant to parallel (and parody) the contemporary search for meaning, and the often blind faith that constitutes this searching.

The magic in *A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light* resides in the female characters, the Priest and Boatgirl. Faris states, ‘… a female voice may be able to transmit the ineffable because of the marginal position within the discourses of reason and realism that have tended to mute the mystical sound’ (2004:178). In fact, the removal of Boatgirl’s reproductive organs suggests the female connection to the ineffable and mystical forces of the universe. Even though the uterus is not returned to her body, in planting it in the ground she becomes the blesser of the earth, and the very thing that she has been looking for – The Blessing Place. Both the Priest and Boatgirl demonstrate an unwavering faith in oppositional forces, dark and light. These radically different sources of faith set up a dichotomy between religion and the metaphysical. Both their visions of faith are alternatives to the rational-empirical paradigm, and as has already been demonstrated, the Priest and Boatgirl are one and the same – both good and bad– in a state of incomplete metamorphosis. Despite their differing approaches to their belief systems, their faith in something outside of themselves is an attempt to make meaning of
the world outside of the dominant paradigm. This play suggests the dangers of totalising systems of belief, represented through the character of the Priest, but also cautions against merely replacing one absolute belief system with another, represented by Boatgirl’s naïve search for meaning. Magical realist theatre disorients the known world as a rejection of absolutes and universals. As such, Boatgirl’s journey leads her from blind faith to a faith predicated on knowing that the known is always in a process of becoming unknowable.

More generally, it is apparent that a resounding element of faith exists in all the texts considered in this thesis, in at least two ways. Firstly, in the act of writing and making theatre that critiques the dominant ideology, these writers attest to the their faith in theatre as a potential site of change, or at the very least, strive to put into the public sphere alternative representations of Australian identity. As Dolan states, ‘Perhaps because our love for theatre propels us to see performance, a precondition is already met for the necessary faith, belief, and desire, out of which utopian experiments and imaginings can be forged, however ephemerally’ (2005:170). Secondly, each text carries within it the awareness that many identities inhabit the space of Australia. There is an overt attempt to offer up these representations to contribute to the debates surrounding Australian nationhood, alongside generating those discussions. Faris’ contends that, ‘…a component of spirit in magical realism undermines many colonial paradigms, since it often operates toward the past and belief rather than toward the future and material progress’ (Faris 2004:135). In the employment of magical realist tendencies in their writing, these playtexts suggest a faith in and a connection to the culture and society around them. As Foreman states, ‘Magical realism, unlike the fantastic or the surreal, presumes that the individual requires a bond with the traditions and the faith of the community, that s/he is historically constructed and connected’ (1995:286). Faris goes further when she argues that the often disturbing, rather than magical images, ‘…dramatize the idea that one of magical realism’s paradoxical projects is how to be grounded in history but not crushed by it and, alternatively, how to rise above it enough to re-imagine it without shortchanging its intractability’ (2004:59). This attempt, on behalf of all the writers, to reinscribe history in order to re-vision the present and the future, suggests an enormous
act of faith, both in their own narrative capacities and in the act of making theatre more
generally. For, as Faris goes on to state, a critical engagement with notions of reality,
history, culture and society traverses ‘…the eternal question of how to live fruitfully on
the earth and in the air, in the body and the imagination, in the sensory and the ineffable,
and how to express that experience’ (2004:59). Dolan suggests that part of the power in
utopian performatives is the way in which they may, ‘…resurrect a belief or faith in the
possibility of social change, even if such change simply means rearticulating notions that
have been too long discredited’ (2005:21). The use of faith in the plays considered here,
in its myriad forms, is a request or desire for social change made manifest in the utopias
of the texts.

Finally, this quote from Kit Lazaroo encapsulates magical realist theatre’s potential as a
site of transformation manifested through the act of faith in the theatrical product, the use
of the utopian performative:

I went to see Peter Pan when I was six and got plucked out of the audience to be
one of the little Red Indians. And I remember standing on the stage and looking
around and thinking, ‘Oh, this is what it’s like to be a little Red Indian.’ My
thought wasn’t, this is what it’s like to be in the theatre. I had that…I became a
little Red Indian (2006).

Magical realist theatre’s faith in the ability to engage the experience of living fruitfully on
the earth is expressed through Lazaroo’s embodied experience of being a Little Red
Indian. As Dolan states, ‘Performance’s simultaneity, it’s present-tenseness, uniquely
suits it to probing the possibilities of utopia as a hopeful process that continually writes a
different, better future’ (2005: 13). Lazaroo’s experience is evidence of the understanding
inherent in magical realist theatre (and its practitioners) that both the real and the magical
(or fictional) inform the world; that their coexistence is what makes reality; that whilst
not altering reality in itself, performance can probe the possibilities of a better reality; that
it is ‘…the combination of materialism and mystery in the term magical realism [that]
may appeal to us because it suggests a possible approach to the realm of the spirit in the
western critical discourse’ (Faris 2004:40). Lazaroo’s aligning of her sight with a
fictional character in such a totalising manner is the act of faith that contributes expansive
and open representations of the world, legitimising non-dominant perspectives and
forgotten subjects. Lazaroo’s approach to theatre enacts and embodies an Other perspective by being (through total identification with the character, and engagement with the laws of the theatrical universe) that other perspective, a possibility unique to theatre. By entering the liminal space of magical realist theatre, simultaneously real and illusory, transformation is rendered possible for, ‘At all levels theatre includes mechanisms for transformation’ (Schechner 2003:191). The transformational resides in magical realist theatre ‘because it witnesses and reports events that humans ordinarily do not’ (Faris 2004:3).

In this chapter I have argued that magical realist theatre reinscribes notions of margin and centre, self and other, madness and sanity and, faith and dogma, through an inversion of their status at the level of social and cultural representation. In so doing, a recuperation of marginalised subjects occurs. Through close analysis of the plays by Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo, I have demonstrated that magical realism’s engagement with child and child-like, mad, sacred and border transgressing characters is a strategy subverting the relationship between margin and centre. Consideration of Australia’s postcolonial status locates my argument in a geo-political sense. As such I have argued that the writers considered in this thesis are always Other to the dominant centre, and as such are able to engage and articulate magical realism’s potential as a discourse of change.
CONCLUSION:

This thesis has shown, using Australia as the cultural context that the mode of magical realism and the form of theatre can be considered together to actualise a politicised method of analysis and production of non-mainstream theatre. This thesis has detailed a magical realist theatre reading practice that identifies the tenets of this approach to the theatrical event in both form and content. The research through practice, in conjunction with the research through theory and consideration of the six case studies, has demonstrated the ways in which magical realist theatre works both as a theoretical tool of analysis, and practically in the generation of new work. I have established my argument through the use of both theoretical and creative research and data collection.

This approach has allowed me to literally play out my contentions through the writing stages and through practice. The research through practice, beginning with the writing process, has demonstrated the expansive potential of magical realism when employed as a means of generating new work. The highly visual, oral and spatially aware mode of magical realism calls for the possibility of actual embodiment. Engaging with the mode of magical realism, in spite of its literary origins, actually encourages a greater sense of physicality and presence in my writing. The technique of literalising language has assisted in my attempts to take the emphasis off the written word in my plays and to render visually the metaphors and ideas I am attempting to express. Written originally in 2004, my play *The Joy before Thinking* has allowed me to realise in both form and content the potentials and limitations of magical realist theatre in practice. Through a process of writing, re-drafting, rehearsing, workshopping and ultimately performing I was able to apply my contention and the tenets I have identified as being part of the magical realist theatre reading practice in the creation of this new work.

Use of visual metaphors as a resistance to rational-empirical laws of the universe has created some of the most compelling, and theatrically challenging moments of the play. For example, the use of flight to represent disevolvement is a key motif, occurring several times throughout the play. Whilst it works well as a suggestion of resistance to normal
space and time, as an element of a performance text, it brings nothing but headaches to
the people trying to actualise the image of flight. As the director of the original work-in-
progress in 2005, I directed the actors to run up a flight of stairs through the raked seating
of the audience, and out of sight. This of course did not actualise the power or potential
suggested by the idea of disevolvement. In various redrafts and further rehearsal
processes, I have been able to capture the potency of the performance elements, such as
light and sound to suggest the character’s flight. The theatrical potency of this image is
maintained, and I am able to marry the potential of literalisation of language in magical
realism with the anti-realist potential of the theatrical space.

My second creative component, *A Slow and Steady Darkening towards Light* was begun
in 2006. This play reaps the rewards of my accumulated experience and knowledge in
engaging with magical realist theatre. As such I was able to apply the knowledge thus far
gained (through both written and performance texts of *The Joy before Thinking*) and
construct visual metaphors that worked in accordance with the possibilities of the
theatrical environment. This included the use of a trapeze to suggest the transcendence of
the character of Boatgirl. This is less a consideration of the possibility of something such
as real flight being actualised in the performance space (for obviously with enough
resources anything is possible), and more a question of how best to engage with the gift
of the theatrical event, which is ultimately its presence, or to put it another way, its being
present-ness.

The theoretical exploration of magical realist theatre, through the plays of Ellis, Katz and
Lazaroo, has demonstrated the possibilities of yielding great insight into contemporary
plays, which whilst not promoting an overtly political aesthetic, function to critique
dominant systems of representation and ideology. Katz in particular has been omitted
from discussions of politicised theatre, critics often overlooking the subversive
potentiality of her writing. Yet a magical realist analysis of her plays reveals a
reinscription of historical narratives, identity, language and dramatic form. Additionally,
whilst *These People* deals with the refugee crisis in Australia in a direct and obvious
manner, Ellis’ *Falling Petals* stages its resistance to the normalising forces of identity,
nationhood and border protection in a subversive and metaphorical way. A magical realist critique opens up the political force embedded in this text.

Similarly the application of magical realist theatre to the Australian cultural, societal and political context has produced new ways of discussing and producing representations of Australian nationhood and cultural identity. The in-between location of the magical realist plays discussed in the thesis, including my own, offers an opportunity for cutting out a piece of Australian identity for review and dissemination. The utopic site of magical realist theatre affords a space outside of time and space for reinscription and reinvention of hegemony at work in narratives of Australian nationhood. Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo transgress the bounds of realism to highlight the racist, patriarchal and classist ideology normalised in and of narratives of Australia.

In juxtaposing the writer’s works throughout the thesis, my intention was to demonstrate the unique and varied ways in which the individual plays engaged with the four key elements of magical realist theatre. Without suggesting a unified approach to their use of magical realism I none the less draw parallels between the ways in which this engagement is undertaken. This thesis has suggested that Ellis, Katz and Lazaroo have all subverted hegemony, especially in response to notions of Australian nationhood. This has been done through a reinscription of history, occupation of the liminal, an expansive engagement with language through a combination of literal and metaphoric visual signifiers, an inversion of marginality, employment of humour, child and child-like characters and the use of madness in many characters. All the playscripts revel in the paradoxical form of magical realism, embracing both halves of its name with celebratory delight in the use of narrative story telling. In consideration of the four analytical chapters, however, it is apparent that the writers engage more fully with some of the tenets over the others.

In the process of analysing and studying these writers, certain patterns of meaning-making emerged in their work. All the writers engage in anti-realist techniques to critique dominant systems of representation, but the approach is multiple. Ellis’ writing is a
process of revelation, making the unseen seen particularly relating to political rhetoric espoused by the government and other holders of power in Western society. His attempts at revealing that which otherwise goes unnoticed include an Absurdist and blackly satirical humour. He favours content in the expression of his subversive ideals and draws on extratextual and verbatim material to ground his plays with the weight of historical fact. Ellis’ writing works predominantly with the aspect of magical realism that makes the ordinary parts of reality, those that are taken for granted or intentionally concealed, strange. In so doing he highlights the injustices and inconsistencies of contemporary Australian culture.

Lally Katz’s writing plays with notions of absence and presence. Katz presents and plays the unbalanced reality only to subvert it in the final unfolding moments of her texts. Through parody and apparent nonsense, Katz’s dark revelations of the human condition mirror Surrealism in tone and dream like quality. But Katz’s plays engage fully with the illusionary world presented and allow no escape into a symbolic reading. The events depicted, separating her work from Surrealism, are literal events. Katz’s use of intertextually plays with the boundaries between real and illusion, and play world and real world. Her plays engage both form and content to articulate border transgression in all its forms. As such Katz’s plays considered in this thesis make both the ordinary strange and the strange ordinary. This is achieved by the way in which the plays present the illusion of theatrical event as an aspect of the play, through meta-theatre for example, without discounting the feasibility of that intertextual encounter. As such a reinscription of identity, representation and historical narrative in and of Australian culture is made possible.

Kit Lazaroo engages with magical realism through belonging and not belonging. The impossibility of belonging in an atomised world is presented throughout her scripts through a connection to the transcendent. Her texts are the most complete playworlds unto themselves of the all the writers considered here. The internal logic of the playworlds depicted aligns her writing most fully with the space of the liminal. The characters have magical powers and have tangible experiences of the spirit in daily life.
Unlike the writing of Ellis and Katz, I do not make an argument for Lazaroo’s connection to Surrealism or Absurdism. The acts of faith experienced by and expressed through Lazaroo’s characters avoid cynicism, and suggest humanities connection to unseen forces impacting on our everyday lives. Lazaroo makes the strange ordinary in her liminal plays, leading the audience on a journey of defamiliarisation that ultimately rectifies the unbalanced reality of contemporary life, even if for just a moment.

Magical realism and non-mainstream theatre have always been about more than creating for creation’s sake. Both the form and mode share, as has been amply demonstrated in the previous chapters, a commitment to revealing invisible ideologies and demonstrating new ways of being. The shared ideology of magical realism and theatre lies in an inherent faith in both to know the world in all its paradoxical fullness. As critic Maillard states:

The spirit of magical realism…is: Something tremendously important must be said, something that doesn’t fit easily into traditional structures, so how can I find a way to say it? (qtd in Delbaere 1992:98–99).

Theatre theorist Baz Kershaw states:

If performance can illuminate some of the sources of worldwide oppression by exposing how the politics of representation, say, may be used to reinforce the marginalisation of minority groups, then it may contribute to a fairer economy of signs (1999:86).

In these statements is revealed a sense of purpose and import that goes beyond the production of a piece of writing or performance. Kershaw and Maillard express the desired outcome of impacting on the world beyond the text, to illuminate ‘something tremendously important’ to the wider societal, cultural and political landscape of contemporary society. That ‘something’ is, as Kershaw states, the revelation of the marginalisation of minority groups, whether that marginalisation be for reasons of class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, geography or politics. This can be achieved in magical realist theatre for it challenges the audience’s relationship to the text. Aston and Savona state that:

A play, which requires the spectator to “re-examine the rules” of drama demands her/his collaboration and active participation in the production of meaning. Such a re-examination challenges the spectator’s relation to both the dramatic world
and the actual world. It is a process of engagement whereby what is known becomes “unknown” (1991:33).

A magical realist approach to subverting hegemonic forces and the normalisation of social identity reveals the fictional of the known. Magical realist theatre engages in a process that makes the familiar strange, pushing it into the realm of the unknown. The magic, as has been reiterated throughout, functions as a cultural corrective and as a tool of disorientation, undermining all truth claims. Magical realist theatre frames innovative and varied ways of seeing the world, presenting the previously inadmissible and extending the frame of what is accepted as real in societal and cultural representation. This allows for a multiplicity of paradigms of meaning making. Magical realist theatre attests to the many ways in which meaning is made of the world.

In conclusion, the potency of magical realist theatre as a political discourse, both in its application to theory and to performance, is located in an attempt to impact the wider society, culture and politics from which it emerges. My engagement with magical realist theatre, and my contention of its applicability to the Australian geo-political context, emerges from a desire to mediate cultural binaries: self and other, magic and mundane, life and death, margin and centre to name but a few. The hope is for border transgression in all its myriad forms, to admit the inadmissible, to know the unknowable. This attempt can be framed by Dolan’s statement:

…We can’t measure the effectiveness of art as we can a piece of legislation, or a demonstration, or a political campaign for candidates or for issues. But I do believe that the experience of performance, and the intellectual, spiritual, and affective traces it leaves behind, can provide new frames of reference for how we see a better future extending out from our more ordinary lives. Seeing that vision, we can figure out how to achieve it outside the fantastical, magic space of performance (2005:20).

In the contemporary cultural and political climate of the Western world, the importance of attempts in the theatre to realise alternative ways of being cannot be underestimated. In ‘seeing that vision’, in seeing in unordinary ways, the possibility for actualising change in a wider environment is made real. The ideological program of magical realist theatre is to
infect the imagination, at the very least, with new images and visions of a better future. For as Australian playwright Stephen Sewell\(^6\) offers:

> If the end result of all our dreamings is a world where our dead children will be heaped in piles, what point all our beautiful thoughts and words, music and paintings? (2006).

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